SENRIOR THESIS

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Man is a being at once characterized by reason and by desire, two forces which to the modern mind often seem to represent contradiction, or at the very least, opposition within man. The modern understanding of reason is largely the result of a shift that took place when modern science truncated (and rightly so for its purposes) human rationality and then subsequently denied that truncation, instead attempting to create a new philosophical worldview that has unfortunately prevailed as the typically modern worldview since. The result has been the development of an extremely isolated view of the person, which our culture often takes for granted, but which was nevertheless a decisive turn which can be traced back to its conceptual roots. Insofar as reason is thus misunderstood, man will always be misunderstood, and man’s desires will appear more and more cut off from his rational nature. Questions of the relationship between the human mind and the world, between the world and God, between reason and faith, have all become seemingly unanswerable in light of the modern mindset of skeptic agnosticism. A divide has developed within the modern man between his natural religious tendencies (the phenomenon of natural gratitude, the creation of artwork, the desire to worship that man has seemed to experience since his primitive existence) on the one hand, and the strict materialism that modern science has convinced us is reasonable on the other. While man has always experienced restlessness on account of his metaphysical place in reality, in combination with his fallen state, this restlessness has become perhaps more profound in the modern age because it is simply not addressed. Modern man is in desperate need of a reintegration of the human person in light of a notion of a broader, truly *catholic* notion of reason, aimed at the fullness of Truth, that at once roots itself in the past (learning truths and mistakes from the history of ideas), stands firm against the sharp falsehoods of modernity, and is able to blossom into something new and surprisingly fulfilling as we look with hope towards the future.
The Greek Paradox and Plato’s Insight

As soon as man emerges as a rational, self-conscious being, he starts to develop ideas about himself, the world, and the possibility of a higher power. The first natural response of a rational mind seems to be one of wonder, which brings two things to light: a world to wonder about, a mind to do the wondering—which both lead to a third possibility of where these two things came from, how they are connected, and why they seem perfectly fitted to one another. Further, the question arises as to, if this third “reality” does exist, whether we—in our sensory knowing of the material world—are capable of gaining any real access to it through them.

As early as the 6th century BC, we have philosophical accounts of various attempted explanations of reality, as it seems wonder develops into both gratitude at the gratuitous dynamism of being, as well as the mind’s natural desire to know it. As soon as the attempts begin, man stumbles upon a seemingly endless series of paradoxes—which all interestingly intersect within himself. In attempt to account for the world of seeming Hereclitian flux, various theories of a unifying philosophical principle were posited by Greek philosophers in order to preserve the possibility of any real knowledge concerning such a world. This philosophical endeavor characterized one side of Greek history, while mythology characterized the seemingly unrelated flipside: “Greek philosophy was a rational attempt to understand the world as a world of things, whereas Greek mythology expressed the firm decision of man not to be left alone, the only person in a world of deaf and dumb things.”¹ What Plato brings to light in his notion of the Good is revolutionary for Greek philosophy, but is not even meant as an attempted theological explanation. What Plato suggests with the Good, however, is nevertheless crucial for an understanding of the paradox of being and appearance—which, if left unsolved, turns rather into

a contradiction that ultimately leads to skepticism and a complete lack of trust in the intelligibility of the world and the mind’s ability to know at all. Without Plato, the rationality of man that desires to know these things in the first place collapses in on itself. In taking a look at Plato’s theory of the Good, we can see both its success for philosophy, and its privative nature in regards to religion—both of which lead to a view of Plato as a foreshadowing of the Christian philosophy to come.

The problem of being and appearance, or “the one and the many” seems to be that while reason is at once most immanent in a person—the very source of his wonderment, questioning, desire—it yet also transcends him in some way, as order also reigns throughout the world and the heavens (and in a much more orderly fashion than within rational man). It seems obvious that, in some sense, man was shaped to be receptive to this order, since the mind is able to recognize it, and yet, the only philosophical solution seemed for the Greeks to be on the one hand a reduction of the world to one unifying principle—be it Thales’s water or what have you—or on the other, a denial of a unified reality in light of holding “man as the measure” of all things. The former gives no attention to man, the very being reasoning about such a principle in the first place; it leaves the human person restlessly unsatisfied with who he is, and where he stands in the universe. A contradiction exists here, as man seems the only creature able to know this order in the universe, and then from a reductionist philosophy, the only creature who is left unexplained. On the other hand, without some unifying principle, when man is left as the “measure” in a relativistic world—the suggestion of Thrasyamus in Plato’s Republic—too much undue attention is given to man, and the idea of any measure at all self-destructs:

If we make perception the measure for things, there is no supraindividual measure. No one person is in a “better” position to judge than any other. More than that: there would
be no reason to say that any human being is a better judge than any other “perceiver.”
Thus, Socrates claims, Protagoras ought to have begun his book more dramatically with
the claim that “Pig is the measure of all things” or “Baboon” or some yet more out-of-the-way creature with the power of perception. Further, if the perceiver is the measure, than there is in fact no transcendent unity, and hence the
possibility of any measure at all, because if “every man is a measure at every moment, with
respect to that moment alone” this essentially means “in the end that there is no measure at all.
The statement is therefore empty; it has no defensible meaning.”

Thrasymacus (which profoundly foreshadows that of the modernity) collapses into
meaninglessness, because it fails to bridge being to appearance in any way that gives us access to
the truth of reality. Truth becomes, for the relativist, a mere means of power—of exerting one’s
opinion over another in order to change in an externally forceful way.

What Plato introduces as the key to this paradox is first of all an explanation of
knowledge and understanding as a relationship—an event, echoed in the dramatic form of the
Republic’s dialogue itself—and the twofold notion of the good which makes that relationship
possible. All the themes which Plato addresses “take their bearings in some decisive respect from
the idea of the Good, which Plato claims to be the ultimate cause of the being, the truth, and the
knowability of all things, and also the end desire and the universal reason for action.” Finally, a
solution is granted through the positing of this third, transcendent force—Goodness—which
both distinguishes and connects the mind to the world, and being to appearances in a trustworthy
way. “The Good will turn out to be the key to the problem we are addressing here because it is
‘what gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower’ (508d); in other

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3 Ibid
4 Ibid, 1
words, it both establishes the knowability of a thing and offers the way to reach it—which means that it governs the entire event of reciprocity between reality and the soul” (105). The Good, therefore, both differentiates between being and appearance, and in light of that difference also offers a bridge between the two.

Plato explains this notion of the good through a connection to love. The in-itself nature of a thing—it’s being—is unable to be known except through particular manifestations. And yet, it cannot be reduced to those manifestations without losing any coherent meaning—without losing its reality. But if being encompasses appearance—if the absolute includes the particular—then we are granted real knowledge through particulars, whose revelatory nature necessarily points beyond themselves. This is why philosophers can enter into particular things in a relationship that grants them real knowledge of being without getting stuck on the level of the particular. Likewise, “Love is not love,” Plato tells us, “unless it wants the whole of what it loves and is not content with mere part...Philosophers, by implication, are true lovers because they are lovers of truth, and to love truth is to love the whole of a thing rather than a mere aspect.” Reason, in this sense, is by nature ecstatic—never content with the surface, but always desiring the whole. Recognition of this wholeness is precisely what makes an other really other, and thus allows for any relationality—through love or reason—in the first place. If we only know in part—some part we can conceptually grasp through logical deductions, we are reducing the wholeness of the other to what suits us in order to remain in some sense of control over it. While a certain aspect of reason, therefore, is deductive and logical, reducing what can be known into conceptual possessions of the mind, this is not reason in its fullest sense, which would never be satisfied with partial knowledge of a thing. This is not to say that partial knowledge is useless—it is in

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5 Ibid, 105
6 Ibid, 96.
fact vital to a number of disciplines (and this is where we will come to see modern science has
made its decisively forgetful mistake). The point to be made here is that reason is fitted for
being, which is simply not reducible to the material world.

In order to avoid contradiction, it must be emphasized that Plato relates the absolute and
the relative within the Good in an *asymmetrically reciprocal* way, through an explanation of the
relationship between the soul and reality:

The soul is, on the one hand, *receptive* to its object, insofar as it’s very ‘being’ consists in
its relatedness to reality, and thus the nature of its ‘object’ determines the power of the
soul: if the ‘power’ of knowing exists in the soul, it is because there exists in reality
something beyond mere appearance. On the other hand however, the soul is also
spontaneous with respect to its object, insofar as it at the very same time brings about the
mode of the object by which it is determined…In other words, to connect the two aspects,
the object presents itself in a particular mode according to the quality of the soul’s power
that is ordered to it, even as it simultaneously determines that power. Neither comes
before the other; the presentation of the object occurs as an ‘event,’ we could say in the
relation to the soul.”

Hence in order to maintain the importance of appearance, it must remain subject to being in their
relationality. The absolute cannot be relative to the relative; it rather encompasses the relative as
part of the whole of Goodness, and is made manifest as an *event* in regards to the rational soul.
This is why Goodness, in order to be itself as truly encompassing the whole, must include the
partial, and never spurn manifestation, likeness, appearance, but rather encompass them so that
they can dramatically exude some real sense of truth. Therefore Socrates “refuses to identify the
good with either pleasure (which corresponds to sense-experience and therefore to images) or to
knowledge (which corresponds to intelligent forms), because it transcends both so as to include
both.”

Aquinas would later come to echo this in saying the lesser should never be despised for
the sake of the higher, but we must instead engage in relationship with them in order to raise
them up. This tension can ultimately be maintained because of reason’s connection to love, since

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8 *Ibid.* 101
both aim at an attainment of the whole of a thing—its being: “Beings, or the in-itself nature of things, is that which discloses itself to a love ordered to the whole of a thing.”\textsuperscript{9} This connection between love and goodness also sheds light upon the connection between a thing’s goodness and intelligibility, which should ultimately lead to a philosophy of gratitude, rather than one of skepticism.

The Good and God

As similar as the notion of the good seems to be to the Christian God, the fact that Plato never identified it as such points to man’s ever remaining tendency towards worship—which far from being opposed to reason, when explained properly is proven to be part of its fullest scope. While Plato may have reasoned to a perfectly logical philosophical view of the world, he nevertheless kept his inherited gods. Already here we see a foreshadowing of the fact that the true God will be revealed—in a dramatic turn—rather than simply discovered by man; though once revealed, He can nevertheless shed rational light on every aspect of reality. Regardless, before this revelation, in Greek thought, philosophy existed to account for the world, while mythology existed to account for man. The Good could be reasonably applied to a philosophical worldview, but it could not be worshipped. Plato’s good remained unable to satisfy Greek religiosity because Greek religiosity was an attempt to account for those things that separated man from the rest of the world—will, freedom, reason itself. These things that remain in man were left to the realm of the gods—forces much more like men than things, who had wills of their own and retained some kind of interest in and influence over human affairs. Man still

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Ibid}, 102
retains an unexplained desire to worship, and he could not bring himself to worship something less than himself. As much as the good may account for the world, and its intelligibility—which may satisfy one aspect of the rational soul—it is the very nature of rational soul, as Plato himself tells us, to desire all things. Reason itself is unsatisfied with Plato’s solution by the very fact that there is some religious remainder left in man. This is “by far the hardest problem for philosophy and for science…to account for the existence of human wills in the world without ascribing to the first principle either a will or something which, because it virtually contains a will, is actually superior to it.”\(^{10}\) While the Greek’s inability to let go of their gods certainly lead to a contradiction between philosophical and religious thought, it was not an entirely intellectually immature one. There is certainly a sense in which the sound philosophy of some impersonal first principle would not sufficiently satisfy men in that they were *men* and therefore different from the rest of the world. The idea of the Good, transcendent as it may be, is still a *thing*, and therefore incapable of quenching man’s curiosity about himself, his actions, his will—how could these things exist in the multiplicity of the world if the unifying principle did not contain them? Hence the need for “gods”—forces, though they were, they remained still something more like men than things, endowed with wills and interestedly active in human affairs. Far from an intellectual weakness, this was in fact, a shining forth of reason’s ecstatic nature; man as a rational being was left unsatisfied with a purely rational account of the world.

Plato’s theory of the Good, and his connection of reason to love—both being ecstatic in nature because of their desire for the *whole*—can thus be seen as a profound foreshadowing of the radical introduction of Christian philosophy. His dramatic understanding of reason, in fact, sets the stage for the “decisive turn” of which he himself spoke that makes drama what it is.

\(^{10}\) Gilson, 22
Reason and Revelation

The dramatic “turn” that makes sense of all the paradoxes of philosophy and religion—in which the human person always seemed to be a strange point of intersection, remaining never fully explained in himself even as the only creature able to philosophize or worship at all—came in the revelation of a personal God. The Judeo-Christian God, in keeping with the Platonic notion of intimate knowledge, was finally not one which human beings composed themselves to account for the gratuitous excess of reality that somehow always translated into a desire to worship, but rather one who revealed Himself in a relationship with His people.

When God revealed Himself to the Jews, He first of all revealed Himself to be One—leading the Jews to the conclusion that God must coincide with the metaphysical principle of reality. And yet, the Jews were in relationship with Him. The name revealed by the Christian God for Himself here is key—“I AM.” Through the Jews, God revealed that the unifying principle, existence itself, is also a person, who is by nature self-communicative, active and gratuitous. The pure act of existence spills over into all things that exist, as it simultaneously hold them in their unique, participatory existence. From this point of view, all things, insofar as they exist, reveal something about God Himself.

And yet the story does not end here; in the drama of human reason’s aspiration to gather all things unto itself, the ultimate decisive turn is taken in the second, and complete revelation of God. The Good in Plato is revealed to be a personal God in Judaism, and then revealed to be a Trinitarian God in Jesus Christ—who manifests God in his identity as the logos which is the foundation of all reasonability, as well as the human person, and his capacity to know. Philosophy and theology are thus reconciled with this introduction of the notion of
personhood—which has its source in God and which in the created world contains existence, essence, and individual personality. This was foreshadowed in all the privations of Greek philosophy by the fact that man himself seemed the only one effected by the paradoxical nature of reality. This new connection between personhood and being, sheds new light on reason itself: “The person is not something added on to being as a special delimitation; it is simply what being is when allowed to be at its fullest, freed from the constrictions of sub-intelligent matter.”

Being culminates, therefore, in the person—the only rational being we encounter in the finite world. Being, reason, and personhood, then are all intimately related concepts, and each can shed light upon the others.

Further, we are shown that this logos is intrinsically connected to love, for through Christ’s Incarnation—His “dying, sojourn among the dead, and rising to new life, Jesus has made Trinitarian love the Reality that holds sway throughout all the levels of being—and so has set this love up as the principle that keeps the world together as a meaningful whole and guarantees that it can be interpreted meaningfully in the first place.”

It is finally brought to light here that not only is the person in fact, the highest mode of being, but love between persons is the very truth of reality. The unifying principle of the Greeks, the logos that holds all things together, is revealed to be Love itself. While this (like God’s first revelation to His people) was revealed from above, rather than reasoned to from below, it nevertheless both fulfills reason’s erotic longing, and allows a rational recasting of light upon all reason had been able to show. It is first of all noteworthy to examine why revelation can fulfill, rather than contradict reason; and

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secondly, to see how the revelation of the Judeo-Christian God not only lead to a unique theology, but also a uniquely Christian philosophy in which reason seems finally able to flourish.

Existential Otherness

What enters the scene with this revelation of God is the importance of difference for creation, freedom, knowledge, and relationship. With this new emphasis on existence over the previous world of essences alone, the significance of otherness begins to shine through. What makes an other fully other is not merely their essence, but the inscrutable depth of their very existence, which is why the description of another person never measures up to a real encounter of their existence. In personal relationship we experience the mystery of existence—it is in fact this very mystery that invites us to come to know and love a person (as both reason and love are erotic). If we could simply know a person completely, there is a sense in which we would have grasped them in some possessive sense that could not be compatible with love.

Because reason is thus fundamentally dependent on an other (in personal relationships all the way down through creation) about which its rational activity takes place, revelation becomes fulfillingly analogous to reason. While philosophy is primarily concerned with the world or nature as other, this is in some way analogous to seeing its source or supernature, as an even more primary other: “There is a certain analogy between reason’s capacity to know the world, which as its ‘other’ lies in some sense beyond reason itself”—just as all things reason is to know must lie beyond it if it is to ecstatically come out of itself to meet the other in a knowledge relationship—“and its capacity to have access to what transcends it altogether. Moreover, if reason were capable of grasping the altogether transcendent”—knowing the Other—“this would
be its highest act.” Further, if from the start we eliminate this possibility, if we a priori exclude revelation from reason’s receptive scope, “it would undermine the impulse that all great thinkers have recognized as reason’s defining feature: an *eros* ordered to the ultimate, the original, and the comprehensive.”—just as, Nietzsche tells us, love will likewise “suffer an inevitable collapse” if limits are set to its natural objective from the outset. With this in mind, we can begin to look rationally at reality in the light of what has been revealed through Christ.

The Christian philosophy that developed as the fruit of Christ’s revelation—both of God and of man himself—is one whose focus, root, and end is a Trinitarian God of three persons, each defined by their active existence. As creatures made in the image and likeness of that God, human persons are essentially communal beings, created for relationship. St. Thomas Aquinas, who most succinctly summarized the Christian philosophy, “has an explicit, powerfully dynamic notion of being, of what it means to be, as intrinsically self-communicative and relational through action.”

Even with Augustine, there was yet a disconnect between the revealed religion of a God whose name is “I am”, and the philosophical system of Plotinus that he clung to—defined by an understanding of essences, in which there is no freedom, no real otherness, no possibility of creation (since existence in itself is not definable, not capable of being grasped in the conceptualizing nature of the rational mind). What Thomism brings forth is the idea of being as essentially communicative, and self-revealing. This lifts up Plato’s understanding of knowledge as relational to a new level that contains not only philosophical, but also theological importance.

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14 *Ibid*
15 Clarke, 601
Aquinas for the first time posited that existence precedes essence—that before a thing can be the particular thing that it is, it must first *be*, and as such, be active. For, “active power follows upon being in act, for anything acts in consequences of being in act. It is the nature of every actuality to communicate itself insofar as it is possible…Communication follows upon the very intelligibility (*ratio*) of actuality.”\(^{16}\) We are thus presented with two facts: Being is by nature both active and communicative, and these two are intrinsically related—for it is through action that being is communicated. Since it is the nature of the good to communicate itself to others, “natural things, insofar as they are perfect, communicate their goodness to others.” This of course applies to being in the world, but also, and “much more does it pertain to the divine will to communicate by likeness its own goodness to others as far as possible.”\(^{17}\) For Plato, the Good was likewise communicative, but was considered higher than being itself—its transcendence was what granted all beings their intelligible nature—but it was always therefore limited in its self-diffusiveness by essences. For Aquinas, this is not the case:

Existence itself (*esse*) now becomes for Thomas the ultimate root of all perfection, with unity and goodness its transcendental properties or attributes, facets of the inexhaustible richness of being itself. And once the Platonic realism of divine ideas is overcome, Thomas’s Supreme Being, the pure subsistent Act of Existence, can become identically Intelligence and Will, and the intrinsic self-diffusiveness of the Good turns into Love, self-communicative Love. The ultimate reason now appears why all beings, by the very fact that they are, possess this natural dynamism toward action and self-communication: they are all diverse modes of participation in the infinite goodness of the one Source, whose very being is identically self-communicative Love.\(^{18}\)

This is vital because it points to an intrinsic relationality tied to the very substance of a being. Thomist metaphysician Norris Clarke takes this to mean that being is essentially two-fold: it first exists *in itself* as a substance, but tied to and inseparable from this is its existence *for others*.

Being, by its very nature, is an active presence, which in its fullness turns into self-presence—or the self-awareness characteristic of the rational human person. Rationality is thus

\(^{16}\) *Ibid*, 603
\(^{17}\) *Ibid*, 604
\(^{18}\) *Ibid*, 606
tied to relationality, just as the Good was shown to be tied to Love. If being flourishes fully, in its highest form, in a rational human being whose actions manifest that being to others by means of intellect and will—and a good person is one who’s free action as such will be rightly ordered, “this active presence to others will take the form of willing what is truly good for them, which is itself a definition of love in its broadest meaning…To be an authentic person, in a word, is to be a lover, to live a life of interpersonal self-giving and receiving.” 19 Because the person is being at its fullest, and the lover is the most authentic person, then man as a rational being, finds his ultimate fulfillment in love—which is not opposed to, but rather satisfactory of that fundamentally erotic rationality. In the words of Adrian Walker, “Only a philosophy of free love can justify our existence,”—since created being culminates in man, who finally has the rationality to perceive the gratuitous nature of reality, and thus live out his thanks in freedom as the rest of the world does by nature; however, “…it cannot do so unless at the same time it exegetes the essence of finite being in terms of love. In terms of love and not, in the end of consciousness, or spirit, or knowledge, or power, or pleasure, or utility…finite essences can in turn receive and grasp being as it is in itself only if they do not try to protect themselves, but are trained by beings in the love that gives away: consciousness, and the possession of oneself and of being grow only and precisely in the measure that one increasingly breaks out of ones being by and for oneself into communication, exchange, sympathy with humanity and the cosmos.”20 Being in-itself and being for others are thus mutually conditional, and each grows in relation to the other.

19 Ibid, 610
20 Walker, 526-7
Modernity’s Turn toward the Self

This long awaited resolution in the philosophy of being—centered upon relationality—was nearly immediately forgotten and replaced with modern philosophy, which took a turn inward on the individual self, while still remaining parasitic on the Christian notion of God. Philosophy and Theology, having at last become compatible in Aquinas, were once again divorced by Descartes. The root of Descartes divide was his view of reason as an isolated capacity of the human person. His very attitude in wanting to see what reason could discover “on its own,” was itself entirely opposed to the Christian notion of reason, which always resides in a being who is by nature relational. When Descartes put forth this view of reason, he interestingly did not see it necessary to deny the Christian God—for He once again had now (like for the Greeks) become the content of a separate sphere. However, in positing (what he considered) a slight difference in the Christian God, ultimate rejection of the revealed God is inevitably what followed.

The regression here is an interesting one, because once God has revealed himself, the revelation cannot be forgotten—only partially ignored or denied. But this, it seems, is the very opposite act of reason as an ecstatic power. Having been granted the infinite source of Truth, in whom reason’s fulfillment can finally be found, Descartes decided that he would rather deny the fullness, the whole, the mystery, for instead some finite part which could fit into his conceptual grasp. He began by taking a certain view of the world as a machine. Because a machine is simply made of “parts,” the whole of which is no greater than its sum, and which by nature are not revelatory of anything beyond themselves—this was a very successful method in terms of sufficiently grasping specific and isolated aspects of the material world as simply material. This is the method of modern science which works exceptionally well for its purposes. However, with
his thought still entirely infiltrated by the revelation of the Christian God, He found it necessary
to alter, rather than utterly reject Him (though they ultimately turn out to be one in the same).

For Descartes, the God who revealed himself as pure Act, Existence itself—became
instead the Creator, the Author, the Maker of the machine. Implicit in his doing so is a profound
denial of the existential nature of reality and therefore both philosophy and theology. If otherness
is essential to knowledge, and if existence is revelatory, then to bracket one part of something for
purposes of conceptual grasping, knowledge becomes essentially (once again) linked to power
and not to ecstatic attainment of truth. The wholeness of the revelatory other makes relationship
necessary for knowledge to be granted. Deliberately sectioning off a mere part of the thing for
bounded purposes set \textit{a priori} may in fact be helpful for certain disciplines, but it certainly
cannot be considered the aim of reason itself, which has always been understood as erotic. Only
after Descartes could a scientist say we must “rape” nature—only with a severely impoverished
view of existence, otherness, reason—because only then would we view it merely as a machine
that we can have power over, power to be used for our own purposes and nothing beyond them.
A God who was the pure act of Being, and thus communicative beyond what we could want to
limit him in communicating, was too intrusive to Descartes. Having reduced nature to a machine,
he thus reasoned logically to a reduced God as its explanation; the mastery of nature he desired
required a simultaneous mastery of God. This order of reasoning is strikingly non-existential
and as such, strikingly irrational. In a Cartesian world, it is impossible not only for nature to
\textit{reveal} anything to us (as the act of being loses its revelatory character), having been reduced
from a true \textit{other} to a mere object for our use, but God’s revelation likewise becomes reduced
back to the unifying principle defined by his act of creation alone. This is a safe view of God for
Descartes, because a machine-maker God is a conceivable God; there remains no unknown, no
mystery, nothing for reason to further aspire to. But as the Supreme Other, characterized by His self-communication—through direct revelation, and through His creation—God cannot be reduced \textit{a priori}, and in fact to do so is an act antithetical to reason.

God for Descartes thus becomes not only a mere cause, but even His causality becomes reduced to the Cartesian understanding of secondary causality (whereas Aquinas understood God to be outside the order of causality, as the one uncaused act of pure existence). Viewing God in such a way necessarily leads to a plethora of dualities—between body and soul, essence and actions, God and the world. As the first cause in a series of Cartesian causes, God becomes difficult to deal with because he ultimately occupies the same ontological realm as His creation; this lack of distinction paradoxically leads to an impossibility of compatibility between the two—instead matter must vie for priority over spirit—and thus ultimately one must be rejected in favor of the other.

Reason for Descartes and for those who followed, therefore became entirely isolated from reality; the ideal philosopher became a man turned in on himself. Reason became the force that alienated man from the world (as it once had, only in order to bring him into intimate relationship with reality) in an ultimate sense. This was not the case even for the Greeks, whose word for the man “turned in upon himself” translates to “idiot,” and was “used to describe one who in fact \textit{neglects} reason, the \textit{logos} that binds all people together.”\footnote{21 D.C. Schindler. \textit{Plato’s Critique of Impure Reason: On Goodness and Truth in the Republic}, 5} Cutting off reason from the possibility of revelation or even the revelatory character of nature (especially after revelation had already been granted) thus resulted in a philosophical concept that could only be “the philosophical ghost of the Christian God.”\footnote{22 Gilson, 105} This, therefore, is at once a regress, but an even more irrational one: God “became again what he had already been in the \textit{Timeaus} of Plato: a
Demiurge, the only difference being that this time, before beginning to arrange the world, the Demiurge had consulted Newton. As such, it’s not surprising that God ultimately became subservient to seventeenth-century scientific discoveries which rendered Him unnecessary. As soon as God becomes an object of Descartes creation, the logical conclusion of His ultimate disappearance becomes inevitable. And not only does our notion of God suffer, but reason itself becomes a purely mechanistic method of power, severely opposed to the erotic reason we saw in Plato. The radical skepticism of Descartes echoes the relativism of Thrasymacus—both neglecting any relationship between the mind and the world: “If an individual is taken simply and exclusively on its own terms, as having its measure nowhere else but in itself, and thus as lacking any intrinsic relation to the whole, a relation that would necessarily subordinate it to something larger than itself, it has no choice but to relate to everything outside of itself in the mode of manipulation. Again, while we tend to associate dogmatism with authoritarian assertions of power, Thrasymacus shows us that ‘argument by violent imposition’ is the final outcome of skepticism.”

Ironically, in the attempt to keep reason pure, Descartes ends up causing the very collapse of which he believed himself to be an opponent.

Despite all its failings, the notion of autonomy proposed by Descartes is something that nevertheless desperately needed to be brought to light, something which Aquinas never gave full attention to; and for that, we are indebted to the insight of modernity. Interestingly enough, however, modern thought would not have possibly found grounds for its own proposition except upon soil already thoroughly fertilized by Christianity, which we must not forget first brought about the notion of the person to begin with. Descartes, unfortunately took the turn to the subject

23 Ibid, 107
too far, cutting off the person from the world and any possibility of an other completely. The parasitic, and therefore, in its denial, contradictory ideas of Descartes inevitably brought about inalterable results and reactions which mark the transition into the post-modern period.

Once it has been generally accepted that knowledge is reduced to scientific knowledge “and the notion of scientific knowledge itself to the type of intelligibility provided by the physics of Newton…the verb ‘to know’ then means to express observable relations between given facts in terms of mathematical relations.” Once Descartes has rejected relational knowing and thus the fullness of God’s revelation as I AM, and not simply as “creator,” the degeneration into a Kantian world with no need for God is inevitable. In other words, while Descartes still held on to God as Author, reducing Him to a mere part of His infinite otherness inevitably leads to an ultimate rejection. Kant’s disposal of the need for God is already latent within Descartes philosophy. Heidegger understood the implications clearly: “the God of Descartes is a deduction of the ego, serving as a secondary certification of the verity of experience and defined as a *causa sui* precisely because even divine being must now be certified by modern reason’s understanding of causality. God thus is just another kind of thing, the chief function of which is to provide ontological and epistemic surety for all other things.” This leads to a conclusion eerily similar to the same problem that plagued philosophy before the revelation of Christianity. The inability to view God as the ultimate Other which He is, and to accept Him on His own terms rather than attempt to impose our epistemological limitations upon him, Gilson says, “is the fallacy of a scientist who, because he does not know how to ask metaphysical problems, obstinately refuses their correct metaphysical answers…it is the relapse into mythology…A world which has lost

25 *Ibid*, 109
26 Hart
the Christian God cannot but resemble a world which had not yet found him. Just like the world of Thales and of Plato, our own modern world is ‘full of gods.’ There are blind Evolution, clearsighted Orthogenesis, benevolent Progress, and others which it is more advisable not to mention by name.”

In many ways, then, scientific materialism is a mere regression back to Greek thought: matter has become the unifying principle, and man’s religious tendency is reduced to intellectual weakness—an inclination towards mere mythological explanations of which we don’t want to let go.

The Postmodern Reaction

Heidegger was chief among the idealists of the 20th century reacted strongly against the nihilistic tendencies they recognized in modern thought. Wanting a turn back to wonder, mystery, beauty, love, Heidegger saw Descartes and Kant as the inevitable result of a process that began as soon as we attempted to develop any kind of systematic philosophy; he claims, as early as the Socratics:

Modernity, for Heidegger, is simply the time of realized nihilism, the age in which the will to power has become the ground of all our values; as a consequence it is all but impossible for humanity to dwell in the world as anything other than its master. As a cultural reality it is the perilous situation of a people that has thoroughly ‘one might even say systematically’ forgotten the mystery of being, or forgotten (as Heidegger would have it) the mystery of the difference between beings and being as such. Nihilism is a way of seeing the world that acknowledges no truth other than what the human intellect can impose on things, according to an excruciatingly limited calculus of utility, or of the barest mechanical laws of cause and effect. It is a ‘rationality’ of the narrowest kind, so obsessed with what things are and how they might be used that it is no longer seized by wonder when it stands in the light of the dazzling truth that things are. It is a rationality that no longer knows how to hesitate before this greater mystery, or even to see that it is there, and thus is a rationality that cannot truly think.

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27 Gilson, 136
28 Hart
Heidegger saw that reason cut off from the world and the rest of man himself—a world without mystery, without otherness would be a “pure” but futile and ultimately dangerous rationality. As G.K. Chesterton later phrased the problem, the “madman is not someone who has lost his reason but someone who has lost everything but his reason.” In order to flourish, to give way to beauty, art, creativity—all the things Heidegger considered “humanity’s only greatness” reason must rely be embedded within a mysterious and shockingly existential reality.

Despite Heidegger’s recognition of the inherent failing latent within Kant’s rationalism—its destructiveness for reason itself—his Idealism likewise ends up collapsing reason in just the opposite way. While the objects in Kant’s world lack any immanent reality which the human mind could come to know, Heidegger’s over-emphasis on immanence did not allow for a transcendent reality towards which those things could point. What was yet lacking for Heidegger, as had been already rejected by the scientism of Kant, was any concept of the analogy of being. In other words, “he had left himself no room for any kind of language of analogy, which might have allowed him to say how transcendent being shows itself in immanent existence while still preserving its transcendence.” He sees any conceptual, logical system of philosophy to be a simply negative attempt to master reality, and yet, this ultra-immanence seems to add up no further than Kant’s nihilistic rationalism broke down. Neither system distinguishes immanence and transcendence in any way that would allow for unity between the two.

The Christo-centric Drama of Reason

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30 Hart
As much as Idealism is evidence of humanity’s cry for all that was lost in the rationalist destruction of reason, it ends up being nothing more than the extreme opposite of rationalism. In neither world view is there any real possibility of philosophy: reason is either denied entirely or given a higher place than it can hold, thus collapsing upon itself. Neither gives the proper priority to real difference between the knower and the particular thing known. For Kant, nothing can be known unless it is already built into the subject, which certainly leaves no room for a revelatory other. This is an inherently unrelational philosophy. The existential answers to man’s existential questions offered by the revelation of the Judeo-Christian God “cannot be transposed into terms of science, but only into terms of an existential metaphysics. Hence these two immediate consequences: that natural theology is in bondage not to the method of positive science but to the method of metaphysics, and that it can correctly ask its own problems only in the frame of an existential metaphysics.”31 But for Heidegger, metaphysics itself is a nihilistic attempt to impose the human will on a reality whose mysterious being we should instead simply bask in. While Aquinas seemed to have once spoken to the paradoxical relationship between being and beings, even he remained overly haunted by the Platonic preference of ideas to things—leaving him somewhat weary of materiality, sexual difference, etc. Here we can see and appreciate that the modern turn towards the subject can truly offer us a glimpse into something that was yet lacking in Aquinas’s theology—a true appreciation of the individual, the particular, and the world, all in their proper autonomy.

Latent within both the cosmo-centric philosophy of the ancients and the double sided anthropo-centric philosophy of the moderns and post-moderns—neither of which give enough attention to the difference that constitutes the very possibility of unity, and therefore of

31 Gilson, 120
real knowledge—lies the unanswered question of whether or not reason can genuinely be taken by *surprise*, whether it can come to know anything outside of what already knows. On the one hand we have the “constitutionally lonely mind” of Kant, in which the world is not truly an other to be known, but is reduced to a mere occasion, an agent in the process of understanding which merely allows the potential for knowledge in the knower to be realized. At stake here is the real existence of a real other—something outside the mind that is not simply there for the mind’s use and which cannot be predetermined by the mind. For Kant, then, revelation only reveals what is already present within the limits of reason. But this, then, is not really revelation at all—but merely some already constitutive aspect of reason itself. This is merely a modern echo of the age old paradoxical question articulated in *Meno*—namely, whether anything new can be introduced into the rational soul. Modern thinkers were at least in good company, seeing as neither Plato nor Aristotle were able to unlock the paradox. The Cartesian attempt at a solution was simply to deny the otherness of the world—“consciousness itself is nothing but the world as manifest to me”32 In other words, the immanent structures of reason itself already presuppose contact with the world, and hence there is no need for (or possibility of) the soul’s transcendence in coming to know its other.

Meno’s yet unsolved paradox and the postmodern dissatisfaction after the philosophical turn of Descartes—this desperate need for a language of analogy that would allow for a reconciliation of Being and beings—foreshadows the response that would come from the Communio School of thought, and in particular the Christo-centric theological approach of Hans Urs Von Balthasar. For Balthasar, it was essential for consciousness to maintain an otherness *within* the union of the soul to the object known. For him, the receptivity which Kant postulated as being already latent within the soul, occurred *within* the event or encounter of knowledge:

32 D.C. Schindler, “Surprised by Truth: The Drama of Reason in Fundamental Theology,” 597
“The conditions of possibility arise, as it were, not wholly from below, but as a gift from above, which, precisely because of its generosity, creates the space for the ‘from below’ capacity to receive it.”

There is therefore a primary receptive capacity within reason—not merely a capacity for reception of the other; it is rather a more fundamental capacity for surprise.

We are thus brought back to Plato and his dramatic understanding of reason mentioned earlier in brief:

According to Aristotle, the plot of a good drama involved a reversal and discovery, or we might say a ‘surprise’ and a ‘resolution’…A plot unfolds, which makes sense only if the events that constitute [it] possess an intrinsic and intelligible inter-ordering. Such an organic unity, in turn, requires some key turn of events some moment of decision, which ties together the disparate parts into a meaningful whole. When the drama is successful, this moment takes us by surprise, it evokes astonishment, not only because we sense the fateful significance of the moment, but also because the moment is not simply the mechanical product of the preceding events. At the same time, however, the turn of events is not merely a surprise, because it serves to give meaning to the plots as a whole, and thus to bring light to the significance of all other aspects of the plot. There is a discontinuity that nevertheless preserves a continuity, though that continuity gets recast by the dramatic reversal.

If reason then, and the process of gaining knowledge is understood as Balthasar understood it—dramatically—then there is a surprise element present even within reason on the most natural level, (as the rational knower depends upon the communicable existence of the other, which reveals itself in a dramatic encounter.) The key here is the fact that the very receptivity for the knowledge in question is given in the encounter. There is therefore, a more basic receptivity for surprise itself in reason that is the very basis of its erotic nature.

Balthasar understands the drama of consciousness as constituted in a both personal and ontological event, which allows for both unity and difference between two freedoms. He uses the picture of a mother’s smile as the manifestation of his understanding of knowledge. When a mother freely offers a smile to her child, she “welcomes” him into relationship with her and with

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33 Ibid
34 Ibid, 603
reality as a whole—in a trustworthy gesture that awaken his consciousness and in doing so, invites him to respond. And in fact, the child’s ability to respond—with a smile back—is also given in the encounter; regardless of his ontological capacity to smile, he is not free to do until he is surprised by the free smile of his mother. If we understand this image as the most fundamental display of awakened consciousness, then we understand the mind to be constitutively relational—and therefore unable to be self-understood as relational on its own. This is where individuality coincides with relationality—they in fact grow in proportion to one another, while individuality remains always encompassed within relationship.

If reason is thus understood as intrinsically surprisable, then revelation will not be seen as a departure from reason, but rather as an intensely rational, and therefore fulfilling moment: “Insofar as reason in its natural functions aspires to know what is other than itself, it expects to be ‘overturned to some degree—as slight as the reversal may happen to be in ordinary circumstances—by the object it seeks to know;’” and since we have already posited reason’s erotic nature—its tendency toward ultimacy, “it naturally aspires to be overturned by what is ultimate.”35 Others in nature surprise natural reason in their revelatory otherness, while supernatural otherness surprises reason in just the same; in both cases, the other takes the priority. There is a natural faith even in reason therefore, which is fulfilled in the surprise of faith (revelation) which reason could never have known in the natural order of knowing. Thus, “understood dramatically, the inner spontaneity of consciousness is constituted in the advent of a gift,” which “recapitulates the constitutive aspiration of reason and in this sense directly ‘speaks to’ reason in its most inward core precisely as an unanticipated event.”36 There is thus a *gratuity* characteristic of revelation that presents itself even to reason in all of its natural acts of knowing.

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35 *Ibid*, 608
36 *Ibid*
This gratuity, however, only exists insofar as we recognize reason as desirous of the whole, and therefore always humble in the face of the other which is wishes to know. In the presence of this gratuity, the more knowledge the rational soul comes to know, the more we will come to know reality as *mysterious*—which explains and safeguards the erotic nature of reason.

While this is certainly a response to the modern shift and postmodern reactions in philosophy, this reevaluation of the constitutive relationality of being and the dramatic nature of reason challenges even the Thomistic notion of being as put forth by Norris Clarke described above. Schindler, in his evaluation of Clarke’s proposed fulfillment of Thomistic relationality, challenges Clarke to add a third, more primal dimension to being which grounds this reasonable love in gratitude. While Clarke fully explains his philosophy of active being, he posits the receptive character as somewhat secondary. Clarke differentiates between *esse*—the first act of being in substantiability—and *agere*—which completes the first act through its relation to others.

The point Schindler makes here, is that if the first act is not complete until it acts *for others* in the second, there must already be something inherent within *esse* that inclines it toward relation; in other words if relationality is held by Clarke to be equally primordial with substantiability, then relationality must reside also within the first act of being, and not merely the second. Schindler puts forth Balthasar’s theory of receptivity as itself a perfection (not merely as revelatory of a privation, or need)—which is ultimately rooted in the Trinitarian nature of God as revealed in Christ: “It is the very nature of the Son (*Logos*) that he is eternally from the Father, even as the Son remains equal to the Father in this eternal difference as receptive. Being receptive—being from another: hence being a ‘child’—is thereby revealed to be something positive, not
negative.”37 We certainly cannot say that Christ’s Son character bespeaks any lack in him, and therefore it would seem that our receptivity is not primarily a lack; we are not receptive first because we are creatures or fallen creatures, but first because of a receptivity already characteristic of the God in whose image we were made.

Having been created, therefore, in the Logos, Second Person of the Trinity, who is characterized by his active receptivity (He is the Son insofar as He receives everything from the Father) reason itself will likewise be characterized first and foremost by receptivity. Clarke quotes Maritain in saying: “Thus it is that when a man has been really awakened to the sense of being or existence,”—which is the result of being flourishing in the self-consciousness of man—“and grasps intuitively the obscure, living depth of the Self and subjectivity, he discovers by the same token the basic generosity of existence, and realizes, by virtue of the inner dynamism of this intuition, that love is not a passing pleasure of emotion, but the very meaning of his being alive. Thus subjectivity reveals itself as ‘self-mastery for self-giving…by spiritually existing in the manner of a ‘gift.’”38 What Schindler brings to light is the fact that this subjectivity—the in-itselfness of being, which flourishes in man, and as such overflows communicatively towards others—is still primarily characterized by receptivity insofar as it has been given from another. In other words, self-mastery would not lead, as Maritain posited, to self-gift unless there already something gratuitous even in the self. We could not find the fulfillment of our being in giving of ourselves if our being was not first a gift.

Not only is this true in a metaphysical and ontological sense, but it shines forth in all our personal, common sense experiences. Before man can reason about anything, he must first of all make note of the fact that he has been given a mind to reason with, and a world of otherness to

37 Ibid, 538
38 Clarke, 610
reason about. Reason must be essentially rooted in gratitude in order to flourish fully as reason. There is a giftedness to reality and to our minds which are fitted to know it, which we must acknowledge. In Jesus Christ, we are shown that the One God that accounts for the intelligibility of the world is also the person who deserves our worship—not as some distant, uninterested source of our Being, but rather as one whom in every moment of our existence, we are by nature intimately related to. And not only does Christ reveal to us the nature of God, but also the nature of man—who finds himself only insofar as he gives of himself.

If all of creation is therefore considered in the context of the logos—the Son whose very perfection is found in His receptivity—then man himself is most freely fulfilling his nature insofar as he recapitulates this receptivity in every human action. This is why Mary exists as the archetype of creaturely being in her fiat, which “confirms and recapitulates the prior truth of created being as gift: the fiat ‘repeats’ in freedom the receptive relation (to God) that is already constitutive of the proper meaning of the created order”39 (586). She can only offer herself as a complete gift back to God, because her life itself is rooted in the nature of gift. In a paradoxical sense, then, human freedom is precisely found in the obligation of love, for “Being bound in love—the ‘obligation’ (obligio) is first a matter of love because the ‘given’ (datum) of creation as a ‘gift’ (donum)—is the most basic feature of the human being”40 Thus, precisely in actively and willingly fulfilling the obligations it by nature entails, love retains the power to set the creature free.

The Freedom of Obedience

39 Ibid, 586
40 D.C. Schindler, “Surprised by Truth: The Drama of Reason in Fundamental Theology,” 591
The Son’s active receptivity is made manifest to us in the *kenosis* of His Incarnation, by which he humbles and outpours Himself so fully that the Incarnation is not complete until His descent into hell. In His Passion, therefore, it becomes clear once and for all that the freedom of reason is paradoxically fulfilled in the obligation of love. The ultimate obedience of the Son to the will of the Father reveals the mystery of Trinitarian love for which our rational souls strive.

On the Cross, in his desolation, Jesus cries out, *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* In this cry, we are granted access into the mystery, for:

[T]he Logos embodies the answer to the ‘why’ that he himself calls out:…the love that has no ‘point’ or ‘motive’ or ‘why’ beyond itself and that exegetes itself as love precisely in the death of the *Logos* in the absurdity of the Cross. The incarnate *Logos*, remaining in the midst of the illogic of sin, embraces from below (*unterfasst*) its ‘gratuity’ (its futility, its perverse folly) with the ever-greater ‘gratuity’ (the whyness, the ‘folly’ of the super-positive creativity) of the Father’s love. The *Logos*, verifying in his missional being the absolute trustworthiness (*emeth*) of the One who sends and in this sending gives himself away (Jn. 3:16), is the exegesis, the unveiling, the illumination of the inoriginate origin of the Father’s love. And it is in this way that he is *the* logical form *par excellence*. The Son’s obedience of Love makes him once again the form: this time the logical form of all forms.*41*

This is why Christ’s ultimate obedience fulfills reason in the supreme act of recapitulative receptivity—a force of Love strong enough to overcome death—the a-logical contradiction of sin. Reason is saved by the folly of the Cross precisely because the “illogic of sin” has no power against the Love of the Father. In Balthasar’s theology, Holy Saturday exists as the fulfillment of the Incarnation. In order for the *Logos* to successfully assure “the analogy between worldly ‘logic’ and Trinitarian love,” He must somehow embody the contradictory, nonsensical, illogical “No” uttered by the creature in rejection of the “logic of love” inscribed in his very being; and Christ accomplishes this by obeying love to its extreme end—“to the extreme of

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*41* Sara, Juan M. “*Descensus ad inferos, Dawn of Hope.*” *Communio International Catholic Review: Volume 32.3.* (Fall, 2005), 561
Godforsakenness.” In successfully doing so, He reveals the ultimate trustworthiness of reason which Plato’s goodness was a mere foreshadowing of.

The eternal “yes” of the Son to the Father is the moment that enters time as the ultimate turn in the drama of human life. It is this yes which we must recapitulate in our human actions in order to bring the fulfillment of freedom to our natures, because as creatures created within the Son’s “yes” to utter a creaturely “no” is simply a-logical; it is sin, which binds us to death in its denial of reality.

The silence of the Father that Christ experienced upon His descent into hell bespeaks the mystery that perhaps exists even within the relationship between the Father and the Son. As Others in the ultimate sense of the word, they are at once related in the ultimate sense. That relation, in fact, secured by the Son’s obedience and trust even in the experience of the Father’s absence, is what allows them to be united ever further, with Christ having raised all things up and offering them within Himself to the Father:

The silence of Holy Saturday is at the center of the transcendental verum. This means that the truth is the coming to light and the articulation of a foundation that, confirming itself by means of its plenary presence, convinces us with all describable evidence that it always greater. The truth, then, is neither rationalist nor irrationalist, it is a mystery: a form in which the groundless ground makes itself known as such—gratuitously judging, saying, and giving meaning to all that it grounds.

Christ, the Logos, takes otherness so seriously—grants it so much respect as the necessary foundation of relationship—that in his ultimate obedience to the Father, he was obedient even to the natural order, receiving all natural things in their otherness from the Father “to shepherd them up from nothingness in his rising from the ‘lower regions of the earth (Eph 4:9).” This is why sin is not primarily morally bad—it is primarily false, an absurdly futile attempt to live while

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42 Ibid, 559
43 Ibid, 562
44 Walker, 540
rejecting the nature of life. If the *Logos* were primarily rationalistic, it seems there would in fact be no possibility of redemption. Rejection of the truth of being would lead directly to non-being. But by the very fact that being is already gratuitous, salvation is likewise gratuitous, since both are ultimately rooted in a God who is ‘whyless’ love. This mystery of the Father’s love, which is revealed to be the source of all truth, provides the rational soul trust in what it knows, while at the same time respecting the erotic nature of reason insofar as even within God Himself, the Son does not attempt to grasp the Father—He simply loves Him.

**Wonder, Gratitude, and Restraint**

What we are therefore left with—where we must begin—is with the development of a philosophy that accounts for and honors the nature of reality as gift. The most reasonable philosophy, then, is one of gratitude. We must live our lives actively offering ourselves gratuitously, and denying ourselves in restraint, precisely because our lives, from the ground up, must honor gift nature of being. Here, the thought of G.K. Chesterton—specifically as put forth in his essay *Ethics of Elfland*—becomes exemplary for the shift in understanding that must take place if we are to live in gratitude. Chesterton challenges his readers to flip their method of viewing the world, reality, supernature. For him, this world is full of mystery, and as such, paradox is not something to be ignored for the sake of one extreme or the other, but rather becomes the very key for understanding. In his attempts at maintaining Orthodoxy, Chesterton is always holding together two extremes in a delicate balance—believing that to come down purely on one side or the other would be heretical. He challenges both the “insane rationalism” of the modern, and the “hyper-emotivism” of the postmodern idealist, positing instead the philosophy
of Elfland. Chesterton believes, reawaken the sense of gratitude that is so quickly dulled in man by his lack of wonder in the face of reality. They rouse in us a sense of awe for the way things are by telling us “apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green. They make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water.”

The point of Chesterton’s examination of fairytales is to propose that nature, as it has been given, already possesses a magic-like quality that should evoke wonder, followed by gratitude, followed by restraint and proper treatment of the gift. From the perspective of Elfland, which honors nature as something magical because of its inherent mystery, two things arise: firstly, “To see the world is to wonder at it: the wonder is therefore not some sentimental patronage but a kind of shock,” from which follows the fact that, “such an awareness of the thisness of the world calls out gratitude; for admiration, as Chesterton points out, has included within it and element of praise.” If we view nature as such—a gift given with its own inherent qualities and truths to be respected, rather than a mere machine for our practical purposes—then it follows that latent within it are certain we must follow in our interaction. Chesterton views this restrictive nature of life to be totally justified, and argues that complaints about restrictions are disproportionate to the exhilarating fact that we have (insofar as we have been given) what is restricted in the first place. Gratitude, he claims, is then best expressed in restraint—in our view of the world as precious, as not necessary, as having possibly been some other way, as having survived like glass, wondrously bright, but brittle. For Chesterton, then, our freedom—exemplifying our interaction as paradoxical creatures with a paradoxical world—is achieved in

46 Chesterton, 257
48 Ibid, 259
binding ourselves, and genuine joy discovered through discipline, fidelity, oaths and obligations of love.  

The paradoxical quality of nature is resultant of its analogy with supernature—which once again leads not to rationalism or irrationalism, but to mystery. Ultimately in Chesterton, we arrive at the need for a sacramental worldview—one in which every created thing reveals something about its creator. Here we are reminded of Plato’s discussion of being and appearance: because they are asymmetrically related—with appearance contained within the whole of Being, there is real access to the world of Being through the appearances, while they yet remain individual manifestations. In Christian philosophy this idea is fulfilled this in viewing the world as a sacrament of God, and retaining the fact that it can only exist as such because of its real autonomy—its real otherness. Chesterton therefore does not consider God “a deus absconditus at the end of a chain of being, but revealed and active in every phenomenon and experience…everything is waving madly at us to indicate its Divine Origin and its storied character.” Sin, in its superficiality, fails to see beyond the appearance into the realm of being; it fails to see the constant interaction between the natural and the supernatural; it collapses paradox into contradiction and errs on one heretical side of the fullness of truth. “Adam and Eve,” Chesterton would say, “…clung to a univocal understanding of the world,” as opposed to one in which the natural and supernatural are in constant relation, “as if eating the forbidden fruit had but a single and uncomplicated consequence. They were the first fundamentalists and hyper-rationalists.” All sin that follows, and the various philosophies that develop on one side or the other, are characterized by the same: failure to see the world as gift.

49 Wood
50 Milbank, 11
51 Wood
This speaks directly to the schizophrenically rationalist and skeptical modern mind, which Schindler would say is characterized by an impoverished view of reason—which inevitably leads to an impoverished view of nature and of man (which further leads to a plethora of ever growing moral, ethical, and political issues). Chesterton’s appeal to the traditional wisdom and ethic of fairy-tales, far from being a frivolously whimsical argument, is in fact one that honors and exalts man’s reason and its interplay with a world equally as honored—more so than the deterministic rationalism of modernity is able to—precisely (and paradoxically) by respecting its place within the truth of reality’s mysterious nature. His appeal to the magical nature of the cosmos saves reason from the twofold undermining of materialism: unknowingly delving into the realm of faith and doctrine, while simultaneously denying and rejecting such methods as irrational. In a materialistic world there is no room for mystery because mystery requires depth, which a machine does not possess. As soon as the world is viewed philosophically as a machine, God becomes utterly unnecessary, and we have reverted back to the Greek split between man’s religiosity and man’s explanation of the world. To re-enchant the world means to restore reason to its proper place, not to silence it, but so that it might be free to flourish. It was the ‘Disenchantment’ of the post-Darwin age of secularism that opposed reason by clinging to her as more than she could be, and dishonored nature in trying to extract an explanation from her which she could not alone provide. The facts we observe from her repetitive nature are both ‘wonderful’ and ‘willful’—signifying vitality and life, not the ‘stillness of death.’\footnote{Chesterton, 263} It is that part of us that through spirit, art, and ecstasy ‘remembers that we forget,’\footnote{Ibid., 257} who we truly are that views reality most reasonably because it views her as magical. It is this ‘remembering’ part of us that understands life to be a kind of unfolding of a dramatic story.
precious because it did not have to be told—one in which each element of the setting has been willfully chosen to be as such, (repeating itself on command as a kind of ‘theatrical encore’ \(^{54}\)), with each character likewise willed into being, and additionally granted an insight into his own place in the story, as well as the freedom to witness the world in wonder and respond in gratitude to the One telling it.

It is thus a philosophy of gratitude that must be introduced to the modern world as a wellspring of reason, hope, and love. There is a profound sense of homelessness that man naturally feels in the world precisely because of his rational human nature. Reason, as erotic, is therefore never an end in itself—mystery safeguards it, and the ultimate mystery—that of Trinitarian love fulfills it. Until we live in the fullness of that mystery, we will harbor a feeling of restlessness in this world—an incredibly important existential reality which the modern world madly attempts to cover up with mindless entertainment, consumerism, and ever advancing technology (which is perhaps the incarnation of the modern understanding of rationality as a mechanistic tool of power over nature.) To quote Chesterton once more,

The modern philosopher had told me again and again that I was in the right place, and I had still felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the wrong place, and my soul sang joy, like a bird in spring. The knowledge found out and illuminated forgotten chambers in the dark house of infancy. I knew now why grass had always seemed to me as queer as the green beard of a giant, and why I could feel homesick at home.\(^{55}\)

We as moderns can no longer hear the world speaking to us because we have been trained in forgetfulness of the language of being. The first step in overcoming such a mindset is recognizing its presence, its history, its falsehood—which must then be followed by a reawakening of wonder, a return to ‘childlikeness.’ It is man’s rational transcendence that allows

\(^{54}\) Ibid, 264
\(^{55}\) Chesterton, 284
him to be capable of humbling himself in love, as Christ, the Logos, portrayed as the one act characteristic of the fulfillment of our human, and therefore rational nature. If the highest instance of knowledge that we can experience in the natural order is between two persons, which is rooted in the supernatural knowledge between the Father and the Son, then this kind of knowledge should be analogous to knowledge all the way down the chain of being. We should look to gain knowledge, not as a means of power, manipulation, control—but as a way of relating to, so as to become the thing known, to shepherd as much of reality as possible within our finite rational nature up to the Father in Christ. Reason is only reason, as Plato said, if it aspires toward the fullness of truth. And, “Why should we not keep truth, and keep it whole? It can be done. But only those can do it who realize that He Who is the God of the philosophers is HE WHO IS, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.”  

56 We will never enter the kingdom, Christ told us, until we turn and become like children—full of wonder, brilliantly open to the revelatory mystery of reality, which even through nature exists each moment crying out in its silence for us to recognize, receive, and bear the fruit of the seeds of the word.

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56 Gilson, 144
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