

The Postmodern Notion of Freedom and Aquinas's Ratio Entis

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I have always been disturbed by the view that truly creative types cannot possibly live by a Judeo-Christian ethics. Rather, they must be Nietzschean supermen, Heideggerian poets, or Sartrean authentic *pour-soi*. These characters profess a freedom unfounded on truth and incompatible with the strictures of moral law. They are beyond good and evil. But it seems to me that these postmoderns ignore the public record of the Christian saints. As saints none were murderers, adulterers, fornicators, liars, or thieves. Yet for all that conformity to the moral law, the parade of Christian sanctity presents a striking panorama of “different lifestyles”—viz., the learning of Aquinas, the missionary activity of Francis Xavier, the contemplation of Teresa of Avila, the “little way” of Theresa of Lisieux, etc.. Originality and novelty are rampant here because it is precisely within these differences that sanctity is expressed. And who can say that one has seen the end of it? We know now that one would have been grossly mistaken to have made that claim in the third, twelfth, fifteenth, or for that matter, any previous century. Sanctity continually bursts stereotypes. And yet among the saints one again finds no regret that the activities of murdering, stealing, lying, etc., are differences off-limits to the realization of sanctity. Evidently you can be creative and moral at the same time.

Motivated by this religious data, I would like to try to show that on the metaphysical level a similar result obtains. I will argue that a natural law ethic can be thought through in the light of a moral agent informed by the *ratio entis*. While such an ethics has the traditional absolute norms, it will also have all the advantages of analogy and so will be home to creative and novel realizations of the moral good.

I

First, I must sketch what I mean by the postmodern sense of freedom. By

it I mean a philosophical “hardening,” or “taking to the extreme,” of an ordinary phenomenon. I will call that phenomenon the “play of projection.” By this phrase I refer to the fact that by the attitudes, e.g., hopes, wishes, desires, imaginings, with which we come at things, we can invest them, charge them, with a look, an appearance, a “meaning,” that they would otherwise not have. This phenomenon is as common as “Let’s pretend” games played by children. During a summer vacation when I was nine years old, my cousin spun us this story that under an old barn in the neighboring woods, the U. S. armed forces had set up a massive base. All through the summer my cousin embellished the tale. We at least half believed him and when he finally confessed the fib, those woods and surroundings instantly lost the appearance of “depth,” lost a sense of mystery and enchantment.

There is no doubt that this play of projection enlists the creative capacities of the human person and brings us the enjoyment of experiencing novelty. I do not think that these items should be denied and rendered anathema. But the best context for the healthy employment of the play of projection is another matter. I deny that that context is postmodernism. For what happens in postmodernism is that the play of projection becomes radically fundamental. It is constitutive of our experience of things. The experience of things arises in and through the mediation of human projection. As situated on such a basic level, the play of projection takes no cues from things. So conceived, the play of projection seems to be synonymous with an unparalleled freedom.

In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*,¹ Martin Heidegger seems to express just such an extremism for projection. This point emerges in Heidegger’s description of understanding (*verstehen*). He emphasizes that understanding is not at all primarily a cognition but a basic determination of our existence itself: “To exist is essentially . . . to understand.”² Hence, what is it for *Dasein* to exist? In sum, for *Dasein* to exist is for *Dasein* to be free:

This entity, the *Dasein*, has its own being in a certain way under control, as it comports itself in this or that way toward its capacity to be, as it has already decided in this or that way for or against it. ‘The *Dasein* is occupied with its own being’ means more precisely: it is occupied with its own *ability to be*. As existent, the *Dasein* is

¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. By Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988). The book is the text of a course that Heidegger gave at the University of Marburg in the summer of 1927. It was published only in 1975. Its close philosophical relationship to *Being and Time* (1927) is explained by Hofstadter in his “Translator’s Introduction.”

² Heidegger, *Basic Problems*, p. 276.

free for specific possibilities of its own self. It is its own most peculiar able-to-be. These possibilities of itself are not empty logical possibilities lying outside itself, in which it can engage or from which it could keep aloof; instead they are, as such, determinations of existence. If the Dasein is free for definite possibilities of itself, for its ability to be, then the Dasein is in this *being-free-for*; it is these possibilities themselves.³

Heidegger then connects these thoughts on *Dasein*'s freedom with the original existential concept of understanding:

To be one's own most peculiar ability to be, to take it over and keep oneself in the possibility, to understand oneself in one's own factual freedom, that is, *to understand oneself in the being of one's own most peculiar ability-to-be, is the original existential concept of understanding.*⁴

As a basic determination of existence, understanding means our freedom, our being in control of, at the head of, and as such the meaning goes back to the etymology of the German "*vorstehen*"—to stand in front of, at the head of, to preside over. Heidegger identifies understanding in the sense of freedom with the condition of possibility for all of *Dasein*'s particular manners of comportment, not only practical but also cognitive.⁵ This remark, along with others,⁶ is important because it excludes a rational basis for freedom and, in my opinion, marks Heidegger as a postmodern.

The absolute and underivative character of understanding/ freedom comes out again in Heidegger's clarification of the structure of understanding. In a word, understanding is projection.⁷ Yet what I project upon is a can-be of my

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ "If understanding is the basic determination of existence, it is as such the condition of possibility for all of *Dasein*'s particular possible manners of comportment. It is the condition of possibility for all kinds of comportment, not only practical but also cognitive." *Ibid.*

⁶ "If, however, an understanding of being always already lies at the basis of all comportment of the *Dasein* toward beings, whether nature or history, whether theoretical, or practical, then plainly I cannot adequately define the concept of understanding if, in trying to make the definition, I look solely to specific types of cognitive comportment towards beings. Thus what is required is to find a sufficiently original concept of understanding from which alone not only all modes of cognition but every type of comportment that relates to beings by inspection and circumspection can be conceived in a fundamental way." *Ibid.*, p. 275.

⁷ "To understand means, more precisely, *to project oneself upon a possibility.*" *Ibid.*, p. 277.

own self and what I project is my own self. These remarks confirm that understanding is self-contained. And one should one think that the self contains some stable nature that controls or guides the exercise of freedom. Heidegger says that *Dasein* “. . . is always only that which it has chosen itself to be, that which it understands itself to be in the projection of its own most peculiar ability-to-be.”⁸

Heidegger goes on to insist, however, that understanding is not so self-contained that it involves an “isolated punctual ego.”⁹ *Dasein* is being-in-the-world. But again, the exercise of freedom remains what is prior so that intraworldly being, including other *Daseins*, are taken up in the light of that free projection. He says, “. . . along with understanding there is always already projected a particular possible being with others and a particular possible being toward intraworldly beings.”¹⁰ This talk of being in the world and being with others does not mean that *Dasein* ceases to be in the driver's seat. Heidegger says that authentic understanding consists in being determined primarily by oneself, not by things, circumstances, or others.¹¹ Finally, Heidegger insists that in every existential understanding, i.e., in every free projection, there is enclosed an understanding of being. We cannot understand without projecting a sense of being in virtue of which a world is disclosed.¹²

Heidegger's notion of *verstehen* strikingly calls to mind Sartre's position on the absolute freedom of the human subject, the *pour-soi*. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre passionately argues that we are not limited by our place, past, surroundings, fellow-brethren, or death. In general, Sartre points out that the coefficient of adversity found in these items is always a factor of our freely chosen projects. The standard example is the boulder on the road. What it is, viz., a help or a hindrance, depends upon what I want to do. If I wish to travel to a town beyond, the boulder is a hindrance; if I wish to survey the countryside, the boulder becomes a help.¹³ It is true that in his *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger takes some pains to distinguish his position on humanism from Sartrean existentialism.¹⁴ To Heidegger's mind, Sartre is still too metaphysical, i.e.,

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

¹² “An understanding of the being of existence in general is enclosed in every existentiell understanding.” *Ibid.*

¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. By Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1969), p. 620.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*, edited by David Farrell Knell, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 208.

insufficiently attentive to the Being of beings. For Heidegger, Sartrean projection is upon already present beings and so aligns itself with a subjectivity that exploits and manipulates beings. Heidegger appears to want to avoid this subjectivity by a more radical subjectivity that accounts for the very Being in the light of which beings themselves become present. From my perspective, though, this dispute Heidegger picks with Sartrean existentialism is a lover's quarrel, for common to both is the primacy of the play of projection. Even though in the *Letter on Humanism* Heidegger insists that ". . . man does not decide whether and how beings appear. . . the advent of beings lies in the destiny of Being"¹⁵; and also remarks that "the sentence [from *Being and Time*: 'Only so long as *Dasein* is, is there Being'] does not say that Being is the product of man,"¹⁶ it is not clear to me that the term "man" here means Heideggerian *Dasein*. Rather, the word "man" means Cartesian *Dasein*. Heidegger specifies this when remarking: "the *Dasein* of man in the traditional sense of *existentia* and thought in modern philosophy as the actuality of *ego cogito*." Already cited texts from *Basic Problems* indicate quite unmistakably that Heideggerian *Dasein* does decide how beings appear and does produce the Being of beings.¹⁷

II

In sum, by the postmodern notion of freedom I mean a radically fundamental understanding of the human play of projection. What is a Thomistic metaphysician to say to all of this? Three comments come to my mind. First, the postmodern construal of the play of projection is not without cost. Some debits are the following. The first is a loss of objectivity. From an experience with less fundamental projections, we know that projection can make a difference

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹⁷ *Basic Problems* does contain some apparently realist assertions. First, Heidegger insists (p. 49) that a window "does not receive existence from my perceiving, but just the reverse. I can perceive it only *if* it exists and because it exists . . . Perception or absolute position is at most the mode of access to the existent." Second, he says that "perceivedness is not equated with extantness but is only a necessary though indeed not a sufficient condition of access to extantness." (p. 67) But realism is not the sure interpretation here. To the first text, one could say that perceiving does not give the window existence because the projecting of being does that. As Heidegger says (p. 52), "being is what makes a being what it is as a being." One could read Heidegger's *Being and Time* remark, "Entities *are*, quite independently of the experience by which they are disclosed . . ." (p. 228) in the same vein. To the second text, one could say that the necessary further condition for perception is not only the extantness of the perceived but *Dasein's* projection of being. In *Basic Problems* Heidegger does say "with respect to its possibility perceivedness is grounded in the understanding of extantness." (p. 71)

in the appearance of objects. Hence, how does the postmodern know that our most fundamental projections are not causing things to appear in ways other than they really are? This doubt seems irremovable. Second, in the wake of the first problem, one can ask if social communication is ever possible. Is there ever a true encounter with the genuinely other person and how would we know? In the perspective of postmodernism, one will simply just decide that one's projection is the appropriate way of dealing with others. This move gives human existence a tyrannous character. Third, can one "just decide"? Decision is usually understood to be a response to value. But does the postmodern ever encounter real value? Like everything else, value appears only subsequent to projection. As mentioned, however, the objectivity of projection is always doubtful. Hence, why choose?¹⁸

My second comment is that the postmodern's radicalization of the play of projection seems to be obviously false. We are not always mediating the presence of things in and through our freely chosen projects. But Heidegger is sensitive to this charge. He says that the experience of things as non-handy means to experience things as "unfamiliar." This latter experience is in turn reduced to some free projection of *Dasein*. Only because a fit into my presently chosen project is lacking does the non-handy come across as the unfamiliar. So, for Heidegger, the facts seem to show that we never experience things apart from some freely chosen project. What Heidegger calls *Dasein*'s "productive comportment" appears to be universal and enveloping.¹⁹

In reply, I believe Heidegger's analysis works only because it does not go far enough. True, we do experience the non-handy as the unfamiliar, as what lacks a fit in one's project. But by presenting itself as the unfamiliar, as *contra* my project, something can give us pause, something can bring our projecting to a halt. The noteworthy point is that the temporary suspension of projecting does not mean the non-presencing of the thing. The thing remains suspended before one without the mediation of some freely chosen project. The presence of things as what-I-do-not-know-what-to-do-with is an open invitation to consider things in terms of what they are doing for themselves, viz., existing. It is true, as Heidegger describes²⁰, that someone entering a shoemaker's shop with the preoccupations of a banker will experience the shop's contents as "unfamiliar."

¹⁸ In his *For an Ontology of Morals* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. 93, Henry Veatch explains the inability of transcendental method to allow real ethical obligation.

¹⁹ See *Basic Problems*, pp. 112-17 for Heidegger's case for the fundamentality of productive comportment.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

They will not mesh with the project of high finance and will appear with a screech of unfamiliarity. But is it that difficult to imagine the banker as dropping his project of banking and letting things just present themselves? I think not.

In sum, we can see that the presencing outstrips our projective comportment. Projective comportment has an ebb and flow that contrasts to the continued presence of things. The latter belies the former. As mentioned, the unfamiliar can stop the comporting in its tracks. But other factors can do the same. Exhaustion in the midst of a difficult task can lead us to place the projecting aside but without the loss of the presence of things. To return to Sartre's boulder on the road example, if I encounter the boulder at high noon, I may decide to put off what I want to make of it and break for lunch. Does the boulder cease to be present? Of course not. Long ago Aristotle noted²¹ that success in meeting practical needs and necessities meant a diminution of practical concern without a commensurate diminution in the presencing of things. In fact from this continued presencing of things, philosophy took its rise. Hence, I fail to see projective comportment as subsuming the presencing of things. Being does not mean projectedness.

The postmodern will likely insist that things remain present precisely *as things present at hand*. In other words, their presence remains contextual. In this case the context is "presence at hand." This remark leads to my third comment. It is far from clear that this noted context must be taken as a projection, as a constitutive *apriori*. In fact, the context contains no features that would preempt an *aposteriori* source. Even the ineluctibility of the context is an indecisive feature for its projective nature. For the context may be ineluctible because it is an immediate and spontaneous *abstractum* from real things given in sensation.²²

What is said here is important for showing that the play of projection so lionized by postmodernism occurs against a larger sky. Our projections do not traject into the void. They occur within Reality, within Being understood as this ineluctible *aposteriori* context, or *abstractum*, for our appreciations of beings as being. For all of his talk about a return to being, I think that Heidegger himself misses it.²³

²¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 2, 982b 11-27.

²² For an extended elaboration of this reply, see John F. X. Knasas, "A Heideggerian Critique of Aquinas and a Gilsonian Reply," *The Thomist*, 58 (1994), pp. 415-39.

²³ In *Basic Problems*, Heidegger is searching for the horizon against which being in the sense of a world view is projected; see p. 280. This horizon turns out to be the temporality of *Dasein* (p. 302) which seems to be another gloss of *Dasein*'s cognitively ungrounded freedom. In my opinion, Heidegger seems to be oblivious to the analogon of the *ratio entis* that is in truth the horizon that profiles what he is calling being.

III

Despite these criticisms, the postmodern will still hesitate at making the play of projection something less than fundamental. A major motivation appears to be a perceived incompatibility between human freedom and any cuing of the human person by reality itself. In other words, if human existence is not fundamentally projective, then it is fundamentally receptive; it is other-determined rather than self-determined. Heidegger presents this opposition by contrasting authentic understanding with inauthentic understanding. In *Basic Problems* he presents both within a temporal interpretation of understanding. Authentic understanding he calls "resoluteness," and resoluteness is said to have its own temporal structure. When *Dasein* goes for a freely chosen possibility, it is both going ahead of itself and returning to itself. It is going ahead of itself because the possibility as freely chosen becomes one with *Dasein*; it is returning to itself because again as freely chosen, the possibility embodies *Dasein* as free which *Dasein* was before the choice. There is a circle here in which *Dasein*'s exercise of freedom returns *Dasein* to its own freedom. The "going ahead" is the future component of resoluteness, the "returning" is the past component. But resoluteness also includes a present called the instant. Characteristic of the instant is that something is enpresented. The enpresenting occurs according to the exigencies, or demands, of the free future projection.²⁴

Heidegger next turns to a temporal analysis of inauthentic understanding. As a word of introduction, one could say that the temporality of authentic understanding was shot through with an awareness of *Dasein*'s freedom. Resoluteness concerned a conscious holding on to this freedom. Resoluteness is to exist in this freedom. With inauthentic understanding the awareness of *Dasein*'s freedom is lost. Hence, the future of inauthentic understanding is determined by the possibilities of things, not by the can-be of *Dasein*. Heidegger's way of saying it is "*Dasein* comes toward itself from out of things."²⁵ In short, *Dasein* identifies itself not with its own possibilities but with the possibilities of things. *Dasein*'s future, that towards which it moves, is non-*Dasein*. Furthermore, what *Dasein* returns to, i.e., its past, is not its own freedom but again the possibilities of things. *Dasein*'s inauthentic past is marked by a forgetfulness of itself and its own can-be, or freedom. The inauthentic present will be elaborated later. For the most part *Dasein* exists in the temporality of inauthentic understanding. Inauthenticity predominates because *Dasein*'s intentionality first

²⁴ *Basic Problems*, p. 287.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

bears upon things in themselves.²⁶ Such a focus inadvertently covers over the founding role of *Dasein*.

IV

In the remainder of my paper, I want to neutralize this last motivation for the postmodern radicalization of the play of projection. Does a cognitive link to reality chain and bind human activity? Does a fundamental aposteriorism kill the poets, the artists, and creative thinkers? One could say yes to these questions only in the light of a very impoverished understanding of what Aquinas calls being, the *ratio entis*. Humans would be reduced to robots of the real, would suffer a great diminution of freedom and creativity, if the *ratio entis* is taken as the greatest genus. A genus must not include the differences by which it is determined to its species. In other words, the differences of the genus must be viewed as extrinsic to, or outside of, the genus. The reason for saying this lies in the thought that otherwise the genus would be placed twice in the definition of the species. For example, if the genus “animal” included the difference “rational,” then the definition of man would not be rational animal but rational animal animal.²⁷

Yet this extrinsicism of the difference to the genus must be understood in a nuanced fashion. If the difference is understood as simply extrinsic to the genus, then the genus would be only a portion of the species. Since only whole is predicated of whole, not part of whole, a pure extrinsicism for the difference would render the genus a mere part and make predication of the genus impossible. Consequently, Aquinas distinguishes abstraction with and without precision.²⁸ Abstracted with precision, a common nature like a generic notion is closed off

²⁶ For Heidegger’s analysis of perceptual intentionality and the projection of being contained within it, see *ibid.*, pp. 55-72.

²⁷ “If being were a genus we should have to find a difference through which to contract it to a species. But no difference shares in the genus in such a way that the genus is included in the notion of the difference, for thus the genus would be included twice in the definition of the species. Rather, the difference is outside what is understood in the nature of the genus. But there is nothing that is outside that which is understood by being (*ens*), if being is included in the concept of things of which it is predicated. Thus being cannot be contracted by any difference. Being is, therefore, not a genus.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 25, *Quod autem*; trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), I, 127.

²⁸ On these two kinds of abstraction, see Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, ch. 2; for commentary, see 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: Collected Papers of Joseph Owens*, ed. John R. Catan, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1980), pp. 84-90.

to its very differences. The nature is rendered merely into a part of the instance from which it was abstracted. Hence, it cannot be predicated, i.e., identified, with the instance. If this was the only kind of abstraction of common natures, knowledge of anything would become impossible, for one could never say what anything is.

Abstracted without precision a common nature is understood to remain open to the very differences from which it abstracts. For example, human nature abstracted without precision as "man" does not include any definite complexion, but neither does it go on to exclude what it does not include. Furthermore, the past to which Dasein returns is not its own freedom but is again the possibilities of things. Note that here the differences are outside in the sense that the commonality remains open to them. This "openness" keeps the differences present and permits predication of the commonality, even while it understands the differences as extrinsic. In sum, in abstraction without precision of a genus the differences are rendered extrinsic, but are potentially contained.

Now if being, the *ratio entis*, is like a genus, then all the differences of being would have to be placed outside of being and so rendered nugatory. That would prevent any differentiation of being. Being would be frozen and static. Nothing new under the sun would have the foreboding sense of metaphysical necessity. By this genus-like understanding of being, aposteriorism would strike the intellect dumb. It would be the end of creativity.

But Aquinas contrasts the *ratio entis* from a generic notion. Being is differentiated but not in and through the addition of something extrinsic. Rather, being is differentiated into special modes.²⁹ These modes are the diverse genera of things, viz., substance and the various accidents. But the multiplication of being into these modes is not in and through something extrinsic like a difference of a genus. Rather the multiplication is stated this way: the mode expresses something not expressed by the name being. Being provides for its own differentiation. Scholastics have formulated the situation of being *vis-a-vis* its diverse genera this way. Being contains them implicitly but actually. In contrast, the generic notion contains its differences implicitly but potentially.³⁰

Elsewhere Aquinas calls the community of *ens* analogous.³¹ Neo-Thomists

²⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Ver.* I, 1c.

³⁰ "The analogical concept is radically different: it has only a relative or proportional unity, and it does not include the diversity of its inferiors potentially . . . In order that it may not be univocal in any degree, therefore, the analogical concept must include diversity actually, without in any way rendering that diversity explicit." James F. Anderson, *The Bond of Being: An Essay on Analogy and Existence* (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers: 1969), pp. 256-7.

³¹ *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1m; *In I Sent.*, prol. Q. 1, a. 2, ad 2m; *De Ver.* II, 11c.

have fashioned some felicitous ways of expressing the nature of the analogous concept.³² These philosophers reiterate the same point—an analogous concept is not picked out apart from the differences of its instances but *within* those very differences. In contrast, a univocal commonality is picked out apart from the differences of the instances. Hence, what makes the instances of the univocal commonality the same will not be what renders them different. For example, “triangle” expresses the commonality grasped in the equilateral three-sided figure and the right angled three-sided figure. In this situation the equal sides of the first instance and the right angle of the second instance serve simply to differentiate the instances. They do not convey the sameness as it witnessed by having the right angle in a square. The instances are the same in virtue of something else. With the analogical concept, however, we have a commonality that is grasped within the very differences, they serve to render the instances the same. As Aquinas has been noted to say, “some things are said to be alike which communicate in the same form (*in eadem forma*), but not according to the same formality (*secundum eandem rationem*).”³³

The analogous concept may sound like something beyond belief, and one might be tempted to brush it aside as the fanciful product of metaphysics. Common, non-metaphysical experience, though, provides many instances of analogy. Consider the way in which “great baseball player” is applied both to Willie Mays and Sandy Koufax. Mays was a great out-fielder and hitter, Koufax a great pitcher. Different as each of these things are, they nevertheless serve to make Mays and Koufax alike. In these cases, there is a sameness in the differences and differences in the sameness. The very thing that makes Mays the same as Koufax, viz., Mays’ hitting, is also the very thing that makes him different from Koufax and vice versa.

Concerning the analogous concept, there are two further important points to note. First, one must not mentally attempt to pry the analogous commonality, or analogon, apart from its instances, or analogates.³⁴ Recall, the commonality is within the differences of the instances. Any attempt to separate the commonality from these differences results in the loss of the commonality. Hence, inappropriate is the Scotistic demand to specify in what respect the instances

³² For remarks of Jacques Maritain, Gerald Phelan, and Joseph Owens, see John F. X. Knasas, “Aquinas, Analogy, and the Divine Infinity,” *Doctor Communis*, 40 (1987), pp. 72-3. Also in Knasas, *The Preface to Thomistic Metaphysics: A Contribution to the Neo-Thomist Debate on the Start of Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 100-3.

³³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 4, 3c.

³⁴ On the terminology of “analogon” and “analogate,” see George P. Klubertanz, *St. Thomas on Analogy* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1960), pp. 6-7.

are the same and in what respect they are different.³⁵ The demand fails to understand the nature of the analogous concept. Here the sameness is in the differences. Hence, one does not wish to avoid the differences of the instances. They carry the sameness.

Second, the analogous notion carries an astonishing intelligible wealth and plenitude. Because it is grasped within the differences of its instances, the analogical concept manifests itself as an unparalleled source of novelty. Different as the great baseball playing of Mays is from Koufax's, it is still the same in both. Great baseball playing in itself is acknowledged to contain both styles and who knows what myriad others. At the time of Ruth and Cobb who could have envisaged a Mays or Koufax? Today who can guess what further analogates great baseball player will assume? And if the great baseball playing of Mays, for example, is awesome to behold, then great baseball player in itself must be stupendous.³⁶

Returning to the *ratio entis*, Aquinas' understanding of the differentiation of the *ratio entis* into its modes is the crux for comprehending how a fundamentally *aposteriori* stance is compatible with the free creative capacities of the human being. The diverse *modi entis* never transcend the *ratio*. Their diversity occurs within *ens*. In other words, *ens* manifests itself as a sameness within difference. Properly understood, being presents itself as the source and matrix of novelty. Its different modes precisely in their differences emerge from being. But the novelty continues beyond these modes. These modes cognitively engender an appreciation of analogons and new possibilities for analogates. For example, the modes of being that are Chopin's and Beethoven's different ways of playing the piano engender an appreciation of the analogon great musician. Hence, the Thomistic intellector of the *ratio entis* is guaranteed an education in novelty by these analogons that strike the mind through their various analogates. He is instructed in the fact that there are many different ways to do things. As the Thomist sees it, reality is nothing other than an inspiration to creativity. If we can say Chopin and Beethoven and others are inspirations to aspiring musicians, why can we not say the same of the *ratio entis*? The first mentioned is contained in and made possible by the second.

V

Yet the compatibility of aposteriorism and creative freedom in the light of

³⁵ For the demand, see Patrick Lee, "Language about God and the Theory of Analogy," *The New Scholasticism*, 58 (1984), pp. 40-1.

³⁶ On Aquinas' distinction of analogy into its types on the basis of the various ways in which the analogon is found in the analogates, see Knasas, "Aquinas, Analogy, and the Divine Infinity," pp. 75-6.

the *ratio entis* is not a license to run absolutely wild. Despite its ability to make its way into a surprising array of differences, no analogon is a case of anything goes. For example, my way of playing the piano is not a difference that would ever permit the analogon “great pianist.” Some differences cannot carry the sameness. At first thought the *ratio entis* might seem to be an exception, for as mentioned any difference is a being. All this is true. But I would like to sketch a way in which we can see that the *ratio entis* creates its own norms.

The first step in this development is to realize that being is the total good. At first thought, this characterization of being might seem farfetched. Up until now I have presented quite an intellectual appreciation of being. Its guise was that of an object of knowledge; it was a *ratio*, an analogical *concept*, an *abstractum*. But is not our experience more than just knowing? What we know, we also want to possess, i.e., to have in its real existence.³⁷ Knowledge seems to be only part of the story of the human being. Hence, how can one broaden the appreciation of being to encompass the willing of the good?

This appreciation follows on the heels of the *ratio entis* actually including all differences. Hence, the real existence of things, not simply their cognitional existence, is a mode of being actually but implicitly contained in being. In other words, because being implicitly but actually contains its differences, being is not only an object of knowledge that leaves the real existence of things outside its consideration. It also actually includes the real existence of those things that we so ardently will, e.g., moral rectitude, friendship, physical well-being.³⁸ This point about being reiterates what I understand to be being as it is object of the practical intellect.³⁹ Being is more than a speculative object. As an analogical notion, being both abstracts and does not abstract from real existence. Being both gets away from it and stays enmeshed in it. Because the *ratio entis* gets

³⁷ On the will as related to things outside the soul, see Aquinas, *S.C.G.* I, 72, *Adhuc* and *De Ver.* 21, 1c (cited in n. 37).

³⁸ At *De Ver.* XXI, 1c, Aquinas presents the *ratio entis* as the good because it contains the *esse naturale* of things: “The true and the good must therefore add to the concept of being (*intellectum entis*), a relationship of that which perfects. But in any being there are two aspects to be considered, the formal character of its species and the act of being (*esse ipsum*) by which it subsists in that species. And so a being can be perfective in two ways. (1) It can be so just according to its specific character. In this way the intellect is perfected by a being, for it perceives the formal character of the being. But the being is still not in it according to its natural existence (*esse naturale*). It is this mode of perfecting which the true adds to being. . . . (2) A being is perfective of another not only according to its specific character but also according to the existence (*esse*) which it has in reality. In this fashion the good is perfective; for the good is in things” Aquinas, *De Ver.* 21, 1c; trans. by Robert W. Schmidt, *The Disputed Questions on Truth* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1954) III, 6-7.

away from real existence, it is an object of the speculative intellect.⁴⁰ But because the *ratio entis* also stays enmeshed in real existence, it is an object of the practical intellect.

Able to be grasped as the total good, being excites in the human will a necessary desire for it. This necessary desire is the desire for happiness, the possession of all good things, as Boethius says.⁴¹ But since being is an analogon seen in the differences of its analogates, each of the analogates make a claim on our love. Here, though, the claim is to a response that is free. Since the analogates manifest the analogon only through their differences, they imperfectly present the analogon. They remain necessarily *lovable* but not necessarily *loved*.

Among these analogates human persons are special. As intellectual they are analogates that through their intellection have the *ratio entis* present within them. Our reverence for *ratio entis* should spill over into a reverence for these unique analogates. In a human person we meet and confront being in a special way. Here being can speak to us, it can inform us of itself. With human beings the claim of the analogates of being to a free response of love is especially intense. It calls forth an ethics that accords a most high dignity to individual human persons. It is an ethics that has no place for treating humans as mere means to ends.

The above connections are seen in a text from Aquinas on divine providence. Aquinas argues that in God's providence over rational creatures, God governs them for their own sakes. One argument is as follows:

. . . it is evident that all parts are ordered to the perfection of the whole, since a whole does not exist for the sake of its parts, but, rather, the parts are for the whole. Now, intellectual natures have a closer relationship to a whole than do other natures, indeed, each

³⁹ "Ita nec apprehensio veri sine ratione boni et appetibilis [non movet appetitum]. Unde intellectus speculativus non movet, sed intellectus practicus." *S.T.* I-II, 9, 1, ad 2m. At *S.T.* I, 79, 11c, Aquinas says that the practical intellect directs what it apprehends to operation. But operation terminates in the *esse* of its effect. For example, see efficient causality in the *secunda via* at *S.T.* I, 2, 3c. Hence, in its consideration of the *ratio entis* the practical intellect must both regard real existence and regard it as good.

⁴⁰ As making some abstraction from real existence, the Thomistic *ratio entis* is neither an item of ontological realism, like a Platonic Form, nor is it an item open to ontological reasoning. The *ratio entis* remains knowable only in and through its analogates.

⁴¹ Earlier at *De Ver.* I, 1c, Aquinas presents being as the good in terms of the object of the human soul's appetitive power: "In anima autem est vis cognitiva et appetitiva. Convenientiam ergo entis ad appetitum exprimit hoc nomen bonum . . ."

intellectual substance, is in a way, all things. For it may comprehend the entirety of being through its intellect [*inquantum totius entis comprehensiva est suo intellectu*].⁴²

The connection of created intellect with the *ratio entis* places an obligation even upon God. This obligation is to treat the human as an end in itself. Only a part of a larger whole is appropriate for means-to-end thinking. But as intellector of being, the human is more the entirety than a part thereof.

If God must treat rational creatures with dignity, obviously so must we. A number of absolute negative ethical norms easily follow. First, innocent human life is inviolable. Neither the citizen nor ruler can directly take it. In other words, murder is wrong. Murder falsely reduces the human to a mere part of some purported larger whole. Neither is suicide moral. The mentioned necessary desire for being as the good renders suicide profoundly unnatural.

This high dignity accorded the human as an intellector of being also excludes any deliberate depriving of what is materially necessary for one to exist. In short, stealing is wrong.

Also insofar as sexual intercourse is by its nature a most intimate physical union of persons, there is no place for means-to-ends thinking that would lead to transiency. The person is again an intellector of being. One should understand that participation in sexual activity must be accompanied with the absolute respect owing to being. One cannot make sexual intercourse a portion of some larger totality. As involving intellectors of being, sexual union already involves a totality. In a literal way, one sees stars in the eyes of the beloved. For the beloved is an entire universe. An encounter with an entire universe is not a passing one because it resists reduction to a means that would be dispensable once the end is achieved. In other words, given the human persons involved, human sexuality ought to be exercised within a permanent and exclusive context. Finally, any deliberate diminution of the sexual act, e.g., contraception, is also wrong. It is against the nature of the sexual act understood as the giving of a totality.

At this point it may seem that by these negative norms, I am isolating the human being from the creativity of which I spoke earlier. Am I now taking with one hand what I had given with the other? I do not think so. These negative norms delineate a field for a morality that is home to the creativity of being. The more we are sensitive to being's legitimate expressions in our fellows, the more creative and novel will be our response. Through residing in various individuals,

⁴² *S.C.G.* III, 112, *Praeterea*; trans. by Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 3: II, 116-7.

being sets up its own data that calls forth new responses. A mother or father never knows what analogate of good parent will need to be realized on any day in solicitude to their children. Likewise, a teacher can never predict what form of excellence will be required to communicate effectively with each new class. In that vein, is not Aquinas' greatness as an intellectual only comprehensible as a response to the Aristotelian challenge to his Christian faith? See, analogates feed on analogates. We should not be afraid to submit ourselves to our fellows, for being with all its resources for newness is found there. The most difficult part of ethics is not the negative norms but the positive ones. Each of us is left to figure out for ourselves what analogate of good person is appropriate for us in our circumstances.

VI

In conclusion, I have tried to show that the best matrix to accommodate what is true in the play of projection that postmoderns use to characterize freedom is what Aquinas calls the *ratio entis*. Even though this is not a *projectum* but an *abstractum* taken from real things, it does not render the human a mere reflex of reality. Because of its analogical nature, it is an education in the emergence of novelty and is an invitation to project further new and unheard of analogates of being. Moreover, its connection with the total good engenders an ethics of respect for our fellows insofar as they have being present to them by intellection. This respect is encapsulated not only within the negative norms of natural law but also within the positive ones. Regarding the latter, ethics is also a call to creativity as we are left to craft analogates of moral living suitable to our circumstances.