

# The Sound of the *Analogia Entis*

## Part II

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### Hans Urs von Balthasar

Von Balthasar's "On the Unfolding of the Musical Idea" contains one of his recurrent stories: the grave suggestion that musical form expresses the beautiful, and therefore touches on the horizon of the divine.<sup>54</sup> Von Balthasar later recalled Ehrenfels' achievement. He says that the conception of form which undergirds Aristotelian and scholastic ontology, as a "totality of parts" which "transcends its members as parts",

"... was excavated with sufficient success out of the ruins of atomistic psychology ... by Christian von Ehrenfels".<sup>55</sup>

The first step in the reappraisal of the ontological difference is the recovery of the *essentia*. As von Balthasar says in reference to Anselm, the theological act needs the grip hold of the philosophical intuition of essences.<sup>56</sup> The realistic phenomenologists showed that this can be achieved, and that, not as a dogmatic exercise, but as a living philosophical enterprise. Any exit into a static essentialism is blocked by Ehrenfels' starting place in the study of music. The melodic *gestalt* flows out of a movement in time.<sup>57</sup> Przywara hears the 'essence' as an interplay of phonic forces, interweaving in their diverse speeds and velocities. Von Balthasar takes beautiful form as the analogy for the Christology of *The Glory*. He finds in the Incarnation a design of horizontal and vertical thrusts. He says,

"... Everyone who has listened to Bach knows that in the classical fugue, the slow rhythmical arrangement is oppositional: the first theme is slow and reposed, the second runs along swiftly, and the third contains a rhythmical hammering; and every hearer knows that this varied thematic construction is determined by the rationale of the fugue's total construction. Something similar occurs with the Gospel. The eschatological theme, ... is incomprehensible without the cadence of Christ's suffering. The vertical form of the Son of God who descends from the Father and goes back to him would be illegible without the horizontal form of historical fulfilment ..."<sup>58</sup>

In theology, horizontal or immanent being is concrete history; vertical or transcendent being is made visible and realised in the 'descent' of the *'homo factus est'*. The historical flesh and blood of Christ's person illuminate the darkness of the supraconceptual, vertical 'beyond' of being. The transcendental beauty of Christ is the convergence of form (*gestalt*) and the brightness (*glanz*) of the depths of being.

Reality is in movement in the constant passage of 'essence' towards its act of being. The purpose of beauty, as *The Glory* has it, is to make being present in its apprehensibility. The artistic object pushes inner structure to a high point of pressure; this vital and joyous actualisation of essence, materially tangible, visible, audible, standing apart from its background, says 'I am'. As von Balthasar states,

"In the luminous form of the beautiful, the being of the existent becomes perceivable as nowhere else."<sup>59</sup>

No 'proof for the existence of God' will make sense unless the recipient is able to perceive "what is".<sup>60</sup> A beautiful object makes being perceptible because its form *binds* its field of expression. 'Expressions', Scheler claimed, are known in sympathy. Von Balthasar does not underline the intellectual grasp of the 'is' in *judgement*. Rather, he examines the notion of the spiritual '*senses*', as found in Origen and St. Ignatius. He attends to sensory perception, as a tactile communion with reality. He describes the theologies of integrated experience. He finds in Newman's "empirical" theology the principle of the involvement of the whole person in 'assent' to God.<sup>61</sup> When he turns to Thomas, he does not find it necessary literally to reproduce his picture of the apparatus through which the human mind knows truths. He goes directly to the original, all-embracing principle of "*experimentum*".<sup>62</sup> He argues that Thomas most thoroughly examined the grounds of the "attunement to being as a whole", in which our knowledge of God is given. For Thomas, before a person develops rational conceptions, or specific notions, he or she has a basic palpability to reality. Since the condition occurs *in a subject*, it is not a pure openness, but a feeling state. This primitive state is

". . . prior to the distinction between active and passive experience: in the reciprocity which is founded on openness to reality there is contained both the receptivity to extraneous im-pression and the ex-pressing of the self into the extraneous. Thus, the fundamental act of feeling (the 'primal feeling') consists of the consent . . . both to suffer extraneous impressions and to act upon the extraneous, and both . . . are . . . the cause of primal joy."<sup>63</sup>

Von Balthasar has reworked Thomas's notion of connaturality in a Schelerian direction. He pictures it as implying the subjective condition of 'feeling one with' reality. The experience of such connaturality is like being taken over by the rhythms of music. At a low level, one is compelled to tap one's feet; at a greater depth, one breathes and feels and thinks in time with the sound.

The "primal feeling" is not a relation through any one act to any one essence. Rather, it responds to the lacunae within each object, as between form and being. As for Thomas and Przywara, this is the opening within which created beings are related to God. The original human resonance to God is "conditioned by the analogy of being." Von Balthasar says,

"At no level can God be considered a creature, nor does he possess a common being with creatures. This is why this primal attunement to him is not an intuition in the epistemological sense, nor is it the result of a purely logical inference from the finite to the infinite. The non-fixability of the primal experience is but the noetic reflection of the ontic indeterminateness of being in its totality over against God. Being as such . . . directs us to the inaccessible Fount."<sup>64</sup>

The more structured the melodic 'mesh' of the artistic object is, the more it is available to infinite being. Form is not perfect closure. The thing of beauty, standing out from all else as 'this object', draws on a deeper horizon. At a shallow level of acquaintance, other persons are predictable. If one presses deeper, one recognises that they have a strangeness which one can never wholly know. This depth is given with the object, or the person. It is not extrinsically deduced. As Plotinus observed, beauty expresses the 'more than beautiful'.<sup>65</sup>

The 'more than' of each being is intrinsic to it, because its form is interiorly related to the depths of being. It is also a mark of freedom. This is von Balthasar's reply to the debate between Thomas's and Bonaventure's ideas of the first object of the human mind. He agrees with Scheler that there is no added inference *from* a 'world' of well-wrought mechanisms *to* God. We begin within a reality which shows its relation to its supernatural ground. This is assumed by any argument for God's existence.<sup>66</sup> But the 'more than' of reality extends to such a depth that its form can only expose itself in freedom:

"This quality of being 'enfolding' in man's mental acts is . . . God's manner of being manifest in the creature: revealed in ever-greater concealment. Once the spiritual creature realises the content of the

concept 'God', it . . . becomes evident that God can be evident to him . . . only in such a way that, as the free cause of all that is, God must withdraw . . . from a comprehension within the finite object and the finite . . . spirit. *Si comprehendis, non est Deus*. The mystery of Being, which is manifest, invites the creaturely spirit to move . . . beyond itself. If this were not so, then the intuition of Being . . . would be . . . the apprehension of finite . . . Being . . . without its relation to the absolute . . ."<sup>67</sup>

This is what lies behind Anselm's ontological argument. Von Balthasar remarks on Anselm's treasure trove of words for the 'spiritual sight' which shines into the inlaid necessity within God's being. The human needle probe can only touch a little of God. But, since the whole is implicit in the part, it sees that its thin thread continues on to infinite necessity: "From such apprehensibility there arises certainty."<sup>68</sup> The intuition takes place within the context of the 'more than beautiful'—the more than *ens commune*. The intuition of God's nature will 'see that it cannot see'. It does not see contingent truth, but supra-empirical perfection. Its panoramic vision is placed inward to the divine 'Ideas', looking out to their contingent expressions.<sup>69</sup> The '*quiddam majus quam cogitari possit*' refers to reality, not to a concept. For,

" . . . In Anselm's doctrine of thought each statement about essence is . . . a function of a statement about existence; if the function of . . . meaning can . . . be considered . . . for itself, abstracted from existential correctness, then it can be so only in its applicability to the real. . . Thus . . . thinking owes the final bearer of the . . . order of designation and expression the declaration of reality, because this logical bearer is by definition also the ontological bearer, in so far as every conceptual order is founded on the order of existence."<sup>70</sup>

There may be those who are unfortunate enough to be sufficiently dyed with the prejudices of Anglo-Saxon Thomism to consider that something has been smuggled in here, if this is supposed to be a philosophical argument. But perhaps it is not. For von Balthasar, it was Anselm who first moved from the classical *philosophical* conception of the analogy of being to the *theological* rendition. Anselm explained that analogy as the "analogy of freedom". The vision of perfect ontological necessity depends upon God's self-showing, because for Anselm

"Freedom is the central conception of a Christian understanding of reality which . . . contemplates the relationship of absolute and relative being in the light of the self-disclosure of the absolute."<sup>71</sup>

The 'He Who Is' of philosophical theology can seem to illuminate a more ordered landscape than that in which a jealous God condemns a nation to exile and devises its restoration. For von Balthasar, the metaphysical thesis of divine absoluteness is consequent upon a theological perception of divine freedom. In order to be freely related to something, one has to be other from it. The gloriously free nonsubstantial Being is the Biblical God Who wields judgement and healing. Only a God Who is wholly diverse from creatures can reveal Himself to them, as opposed to mechanically discharging His effects or pronouncements. *Revelation*, or *self-giving* speech, whether in the ontological vision, or in Biblical history, can only be effected by a *Person*.

The 'difference' also opens its horizon to metaphysics, if, beginning not with criticism but with wonder, one asks 'why is there anything at all and not simply nothing?' The "primal wonder" is turned toward God in four stages. A child's first awareness is, von Balthasar says (one would add, a lucky child), that it is harboured within being by its mother. Through another person's protecting hands, the child

“. . . experiences being (*Sein*) and human existence (*Dasein*) . . . as the incomprehensible light of grace.”

This is why, von Balthasar explains, "it engages in play".<sup>72</sup> The child plays in an experienced *unity* of being there and being such, its own. It recognises later that it is one among many beings: just as one does not 'assimilate' the whole of being to oneself, nor do any of the other persons and objects who are found to share in it. The third stage shakes up the perfect oneness found between things and their being. One realises that the 'primal wonder' will not be fulfilled by any particular nature: it must be "directed at both sides of the Ontological Difference". It sees the interdependence of the acts which make an object of this form, and *by* this being. *Ens commune* is and is not necessary. It is necessary only in so far as the (given) form requires it. But if being is not *one* in all of the forms which it makes to be, then the forms of nature have the freedom to proliferate in oceanic, astral, rain-forest variety. The demarcation between *essentia* and *ens* entails both that the 'essences' have their own, immanent, space of profusion, within which to be their empirical selves, and that the being of each thing overflows the particular form. Von Balthasar states,

“. . . the 'ground' of a living entity—be it a plant, animal or person—is always 'more' than what is projected onto the phenomenal surface, and this mysterious More can also be read . . . from that surface . . . Just as being does not mould everything which is to itself, but lets it

be, in the same way all that is must . . . allow being to dwell in its imperturbability . . . that its light should rise over all. [In] the same distance of letting be, being can appear to us in its glory".<sup>73</sup>

Fourth, the freedom of created natures requires the "ultimate freedom" of God. Such a God, impermeable to the forms which share in common being, will not engorge contingent, free natures, in an "encompassing act of being". 'Philosophy' can thus 'see the glory' insofar as it attends to the suspended unity between things and their being. According to von Balthasar,

"The kingdom of beauty (or the Thomist *esse non subsistens*) is as a whole, as being, transparent to the divine *esse subsistens* only comprehensible as *mysterium* which is, as a hidden primordial ground, radiant *glory*. The elevation of God above being, . . . established by Thomas . . . secures at the same time for the concept of glory a place in metaphysics."<sup>74</sup>

Thomas also draws out the 'four differences'. Before we know God, or natural forms, we perceive the undifferentiated '*ens*'. He states in the *De Veritate*, Question 1, Article 1,

". . . that which the intellect first conceives as, in a way the most evident, . . . is being (*ens*)."

But, secondly, Thomas can say the reverse, as in the first chapter of the *De Ente et Essentia*,

"Since we arrive at what is prior from what is posterior, we should proceed from the meaning of being to the meaning of essence."

Existing is 'outside' the material nature: since it need be 'there', *ens* is "posterior". But each form is dependent on its being. For Thomas, being

". . . is accidental, not as an accidental reality subsequent to the essence, but as a prior constituent necessary to make the essence a reality".<sup>75</sup>

Being is outside the form *as this form* but interior to it, as existing. Third, if being is both accidental and essential to things then it is not simple: the being 'such' of objects is multiform. Fourth, oneness belongs to God alone: the setting of His unity apart from the multiplicity of created things ensures their separate reality. The *De Ente et Essentia*

concludes,

“ . . . if we say that God is existence alone, it is not necessary that we fall into the error of those who said that God is that universal existence in which everything exists formally . . . For that existence which is God is of a condition such that no addition can be made to it. Whence by virtue of its very purity it is existence distinct from every other existence.”<sup>76</sup>

## Conclusion

Von Balthasar usually regards political realities from the *ano* to the *ana*. But, just as Barth's *Commentary on Romans* is also a commentary on the vigorous identification of one theological establishment with the German war effort, so von Balthasar's theology has its context. Kolnai and Przywara were embattled with the divinisation of this worldly reality which bore fruit in the Nazi ideology. Von Balthasar, once inseparable from his copy of Stefan George's poems, came adversely to contrast 'aesthetic theology' with the 'theological aesthetic'. All three were reminded of the necessity to mark the difference between immanent reality and transcendence. The degree to which the Nazis' rise to power affected von Balthasar's thinking need not be exaggerated: he had already disclosed their root philosophy in his doctoral dissertation of 1929, "On the Eschatological Problem in German Literature", the difficulty being the cultivation of 'Titanic' Idealism. In a solitary concession to modern history, he will later observe that without the form of Christ, the Church

“ . . . would be plausible neither as a religious institution . . . nor as an historical power for order and culture in the sense of the Action Française and of the German Catholic Nazis.”<sup>77</sup>

Should such phenomena recur, the fixation upon immanence and the recommendation of Christianity as socially beneficial may take an analogous form, perhaps under an altered complexion. It was just luck that Ehrenfels had been taught counterpoint by Bruckner in addition to having been trained in philosophy by Brentano, or that von Balthasar was a good pianist. It reduces to its context. But 'deafness' stands as an analogy for insensibility to all but the mechanical realities which touch one. Being able to 'listen' involves making oneself available to that which touches the emotions as well as the mind. Affective openness to music is a sufficient symbol of the "primal feeling" which senses 'that which *is*'. Von Balthasar used the 'analogy of music' to design a theology of experience.

His theology moves from above to below because it proceeds from the perfect *gestalt* whole to the parts. But no totalising narrative can join the parts of reality in ontological identity. His nearest approach to the upwards analogising of being is a comment about Romans 1.19ff.:

“... everything that is said of God . . . underscores the ever greater difference between Him and creatures. However, this does not preclude God’s doxa from radiating and being seen . . . in and through the form of the world.”<sup>78</sup>

He is even-handed because, as Kolnai says at the outset of his *Memoir*, “Self-limiting freedom is the secret of life”.<sup>79</sup> For von Balthasar, the ‘glory’ which Barth espied in Romans, and whose silence Przywara heard in Bach’s ‘Art of Fugue’

“... stands and falls with the unsurpassability of the *analogia entis*, the ever greater dissimilarity to God no matter how great the similarity to him.”<sup>80</sup>

And this, precisely, is to protect the reality of created nature.

It follows that ‘negative’ theology is not an additional counterpart to the positive experience of the createdness of nature, but is richly present within that experience. The underlying idea of *The Glory* is that,

“Natural theology can only take the form of allowing all creaturely being to become an indicative utterance about God (since everything derives from him and may thus bear his image and trace). But this . . . cataphatic theology must . . . lead to a comprehensive negative (apophatic) theology.”<sup>81</sup>

This means that Christology need not attempt to make an empirical inference *from* its accumulated data about the ‘man Jesus’ to an extrinsic ‘Christ of faith’. The only figure in which Christ can be known is that cast between his historical form and its infinite ‘beyond’. The ‘analogy of music’ and the vertical Christology come together when von Balthasar explains how the believer is assimilated to the form of Christ:

“What is . . . involved is not an objectless and intentionless disposition (*Stimmung*), but . . . a[n] . . . attunement of self (*sich-Einstimmen*) to the accord (*Stimmen*) existing between Christ and his mandate from the Father, in the context of salvationhistory’s assent (*Zu-stimmung*), which the Holy Spirit is in Christ . . . We speak . . . of an empathy (*Mitfühlung*) with the Son . . ., of a sense for the path taken by Christ which leads him to the Cross; we speak of a ‘sensorium’ for Christ’s instinct of obedience. This model is meant to be the Christian’s normal . . . ‘pitch’ (*Gestimmtheit*)”<sup>82</sup>.



For Kolnai, phenomenology hangs on the principle of the intentionality of thought. For Przywara, analogy is a rhythmic relation. For von Balthasar, this dynamic relationality is present within the Trinity: were it not so, the Incarnation could not be the expression of a form. He writes,

“The form of revelation . . . is not the appearance as the limitation . . . of an infinite non-form . . . but the appearance of an infinitely determined super-form. . . . If this form really is the crowning recapitulation of everything in heaven and on earth, then it is also the form of all forms, and the measure of all measures.”<sup>83</sup>

- 54 Von Balthasar, “The Unfolding of the Musical Idea” (37–8).
- 55 Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. IV: The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, edited by John Riches, translated by B. McNeil, A. Louth, J. Seward, R. Williams and O. Davies (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 29–30.
- 56 Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. II: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, edited by John Riches, translated by A. Louth, F. McDonagh and B. McNeil (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1984), p. 224.
- 57 Von Balthasar, *Glory: IV*, p. 31.
- 58 Von Balthasar, *Glory: I*, pp. 512–13.
- 59 *Ibid*, p. 153.
- 60 Von Balthasar, *Glory: II*, p. 166.
- 61 Von Balthasar, *Glory: I*, pp. 166–67.
- 62 *Ibid*, p. 162.
- 63 *Ibid*, p. 244.
- 64 *Ibid*, p. 245.
- 65 *Ibid*, p. 307.
- 66 *Ibid*, pp. 157–58.
- 67 *Ibid*, p. 450.
- 68 Von Balthasar, *Glory: II*, pp. 220–23 and 227.
- 69 *Ibid*, p. 229.
- 70 *Ibid*, p. 232.
- 71 *Ibid*, p. 237.
- 72 For the four Stages: von Balthasar, *Glory: V*, pp. 615–23.
- 73 *Ibid*, 622–23.
- 74 Von Balthasar, *Glory: IV*, p. 375.
- 75 Joseph Owens, “The Accidental and Essential Character of Being in the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas”, in *St. Thomas Aquinas on the Existence of God: The Collected papers of Joseph Owens*, edited by John R. Catan (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1980) pp. 52–96 (pp. 92 & 95–6).
- 76 Thomas Aquinas, *Concerning Being and Essence*, Ch. 5, p. 28.
- 77 Von Balthasar, *Glory: I*, p. 463.
- 78 *Ibid*, p. 431.
- 79 Kolnai, *Memoir*, p. 15.
- 80 Von Balthasar, *Glory: V*, p. 548.
- 81 Von Balthasar, *Glory: I*, p. 448.
- 82 *Ibid*, p. 253.
- 83 *Ibid*, p. 432.