

Twisting the Transcendentals



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Cover: Yellow Hibiscus
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Part I

We should talk about Transcendentals. What are they?

Transcendentals are the three properties co-extensive (corresponding in scope) with being: They are truth, beauty, and goodness. Philosophy studies them with logic, aesthetics and ethics, In that order. Properties may be understood as aspects, attributes, features, exemplifiable-characteristics of a thing that “is”. In philosophy, being means the material or immaterial existence of a thing. Anything that exists is being.

Being is a concept encompassing the objective it (of itself) and the subjective (me, thinking of it) features of reality and existence. Anything that partakes in being is called a "being", by entities that have subjectivity (as in the expression "human being").

The notion of "being" has, inevitably, been elusive and controversial in the history of philosophy, beginning in Western philosophy with attempts among the pre-Socratics (Early Greek Philosophers) to deploy it intelligibly (comprehensibly). The first effort to recognize and define the concept came from Parmenides, who famously said of it that "what is—is". Common words such as "is", "are", and "am" refer directly or indirectly to being.

In the Middle Ages, Catholic philosophers elaborated on the thought that transcendentals exist and go beyond each of the

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"ten Aristotelian categories." (We have found a list in Pattern Recognition Tools)

"Aristotle starts his knowledge on the world by the phenomena, by what we can observe, not by ideas on reality. The observations are expressed by language and exchanged between people. Everything we can say is captured by one of the ten categories. Here is an example for each of them."

Substance, the chair

Quantity, the chair has four legs ???, could be a mistake.

Qualification, the chair is brown

Relative, the chair is lower than the table

Where, the chair is in the room

When, we bought the chair yesterday

Being-in-a-position, the chair is upside-down

Having, the chair has four legs

Doing, the chair carries a heavy load

Being-affected, the chair collapses by the heavy load

A doctrine of the transcendental of the good was formulated by Albert the Great. His pupil, Saint Thomas Aquinas, posited five transcendentals: (Latin) *res, unum, aliquid, bonum, verum*; or (English) "thing", "one", "something", "good", and "true". Saint Thomas derives the five explicitly as transcendentals, though in some cases he follows the typical list of the transcendentals consisting of the One, the Good, and the True. The transcendentals are ontologically one (Ontology: A branch of metaphysics dealing with nature and being) and thus they are convertible: e.g., where there is truth, there is beauty and goodness, where there is beauty, there is goodness and truth etc.

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In Christian theology transcendentals are treated in relation to theology proper, (A study of the nature of God). The transcendentals, according to Christian doctrine, can be described as the ultimate desires of man. Man ultimately strives for perfection, which takes form through the desire for perfect attainment of the transcendentals. The Catholic Church teaches that God is Himself truth, goodness, and beauty, as indicated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Each transcends the limitations of place and time, and is rooted in being. The transcendentals are not contingent upon cultural diversity, religious doctrine, or personal ideologies, but are the objective properties of all that exists.

That is why the Catechism 1-27 says "The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the happiness (Beauty, Goodness, Truth) he never stops searching for: The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God.

This invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being." Although life begins at conception, when would "being" begin? The issue is much too long and complicated to address here. Let's just say that being is baked in the cake. Wikipedia has a very good source titled: "The Beginning of Human Personhood" if you wish to study it further.

If you are a determinist (many varieties) where the "real" is only matter (no metaphysics: matter over mind) you would need to un-persuade an indeterminist (many varieties) that matter is a consequence of spirit. (mind over matter).

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Let's take "beauty" to the point of argument. The determinist will contend that "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder" through the human optic system to the brain (no need to elaborate) firing synapses that materially coordinate with other parts of the brain and the nervous system (culture, knowledge, experience, etc.) producing the answer, "It's beautiful." (Whatever it is). That idea of what is beautiful is subjectively determined by what could be called body/mind physics, by materially generated thoughts.

The indeterminist will argue a higher-order of thought processing that is not locked into materialism, not based strictly on the determination of an individual, but on an indeterminate universal principle or pre-existing idea of the beautiful. (In metaphysics, a universal. (Psychological universals, or core mental attributes shared by humans everywhere, are a foundational postulate of psychology, yet explicit analysis of how to identify such universals is lacking) This is transcendent beauty beyond human subjectivity where there must be an ultimate beauty for which he or she anxiously and continuously searches. (God perhaps). One is earthbound the other is not.

Life, soul, "vitality", can be considered transcendent, A human consciousness of spirit beyond matter which, so far, cannot be scientifically explained. One could say that the transcendentals are innate to the human psyche. Baked in, so to speak, and matured over time. Although it seems so, for all intents and purposes, human beings are not autonomous. The human imagination connected with the gifts of reason and will, operating transcendentally is exactly how Sapiens knew of a creative power beyond themselves. Yes, they invented worship

(religion if you like) but their motive was a "God" revealed. They saw themselves in the One—— him; her; it or them.

“We are seeking to find a place of encounter between man and the God who may possibly reveal himself. This place is the transcendence of man in its specifically human character.” (Karl Rahner S.J.)

Part II

As human beings each one of us, graced with reason and will are enabled with a free imagination to go beyond the material self, reaching-out in so many ways to fulfill the peace and happiness that the transcendentals are known to deliver. The notion of this reaching-out can be vaguely explained using, once again, transcendental "Beauty" by Aesthetics:(art) Aesthetics, the branch of philosophy dealing with beauty (emphasizing the evaluative criteria applied to art)

The painter sets up before a complexity of "being" called "landscape" which satisfies his or her subjective sense of the good and the true, then proceeds to capture its value on a flat surface (canvass or otherwise) by reaching-out with a given degree of talent signifying its beauty. The great French Impressionists, in our view, were able to reach-out and show us the universally beautiful (more or less) in many of their works. Of course other artistic endeavors have done the same. From the cave paintings of Altamira to abstract expressionism all a reaching-out beyond the mundane.

"Oh, would some Power give us the gift
To see ourselves as others see us!
It would from many a blunder free us,
And foolish notion: What airs in dress and gait would leave us"

This from a poem by Bobby Burns with the unlikely title of "To a Louse," apparently inspired Burns seeing a louse crawling on the bonnet of an upper class woman dressed to the hilt (the woman, not the louse). The main point of the poem, and those timeless words, is how good it would be for us to see ourselves through the eyes of others." (Psychology Today, Mark Sherman Ph.d.) Can we see ourselves as others see us? Can the human spirit be both subject and object at the same time?

"William James (1890) proposed a distinction between the I and the Me, which, according to Morris Rosenberg, is a classic distinction in the psychology of the self. According to James the "I" is equated with the "self-as-knower" and has three features: continuity, distinctness, and volition. The continuity of the self-as-knower is expressed in a sense of personal identity, that is, a sense of sameness through time. A feeling of distinctness from others, or individuality, is also characteristic of the self-as-knower.

Of particular relevance to DST (Dialogical Self Theory; Talking to oneself) is James's view that the Me, equated with the self-as-known, is composed of the empirical elements considered as belonging to oneself. James was aware that there is a gradual transition between Me and mine and concluded that the empirical self is composed of all that the person can call his or her own.

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You don't have to be a psychologist to understand that there's an internal "dialogue" going on in our heads all the time. It may be a little different in different people, but when we're reasoning or deliberating, we are asking all kinds of questions of the "I" regarding the "me" until we are willing to make a decision to take action, or to defer action i.e., putting something off. With reason we reach into our memory, consult our knowledge, hem and haw about propriety, assert our moral stance... we may even bring our whole being to bear: all in the mental process of coming to a right and hopefully true and beneficial decision for ourselves and others. In the main, we do this with ease provided the subject matter is not crucial or critical. If otherwise, the internal back and forth in both words and pictures can produce reactions in highly emotional ways. We are not zombies, we are responsible for what we do resulting from what we think to be right in our formed consciences. Of course there is always a chance that for one reason or another our conscience may be in error. The "I" and the "me" are continually deliberating.

Reaching-out to the transcendental good which Sapiens' recognize is within his and her capability is the rudimentary notion leading to the concept of praying to the Ultimate Good (to God). Our private conversations with our selves (talking to ourselves as in DST) is in many ways similar to our truth-filled, heartfelt conversations (prayer) with the Father, Son, and Spirit. The simple prerequisite is that the personal God to whom many of us have pledged our faith and trust— hears our prayers. Since we can be both subject and object at once our prayerful conversations are easily directed to God by our "dual" self. For example: "Have mercy on (me) Lord, and (I) will do your

will;" a bit bizarre, but it seems to work within the context of the "dialogical-self".

If one understands that the Omniscient, Omnipotent Triune God is ubiquitous (everywhere) in a pan-en-theistic way (Pan-en-theism: the notion that the divinity pervades and interpenetrates every part of the universe and also extends beyond space and time. [For Catholics, Pan-en-theism [not pantheism] can become heretical only if it denies creation and the distinction of the world from God.]) When Jesus instructs us to pray, there can be no reason to think we are not being heard and merely talking to the walls. Since God is everywhere and in us as Jesus tells us, we share in his life. To have grace then, is sharing in the Life of God, through Christ, in the Spirit. Schelling says, "God is a life, and not merely a being." In this respect our reaching-out is not a long-distance call to far off "heaven" but heartfelt mental or vocal appeals and gratuity to the Living Spirit within us, exercised either privately or communally.

Every thought, word, and good deed honestly directed to God is a prayer. A prayer can be mis-directed if it's insincere. A prayer can be dishonest in exactly the same way a person to person conversation can. Hubris, exaggeration, false promises, deals etc., are all in play. Directing our prayer to the Father, or the Son or the Spirit is our prayer to the One God of all creation who knows us better than we know our selves as Augustine says. Thus prayer can never really be faked. The determinist will have none of this. For he or she, God has absolutely no relevance.

Regardless of naturally caused racial, physical and cultural differences the "Family of Man," Homo Sapiens Sapiens, the Human Race, is unequivocally, biologically related and (so far) unique in the Cosmos. Man is said to be made in the image of God by Spiritualists (most Religionists); or simply known as "Humanity" (whose origin is emergent from the origins of the universe) by Humanists; most of whom are either Atheists or Agnostics; and for whom there is no concept of Good and Evil per se. Reasons for wrongdoing are explored through scientific methods, e.g. through study of sociology, psychology and criminology. The Secular Humanists doctrine generally states: Humanity is capable of morality and self-fulfillment without belief in God. There is no concept of an afterlife or spiritual liberation or salvation. Realizing ones personal potential and working for the betterment of humanity through ethical consciousness and social works are paramount, but from a naturalistic rather than a supernaturalistic standpoint. Undeserved Suffering is a matter of human vulnerability to misfortune, illness, victimization etc.

“We could never judge that one thing is better than another, if a basic understanding of the good had not already been installed in us. (Saint Augustine)

Part III

When Augustine told us that a basic understanding of the good had been installed in us we know it's true simply by experience. How many people do you know who go around looking for things or conditions that are bad, it's possible but highly unlikely. Transcendentals, like most things in this world do have their opposites. For truth there are always lies and deceit;

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for beauty there is the grotesque, or the repulsive; for goodness there is evil. What is interesting is that these "opposites" when left up to the evaluative or relative judgements of some individuals can be completely rationalized, they can be thought of as having few negative inferences and even in some cases can be called perfectly "reasonable." The gift of reason can be a great mental tool depending on how it's used

Within the deliberations of reason the interrogatives of "why?" "when?" "where?" and "how?" can be answered in many different ways, depending on the imagination of the "I" on behalf of the "me", and depending on the teleological motives and character of the deliberator, the actor, the agent. (Teleology or finality is a reason or explanation for something as a function of its end, its purpose, its goal, as opposed to a function of its cause.) Twisting the transcendentals for selfish purposes to mean the opposite of what they signify, ie., essentially the ultimate truth, beauty and goodness of the Triune God, under certain circumstances can be said to be sins that "cry to heaven for vengeance:" (1) Willful murder (Gn 4:10); (2) The sin of sodomy (Gn 18:20-21) ; (3) Oppression of the poor (Ex 21-23) ; (4) Defrauding laborers of their wages(Dt 24:14-15).

Scripture mentions only four sins which cry out to heaven (God) for vengeance. Considering the source and the emphasis, we have little choice but to examine our consciences on these points. A cursory examination will not do; we must cast off our cultural preconceptions to see beyond the obvious. Sadly, the ease with which we understand the foulness of murder may be conditioned more by our culture than by Divine Revelation. We must take care that we do not find it abhorrent only insofar as

we are creatures of society, rather than creatures of God. Legal Abortion is the major case in point. With Sodomy we have another case in point for cultural conditioning. It is far more difficult for our contraceptive culture to see how contrary to nature homosexuality is. Those of us who instinctively feel its deep unnaturalness react rightly to homosexual activity with disgust, but logical arguments are unlikely to produce the same reaction in those whose instincts are damaged, blunted or rationalized away. Sodomy strikes at the root of human nature because of its perversion of the procreative impulse, without which the race would die. But in case we don't see it or have rationalized it, The Spirit, the giver of life, sees it.

With widows and orphans, ("the poor") once again, we must remove our relativist social blinders to see the great evil in our culture which turns so many into widows and orphans in the first place, (poverty) to mention nothing of sex trafficking and child pornography. The grave sin of divorce, by which natural protection is legally ripped away from women and children, surely heads the list of horrors under this heading. As far as labor is concerned here we come to a principle of sound social order: those in positions of authority and wealth have serious obligations to those who depend on their decisions for their well-being, or even survival. Free enterprise is an excellent system, but in many cases it too often carries the completely unnecessary baggage of a callous and slavish attitude toward employees, regarding them as commodities. Using illegal aliens as pawns for votes by allowing open borders to change the demography of areas of the country is heinous political hypocrisy. The social teachings of the Catholic Church have attempted to address this concern (without pointing at all toward socialism or communism) for over a century.(Dr.Jeffrey

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Mirus Ph.D. Princeton University.)(modified) It wouldn't surprise us at all that the last three sins mentioned we're not at all considered major transgressions by average Americans on either side of the political aisle calling for the wrath of God.

Though all very different we are all human under the Fatherhood of the Creator or, if you prefer, emergent from the chemistry and energy of physical matter by chance. What is true, beautiful and good, then may very well be thought of as having different causes—— but in a practical way are sensed by all human beings. The transcendentals are in effect a fact of life regardless of our beliefs. For some reason they are available to Sapiens' by an awareness of them out of what one could call cosmic consciousness. (World Soul perhaps) Generally both spiritualists and secular humanists could not deny, out of hand, the need for what is true, beautiful, and good in living the "good-life". Neither will they deny that there are certain people who will rationally twist the meanings of the transcendentals to their opposite meanings. For example: Lies properly used are true; What some call beauty is really grotesque; and that evil is actually goodness in disguise. Reasonable spiritual and ethical people easily see this contrarian thought processing as a perversion of the gift of reason for self serving purposes. It is nothing more than a manipulation of conscience coercing human volition. "Good will" becomes "ill will" and is all pervasive in today's culture worldwide, but particularly prevalent in the American left's political system of the last five years. Gross lies become truth. Beauty is rejected and goodness reversed.

"The difficulty in cutting through the great moral questions of our day: Often the wall of resistance is built much more from

the distorted will than wrong reasoning," (Fr. Richard John Neuhaus.) Though the human will always remains free, it can be and often is coerced by specious reasoning for multifarious, malicious purposes.

Excursus

PART IV ACTING IN GOOD FAITH

The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for. (CCC 1, I:27)

To be a Christian there are certain things one needs to take on good faith. Understanding good faith means that the things that need to be believed for salvation cannot be indisputably proven and constituted as fact in an earthly way by repeated experimentation. Religion is not Physics, but Physics and Theology are compatible, as are faith and reason.

There are things that can be known a priori, by the grace of God's gift of reason to a point of certainty convincing enough to be accepted by reasonable people as being as certain as those proven by the scientific method.

So far no one has given us proof of a material condition existing before the Big Bang that would replace the act of Creation ex nihilo by God. Only mathematical hypotheses are offered as proof. The late Stephen Hawking said "I think the universe was spontaneously *created out of nothing, according to the laws of science,*" he wrote. "*If you accept, as I do, that*

the laws of nature are fixed, then it doesn't take long to ask: What role is there for God?" I suppose Hawking would follow Sartre's and Camus' definition of the Absurd: "That which is meaningless" Thus man's existence is absurd because his contingency (eventuality) finds no external justification." In other words, there is no God! What is missing in most atheist philosophy is the gift of God's grace. Since grace belongs to the supernatural order, it escapes our experience too, and cannot be known except by faith. (CCC 2005) How could it possibly be known by a bevy of 20th Century philosophers who summarily reject the Creator-God as irrelevant.

Faith is a personal adherence of the whole person to God who reveals himself. It involves an assent of the intellect and will to the self-revelation God has made through his deeds and words. (CCC 176) (through his Creation (which we see) and the gospels.) "Faith is a foretaste of the knowledge that will make us blessed in the life to come" (St. Thos.Aquinas) (CCC 184) If of course, you have been taught by the Church to believe that. Once again; The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for. (CCC 1 27) In this, the believer senses the grace of God and expresses it by an act of faith That is what Karl Rahner called the Infinite-Horizon of God behind even our hum-drum lives. FWJ Schelling said "God is a Life, and not just merely Being."

What is utterly surprising to us is that so many scientists who claim to be atheists rely heavily on a faith in their propositions. It is a sort of metaphysics in a way, believing in something unproven. We suppose that is why Albert Einstein loved mystery. He certainly solved many.

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“The most beautiful experience we can have is of the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder is as good as dead. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, our perceptions of the profoundest reason and in the most primitive form are accessible to our minds. It is this knowledge and the emotion that constitute true religiosity.”

Albert Einstein

Friday after Ash Wednesday

Gospel Acclamation—(Amos 5:14)

*“Seek good and not evil so that you may live,
and the Lord will be with you.”*