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Reality and the Meaning of Evil

On the Moral Causality of Signs¹

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ABSTRACT: “Evil is *really* only a privation.” This philosophical commonplace reflects an ancient solution to the problem of theodicy in one of its dimensions: is evil of such a nature that it must have God as its author? Stated in this particular way, it also reflects the commonplace identification of the *real* with natural being—the realm of what exists independently of human thought and perspectives—as opposed to all that is termed, by comparison, “merely subjective” and “unreal”. If we stick with this way of construing the meaning of “reality”, then by the excellent arguments of the tradition we are also stuck with defending the sufficiency of privation as a response to what evil “really is”.

¹ Correspondence to editors@realityjournal.org

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In this article, we argue against both ways of being stuck. We argue, first, that a one-sided focus upon the being of nature blocks an adequate understanding of the world we actually live in: the semiotically constituted lifeworld that is the proper locus of human realities, including moral evil. We argue, second, that the positivity of moral evil consists not only, nor even primarily, in the positivity of “action” as such, but in structures of objectivity engendered by creative reason that oppose the due end, and that involve a specific genus of pure object which we call a *mystical daydream*. Like any objects, these objects are communicable and formative in relation to the lifeworld, within which they in turn engender further interpretants for both those who do and those who suffer evil, thanks to the causality of signs.

I. Introduction

As philosophical topics go, evil is better than most at cocktail parties. One can even find ordinary people at cocktail parties who have heard something of a philosophical theory about evil, namely, that evil is in itself no positive thing, but a privation, “the lack of a good that should be there”. Let us imagine a dialogue at a cocktail party between a graduate student in philosophy (GS) of a “neo-Thomistic” bent, and a friendly interlocutor (IN).

IN: “I’ve heard that evil is supposed to be just a lack of goodness. Is that right? Is that what you think?”

GS (*pleased*): “Yeah—technically, it’s a *privation*, the lack of a good that should be there. For example, the ability to fly is a particular good, a particular ‘perfection’ of being that some creatures have and some creatures don’t. The lack of an ability to fly, though, isn’t a privation or an evil for moles, but—excluding the ostrich and a few others—it *is* for birds, since the bird as a whole is structured for a life that depends naturally on that ability. So if a bird lacks the ability to fly, or to fly as well as it needs to, *this* is an evil, a privation — the lack of a good that should be in this being, this subject.”

IN (*musings*): “Yes, an ostrich could just kick the life out of a would-be predator. But if it’s a sparrow, that lack of an ability to fly comes from somewhere, doesn’t it? I mean, if the poor thing has an injured or deformed wing, something made the wing to be that way. Isn’t that something evil, too?”

GS: “Well, no. ‘There’s the rub’ with nature, as Hamlet might say. You’re right on target with your mention of would-be predators. In nature there are a practically infinite variety of natural agencies, each doing their own thing. The result is that, just by being what it is and doing what it does, something can end up causing injury, death, or a mutation in something else’s DNA. Thomas Aquinas—though he knew nothing about DNA, obviously—argued that this sort of occurrence is inherent in a universe of corporeal beings continually coming

into being and passing away, and even feeding off each other. The death of the ass is the life of the lion: what is bad for one creature is good for some other, and all of this contributes to the common good of the whole universe.”

IN (*after a few seconds*): “I’m sorry—did you answer my question somewhere in there?”

GS: “I thought I did. In hunting and killing the ass, the lion causes a loss, a privation—an evil, that is to say—relative to the ass, which is no longer. But even though it causes this evil for the ass, the lion isn’t evil—it’s acting in accordance with its own nature and its natural interests. This is good for the individual lion and the propagation of its species, and also good for the universe as a whole. It just doesn’t happen to be good for that particular ass. It’s the same with whatever would-be predator or mutating agency caused the deformity of the sparrow’s wing, poor thing.”

IN: “What if it was a human who tortured the sparrow and left it that way?”

GS (*after a few seconds*): “Oh, I’m sorry. Okay, that’s not what we call natural evil or the ‘evil in nature’, but rather moral evil, which is a bit different.”

IN: “Actually, that’s what I was thinking about all along. Not prey and predators and congenital deformities and that kind of thing, but wickedness.”

GS: “Right, gotcha.”

IN: “So moral evil is a bit different, you say?”

GS: “Yes and no. It’s different, in that the evil person who tortures the sparrow is *not* acting in accordance with his or her nature. Not at all. The nature of a person, a moral being, is to do what is morally good. So the cause of the bird’s injury in *that* case is indeed something that is *already* evil, the person and his or her morally bad action.”

IN: “So in that case, evil isn’t a privation, it’s an action. I’m relieved—thanks!”

GS (*not losing a second*): “I said, yes *and no*. Moral evil is *still* a privation, just like natural evil. The morally evil action is evil *because* it lacks something that should be there.”

IN: “You just said the action itself was evil. Or rather, ‘bad’. Is there a difference?”

GS: “No, that’s right, the action *is* evil, and this is exactly what’s evil about it: it lacks the moral goodness that a human action ought to have. Evil or privation is always *in* something positive, an existing thing or action that is good insofar

as it has being. Evil is always *in* a positive subject, but if we insist on asking about ‘evil itself’, or ‘evil insofar as it is evil’, this is nothing but a privation.”

IN: “But this evil itself, this wickedness, is... real.”

GS: “Of course it is. A privation is real—it makes a difference, in this case a big one! But it’s the difference made by a lack or a loss, not the difference made by something positive, as if there were some positive quality or flavor of being called ‘evil’.”

IN (*her brow furrowing*): “I don’t think I follow you. This human being is not just *lacking* a good; he is *attacking* a good. He is taking what is good, what is intact, what is perfect, and deliberately bringing it to ruin. It’s as if this goodness itself, the goodness of this perfect little sparrow, nauseates him. Or, it pleases him to annihilate it. Or, both the one and the other.”

GS (*beginning to shift weight between the balls of his feet*): “Yes, well, that’s the trouble. It’s the wrong thing that pleases him and/or nauseates him. Or, it’s the wrong thing that appears useful to him for some reason. In any event, it’s the wrong thing that appears good to him. That’s why his action *lacks* the ordering to a truly good end that it ought to have.”

IN (*staring directly into his pupils*): “So... you’re saying that wickedness *is* this ‘lack of ordering to a truly good end’?”

GS (*feet moving like a ballet dancer*): “Insofar as ‘wickedness’ means the evil itself of a wicked action, yes. (*rolling the dice*) Let me ask you this, begging your pardon in advance: do you believe in God?”

IN (*slightly taken aback; evil and wickedness may be accepted conversational fare at cocktail parties, but God is another matter*): “Yes.”

GS: “Do you believe that God is good, and that every finite being, every creature, comes from God?”

IN: “Don’t some creatures come from some others?”

GS (*earnestly*): “Creatures do come from others through natural processes of change, but it is the first or ‘primary cause’ who, in giving being to nature, gives to natural things their power to be ‘secondary causes’, that is, to effect change in other things already existing, though always in dependence on the primary cause. Nor can any creature account in a radical sense for any particular ‘nature’ itself as one of being’s possibilities. The nature of every finite, positive reality is some kind of partial reflection of the infinite perfection of the primary cause which we call ‘God’. Every actually existing creature moreover depends directly on God for its being—for its very existence or its ‘to-be’. No mere

creature, therefore, can be the ‘whole’ or ‘unqualified’ cause of any positive reality, but only a secondary, co-operating cause. Whereas a mere creature *can* be the ‘whole’ or ‘unqualified’ cause, if we want to put it this way, of a *negative* reality—that is, of a privation such as moral evil—by *failing* to be what it is made to be, by falling away from its own being, in a sense. Do you follow?”

IN (*after a few seconds*): “I think so. Maybe. I guess so.”

GS (*relieved, smelling victory*): “So if wickedness itself were not a privation but some positive reality, then it would have to come from God, and that would contradict God’s goodness, right?”

IN (*after a long pause*): “Maybe. I don’t know. I see what you are saying, but I also see what I am seeing.”

GS (*out of his element*): “What do you see?”

IN (*after another long pause, speaking slowly*): “I see the lack of ordering to a truly good end. I also see that the wicked one himself undergoes loss, just like his victim—maybe more so. But I also think I see that there is something that comes before this lack of order and this loss—you admitted it yourself. It seems to me that there is a wrongness itself that the wicked one wants. He doesn’t just want the wrong thing; he wants something that is wrong. This wrongness that he wants isn’t just a loss or a lack—that’s ridiculous. You can’t desire mere loss itself.”

GS (*breaking in*): “That’s right, you can’t. And in fact...”

IN: “And it’s interesting that you brought in religion. Didn’t Jesus say that anyone who sins is a slave to sin?”

GS: “Well, yes, I brought God in as primary cause, so... yes, ‘religion’ in the more general sense of our relationship to the primary cause, but not necessarily any particular ‘religion’...”

IN (*ignoring him*): “Didn’t Jesus say that anyone who sins is a slave to sin?”

GS: “Yes.”

IN: “How can a lack enslave?”

GS: “Well, the sinner is a slave to his or her own desire.”

IN: “Desire for what?”

GS: “A relative good, like pleasure or power or wealth. The virtuous person would apply the standard of moral goodness to this relative good, whatever it

happens to be, and decide against the inordinate pursuit of it—but the vicious person does not. Instead, he or she embraces it as the apparent good to be done here and now. That desire for a relative good—a desire that *lacks* appropriate order and measure, and to which the vicious person consents over and over—becomes more and more fixed as a matter of habit, and in that way the one who sins becomes a slave.”

IN (*looking not at him but at a point in the space between them*): “No. I am pretty sure now that you are wrong. Evil—evil itself—isn’t only privation. It is like a dream, a shadowy reality but a reality nonetheless, and evil. It is what the wicked want. Although—I think you are probably right about that ‘habit’ business—it is their own desire for it that makes them enslaved. It is not just a relative or apparent good—it is a counter-good, or an anti-good. To love it is to hate what is genuinely good. And it doesn’t stay in their heads. It emerges and it spreads. Far or near, but it spreads. And the spreading of this shadowy reality creates little hells on earth.”

GS (*glancing in the direction of the bar*): “Well, I guess we have to admit that wickedness is something of a mystery—the ‘mystery of iniquity’, as St. Paul called it! To be sure, what the wicked choose makes no sense—I think you’ve made that point very well. Would you like another drink?”

IN (*still gazing at the point between them*): “On the contrary, they choose it because of the sense it makes. (*meeting his eyes*) Yes, I would.”

This dialogue is imaginary, certainly: most actual conversations at cocktail parties do not find themselves so soon in such deep waters! We have constructed this one to show how the phenomenon of moral evil affords a unique point of entry to a discussion of what “reality” ought to mean, for that is the underlying issue between the two interlocutors.

The divergence of perspectives surfaces in the wake of her tentative offering that “this wickedness itself is... real.” His allowance for the “negative reality” of privation fails to impress her. In the end, he is left without a card to play, since “reality” for him signifies simply the being of the things of nature and their activities, including the free acts of moral beings. His vantage point is, in our modern parlance, “objective”. From this vantage point, evil can be understood only in terms of deficiency, as a loss of form or of due perfection. To act virtuously is to act in accordance with the way things really are and the ends to which one’s own being is ordered, and thereby to become fully real oneself—to attain the fullness of one’s being. To act viciously is to undergo loss, to fall away from reality and the truth of one’s being.

By contrast, her vantage point lacks clear definition. Her sense of the real revolves around meaning and (again, in our modern parlance) “subjectivity.” At the same time, she seems able to incorporate his claims about nature more readily than he is able to incorporate her claims about meaning. His attention is fixed upon the realities of nature, the beings that are what they are independently of what we “subjectively” think about them. She understands what he says about those realities but does not think that the meaning of “reality” is thereby exhausted. If we sense that she is in some way correct, then by the end of the dialogue we have come to feel that what she sees—vaguely, but according to all its dimensions—he sees only in silhouette.

Where ought moral evil to be located? What is its proper context? The same context, no doubt, that is proper to moral goodness. It will be the context in which moral acts stand out and are appreciable in all their dimensions. Is this context simply the universe of nature, *ens naturae*, the being of nature as it exists independently of our cognition? One whose thought is fixed on the reality of nature may well wonder what other context is available. For apart from the being of nature, is there not only unreality? And unreality can hardly determine a context, can it?

We maintain that the proper context of moral evil and goodness is neither the realm of nature as such, nor some other realm discountable as “merely subjective and unreal”, but rather the *objective world*, the world in which human beings actually live, the lifeworld in which cognized (objectified) aspects of the being of nature are woven together with pure objects in a single fabric of experience bearing public as well as private meanings.² The proper situating of

² John Deely developed the semiotic conception of the objective world (*Umwelt*, lifeworld) at length in many of his published works, from its foundations in sensation within animal perception, through the semiosis by which sensed environmental features are interpreted as positive, negative or neutral in relation to animal interests, through the transformation by human understanding of these objects of animal perception such that they are capable of being grasped as things existing in themselves independently of being perceived—a transformation that enables the formation of properly intellectual conceptions, including the very idea of “nature” itself as that which exists independently of our knowing it. See particularly the summary treatment in 2001: *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey of Philosophy from Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, 6-10, and the more detailed development in 2002: *What Distinguishes Human Understanding?* chapters 3-6. The claim that human

moral evil in the objective world opens the way to a bridging of the chasm between our two interlocutors.³

Our account of the nature of evil must include not only the metaphysical world of beings of nature but also the experiential world of beings of reason. An account of natural evils (such as blindness) can be given purely in terms of beings of nature, explaining the different ways that such beings are subject to privations (such as lack of sight). An account of moral evil, however, requires a broader vision of the world including beings of reason and the complex web of relationships to which these give rise.

Dodds, "Made of Flame and Air" [p.207].

2. Objectivity Reconsidered

"'Reality' is also a word, a word which we must learn to use correctly." Niels Bohr directed this statement against the underestimation of the sign, the reduction of language to a pictorial delivery mechanism for the reality that is independent of language and lies beneath it. In fact, Bohr went on to say, "we are suspended in language in such a way that we cannot say what is up and what is down. 'Reality' is also a word, a word which we must learn to use correctly."⁴

understanding can come to know the being of nature in what is proper to it as existing in itself is the claim of the various forms of "realism", from the realism of the Latin scholastics to Deely's own semiotic realism, in contradistinction to the claim of various forms of "idealism" that the mind knows only what the mind itself makes: either "ideas" as pure mental products, or objects as synthesized by *a priori* structuring principles applied to an indeterminate sensible manifold in such a way that things in themselves remain unknowable, hidden forever behind the veil of "appearances".

³ A somewhat comparable divergence of vantage points on the nature of evil can be observed in the conversation between John F. Crosby and Patrick Lee, the former writing from a phenomenological and the latter from a Thomistic perspective. See Crosby 2002: "Is All Evil Really Only Privation?"; Lee 2007: "Evil as Such Is a Privation: A Reply to John Crosby"; and Crosby 2007: "Doubts About the Privation Theory That Will Not Go Away: Response to Patrick Lee."

⁴ French and Kennedy 1985: *Niels Bohr: A Centenary Volume*, 302.

Though Bohr's point can be conscripted in aid of an "idealist" stance, the question of the proper signification of the word "reality" need not imply taking issue with the claim of "realism" that human knowing can come to know the being of nature. The question concerns rather whether the being of nature is all that "reality" ought to signify.

2.1. The Objectification of Nature

Awareness of "reality" in the sense of that which exists independently of being perceived is a practical necessity for animal life in its many forms. If an animal's perception fails to deliver such awareness, the animal will suffer the consequences. A single misjudgment of perception can lead, for the hunting lion, to the loss of a meal; or, for a brachiating gibbon, to an untimely end on the forest floor. Though every object without exception is an object *construed*—that is, every object is the result (interpretant) of a prior signification that itself generates further interpretive results—such examples are evidence that, however the relation of knower and known is to be explained, cognition is a relation whose object-terminus is not, merely and without remainder in every case, cognition's own product.

Mistakes happen. If mistakes can teach, there is *something*, some otherness, that manifests itself against expectation to, say, the young lion learning to hunt. It is this dimension within experience of recurring resistance to expectations that awakens both humans and other animals to "reality" in the sense under discussion. In our language, we even refer to striking instances of it as "getting a dose of reality". For the young lion, such doses of "reality" result in the weaving of new patterns into its web of perceptual experience, a growth of meaning that makes of it in the end (barring catastrophe along the way) an expert hunter. For the human learner (and this is the difference that human understanding makes relative to animal perception) the ongoing encounter with "reality" occurs under the auspices of *the idea of reality*, of "that which is what it is," the paradigmatic type of which is that being, encountered through external sensation, that is able to resist expectations *because* (and this is precisely what human understanding grasps) "it is what it is" independently of our knowledge and desires.

An aspiration thus arises for the human animal that arises for no other animal on earth: the aspiration to know more and more of the being of nature in its

natural constitution. Such knowledge is attained heuristically and recursively, as experience feeds the formation of hypotheses or trial conceptions that are tested in further experience, resulting in ever more adequate conceptions that lead gradually to deeper levels of understanding. Along the way, hypotheses that turn out to be false are (as hypotheses) functionally equivalent to hypotheses that turn out to be true. Guesses, however “educated”, may be either good or bad; in either event, they teach.

As Charles Peirce pointed out, it is by way of hypotheses alone—by guesses false or true—that anything *new* is ever added to the “knowledge of reality” arrived at by human beings and communities of human inquirers.⁵ Some hypotheses are good guesses that successfully (if only aspectually) render something of the constitution of the things of nature. Other hypotheses are not so good: in the long run (perhaps a very long run) they turn out to be renderings of what had been thought to exist in nature, but in fact does not. It is this “turns out to be” that is of interest, as the functional equivalence of true and false hypotheses brings to light the essential role played by *purely objective being* in human inquiry into the things of nature. To understand what is meant by “purely objective being”, we need to grasp the difference between *objects* as such and the *things* that become objects insofar as they are known.

What is it that one conceives when one conceives a hypothesis that turns out to be false? If true and false hypotheses are *functionally equivalent* in the process of inquiry, what is it that they both *are*, so as to function equivalently? A minimal answer to this question is that they are both *objects*, where by “object” is meant *that which exists as known*, even if it turns out to exist in no other way. It is on

⁵ From a letter to S. P. Langley (Peirce 1900: R 409, Letter “Peirce to Langley, c. May 20, 1900”, retrieved from Commens.org): “Hypothesis is guessing, or if you please starting a question. A phenomenon is observed having something peculiar about it. Ruminatioin leads me to see that *if* a certain state of things existed, of whose actual existence I know nothing, that phenomenon would certainly occur, or at any rate, would in all probability occur. I say, By George, I wonder if that is not the very state of the case! That is hypothesis. The justification of my attaching the slightest weight to such a mere guess is, that there are just these three modes of inference, and neither Deduction or Induction can furnish me with any new idea. Unless I can get to the bottom of things by hypothesis, I may as well give up trying to comprehend them. But not only that; but just as the general advantage of the inductive procedure admits of deductive proof, so induction in its turn shows that hypotheses have a very decent chance of turning out satisfactory, or at least answering well and being helpful for a long time.”

account of this latter condition of “existing in no other way” that the false hypothesis ends up being called “false”, but it is no less truly an *object* for all that, as well after its disconfirmation as before.

What then is a *purely objective being* or *pure object*? It is an object that exists *only* as an object—that is to say, its being as cognized or known is the only being that it has. The Latin scholastics called such an object a “being of reason” (*ens rationis*), a being that depends on the mind “as an object [depends] on the one knowing” (*ut objectum a cognoscente*).⁶ These beings of reason, or mind-dependent beings, “are beings, certainly, because they are known in the way that being is known; but they are constructs or fictions [*ficta*, i.e., mentally formed], because no true being on the side of physical nature corresponds to them.”⁷ Nevertheless, such beings, though existing only as objects (existing only because they are known) possess an intrinsic intelligibility and consistency according to the being they have, despite the status of this being as mind-dependent or purely objective. Not merely the being of nature (*ens naturae*), but mind-dependent being as well, “is what it is”—if it were not, there would be no meaning and no progress represented by its “disconfirmation” in light of further experience.

The Aristotelian-Ptolemaic theory of the heavens—of those great spheres and their luminaries, mobile yet incorruptible, revolving about the earth—endured as established for many centuries before being exploded. That is to say, for many centuries, those spheres themselves, along with the conception of a corporeality both mobile and incorruptible, were objects *taken for* existing things of nature, which they were not. So taken, these objects amounted to a false hypothesis, but never throughout those centuries did that factual falsity hinder either the communication of these objects in discourse (long treatises were written) or their power of forming cultural awareness as to the very framework of the cosmos in which human beings took themselves to be living. This “discarded image” of the world, no less than the image we have of the world today which we take to be true(r), structured in profound ways the understanding, imagination and conduct of a civilization. As a theory of mind-

⁶ Poinso 1632b: *Tractatus de Signis: The Semiotic of John Poinso (TDS)*, 48/5-6.

⁷ Poinso 1632b: *TDS*, 49/5-8.

independent nature, it was merely false; as a mind-dependent socially-constituted reality, it was a form full of meaning and potency.⁸

It is unfortunate that our ordinary vocabulary, shaped as it is by the intellectual heritage of modern philosophy, makes it harder for us to discriminate, as we have been attempting to do, the being proper to the object as such. An “object” now commonly just means a thing, and “thing” means an entity existing (or at least capable of existing) independently of mind—a being of nature, possibly also shaped by human intelligence as an artifact. In keeping with this modern identification of objects with mind-independent things, the latter are commonly spoken of as “objectively real” and their totality as constituting “objective reality”, where “objective” is used to signify precisely the mind-independence of the being in question. All that is not thus “objective” is commonly termed “subjective” by way of antithesis, often further qualified as “*merely* subjective”—as if a mind-dependent or constructed being invariably signified some idiosyncratic illusion or errant psychological state, a mental projection existing “only in one’s head”, and so forth.

Thus has the word “object” come to be severed from its original premodern rationale: an *ob-jectum* (Latin *ob + iacere*, “to throw”) is not simply a “thing”, but that which exists *in relation to* some power of a living being, particularly some power of cognition or desire. An *ob-ject* is that which is “thrown before” or “thrown in the face of” such a power. If an object of cognition is *also* a mind-independent thing, it is nevertheless an *object* as the *terminus of a cognitive relation*, from which it may follow that it is also the terminus of an affective relation (positive or negative). The hunting lion spots its prey—that is, the prey becomes object-terminus of a cognitive relation. Given the lion’s hunger, that object-terminus becomes object-terminus also of a (positive) affective relation. The prey, when it becomes aware of the lion, is similarly established in a cognitive relation to the lion as object-terminus, and, if the danger is recognized, established also in a (negative) affective relation to the lion as threat, resulting in flight.

Scholastic realists such as Aquinas held that the things of nature in themselves (i.e., precisely in their mind-independent being or thinghood) can—in part, and

⁸ For an overview of the older image of the cosmos and its literary impact in particular, see C. S. Lewis 1962: *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*.

via a fallible and laborious process of inquiry—become objects of human understanding. They also held that not every object is a thing of nature. A given object *may* be a thing of nature (understood aspectually) or it *may* be a mind-dependent being (*ens rationis*), and, in a given case and at a given time, the one for whom it is an object may not know which it is. Regardless of which it turns out to be, it has the existence proper to an object. The scholastics called this mode of existence “intentional” (*esse intentionale*), since an object, any object, exists as object precisely *for a knower* that “in-tends” or stretches toward it as an *ob-jectum*, as a thing thrown before awareness. If you are a realist who recognizes hypotheses about nature for what they are, namely guesses, then you recognize that your mind is constructing an objective pattern which may or may not be the pattern of a mind-independent thing.⁹

2.2. Shared Objects and Sign Relations

Why bother discriminating the being that is proper to objects as such? We have already discovered one good reason to do so: it helps to explain the possibility of errors regarding the being of nature in such a way as to do justice to the way the object—in the original meaning of *objectum*—functions in the process of human inquiry. Another good reason, also noted by the Latin scholastics, is that the conceptual structures by and in which we understand something of the being of nature are not in all cases direct renderings of nature’s structures, but include ancillary structures added by the understanding itself in the course of inquiry. Of this kind are the various classificatory systems in which we articulate the intelligibility discovered in nature as our understanding moves from the vague initial grasp of various wholes to a more precise knowledge of what is contained in those wholes. Thus, we have the conceptions “molecule”, “macromolecule”, “nucleic acid”, and “RNA”—objects that we take to be also things. The classificatory relations themselves, however, by which the species “RNA” is included in these several genera are—and are recognized within inquiry to be—logical (i.e., mind-dependent) relations rather than relations existing in nature independently of our understanding.

⁹ We are not speaking here merely of theories in the practice of the specialized sciences, but of any inference from sense data, such as your belief that the person on the other side of the plaza with his back to you is in fact an acquaintance of yours.

In practice, this is where many “realists”, including contemporary Thomists, stop in their account of the being proper to objects and the role of purely objective or mind-dependent beings in human knowing. For philosophers of this type—so like in this respect to the devoted practitioners of the “hard sciences”—the focus is overwhelmingly upon the being of nature and the tools of its investigation. In practice, this can bring about a tendency to regard *esse intentionale*, or the being proper to the object, as no more than a packaging and delivery mechanism for *ens naturae* as grasped by the understanding. The meaning of “reality” then collapses into an accepted synonym for the being of nature, and “realism” itself turns into a form of myopia that fails to see realities constituted by cognition for what they are.

To relieve and guard against such a myopia, the following exercise may help.

Consider a man who has fallen in love with a woman, and let us further stipulate that the woman is in love with him. Is this mutual love something real? If it is some kind of reality—something that “is what it is”—then what kind (or kinds) of being are involved in it? Can the reality of mutual love be accounted for on the terms of an identification of “reality” with the mind-independent being of nature? To be sure, the “state” of being in love, construed as the sum total of the relevant cognitive and affective states of the two lovers, is indeed a being of nature of a particular kind that is associated with the exercise of natural powers.¹⁰ It is certain, moreover, that unless these two persons exist as beings of nature and exercise their natural powers in this way, they cannot be lovers. But in speaking only of cognitive and affective “states” we have done no more than further qualify the two persons in their distinctness. Love, however, is a “unitive force”, as Aquinas would put it.¹¹ Love brings about a common life—a distinctive *milieu* that, being a reality precisely *between* the two, is over and above the two as individuals. In marrying, the two lovers commit themselves to the lifelong fostering of whatever this reality may be.

What kind of reality is this? We must move beyond the subjective (meaning the domain of existing subjects—that is, substances and their qualities) and locate this reality of love in the genus of the suprasubjective, that is, of relation. Now

¹⁰ Whether we call these states “physical” or distinguish them as “psychological” makes no difference: neither denotation signifies mind-dependence in the sense of an *ens rationis* that depends on mind “as an *object* on the one knowing.” We are speaking still of *ens naturae*, the being of nature.

¹¹ See 1271: *Summa theologiae, prima secundae* (ST Ia-IIae), q.28, a.1.

as every Thomist knows, any act of cognition or affection establishes its subject in a relation to an object. When this object is something “real” in the natural or mind-independent sense, this cognitive or affective relation is similarly “real”, inasmuch as there is a dependence upon the naturally existing object affecting (or having affected) the knowing and loving subject and specifying or formally structuring the subject’s acts of knowing and loving. Thus, when the man sees his beloved and is moved with affection at the sight of her, his cognition and affection are specified or formally structured by her in her mind-independent existence. This remains the case even when the woman disappears into another room and he lovingly remembers her—it is the selfsame naturally existing woman that continues to specify his acts of knowing and loving.¹² And of course the same analysis holds regarding her reciprocal acts of seeing and loving him, and the corresponding cognitive and affective relations.

Is this the end of the story? Not remotely. For though we have indicated how the psychological states of the two individuals are the foundation of cognitive and affective relations to the other—so far has *esse intentionale* made its appearance—we have arrived yet at a mutuality that is only a sum of such reciprocal “intentions”, not at a common life or *milieu*. We have arrived yet at nothing that can be said to be shared. If the shared *milieu* of the spouses amounts to anything more than the furniture, the fireplace, and the fish in the fishbowl, what is it?

The missing reality is rooted in *communication* (literally, a “making common”), by which objects, always public (communicable) in principle, become public (communicated) in fact. By virtue of communication, that which is *one and the same* (this or that object) becomes shared by more than one. This outcome is brought about and sustained by a continual exchange of signs. A *sign* is that which is so related to an object that it is able to bring a third into a similar relation to that object. When this takes place, we have the “action of a sign”, or *semiosis*.

¹² On the other hand, were we to speak of the woman herself as “seen and loved by him”, i.e., of the opposed relations terminating in the man who sees and loves her, these would be mind-dependent relations of the kind the scholastics called “extrinsic denominations”. That is, despite their terminus (the man) being a natural existent, the relations “seen” and “loved” themselves posit nothing “real” in the woman as the fundament of said relations (as the acts of seeing and loving are the natural fundaments of his relations to her), but are rather imputed to her as taken from something extrinsic. In other words, she is “thought of” as related to him in this way (“seen”, “loved”) because of the way in which he is “really” related to her.

For example, the woman's lover says to her, "I love you". The outcome of this semiosis is that she is brought into a renewed relation with what the utterance signifies.¹³ This outcome is known as the sign's *interpretant*¹⁴: she is made aware of an object (his love for her). In fact, this semiosis will typically yield a series of interpretants: not only this awareness of his love, but a movement of reciprocal affection (affective interpretant) as well as some action (energetic interpretant) which might include a reciprocal sign-utterance ("I love you, too", a loving look, a caress).

If we consider the whole of what is communicated between spouses, all that they share—all the common understandings, goals, concerns, hopes and anxieties—we can discern the nature of this *milieu* or common life of love as a *web of shared objects linked by sign-relations*. It is not a collection but a web, since every object not only is what it is, but is a nexus of relations not only physical (we see that the table is between us) but mind-dependent (we see what we mean to and for each other). Because the web is not a mere network of things but a network of *objects* of experience, the relations constituting and sustaining the web are triadic, and not merely dyadic as are the relations of bodies in space and their dynamical interactions. That is, every conceiving of an object is the cognitive outcome or interpretant of a prior semiosis, and every object conceived becomes in its turn a sign generating a fresh series of interpretants—fresh awareness, fresh movement of affection, fresh action. What we are describing is nothing less than the stream of conscious life itself as an action of signs.¹⁵

¹³ Not all signs are linguistic or cultural; some are natural signs, for instance the darkling clouds that are a sign of rain for the animal capable of interpreting it.

¹⁴ The interpretant is a key notion in Peirce's semiotics. Peirce c.1897 (*CP.2.228*) is one of many texts that could be cited: "A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign."

¹⁵ Communication—the constituting and sustaining of this web—depends upon a form of causality distinct from the efficient causality of natural agents, and distinct as well from the intrinsic structuring causality that determines physical material to be this or that kind of natural substance. In their common life, spouses act upon each other, not principally as natural agents exercising efficient causality (though they do that too), but as utterers and receivers of signs—as co-weavers of the semiotic web. Efficient causality is presupposed: mouths must move if words are to be spoken, sounds must reach the

A shared object need not be a thing existing in the natural sense. “House rules” may govern actions in a home, but these rules are not things, they are objects. An object may be what does not exist now but existed formerly (the memory of the romance and adventures of youth), what does not exist now but might yet (the dream of a child’s success), what does not exist and will never exist (children never born, plans destined to fail), or even what is impossible to exist (empty daydreams representing what is beyond the dreamers’ power or place to bring into being). These objects are not things, or not merely things, but, according to a ratio that varies from one to the other, pure objects. Insofar as they are things, they exist or can exist, but they *signify* (one and all), not insofar as they are or may be things, but insofar as they are objects. Thus, to the extent that life is lived intentionally, it is objects and not things that rule.

In the web of married life, the spouses themselves become signs of a particular kind. In their common awareness, each one is *spouse* for the other—a kind of role or office, a relation irreducible to any physical or mind-independent relations, but a purely objective relation constituted and sustained by awareness. Inasmuch as this social role is public, it engenders interpretants in others besides these two. Offspring, in-laws, friends, and members of the larger community enter into this web of meaning which is, after all, a sort of objective “neighborhood” within the lifeworld of a particular human society.

The objective world of that society is a world of lovers, spouses, friends, neighbors, random strangers, parents, children, teachers, students, priests, politicians, peace officers, judges, nurses, cabbies and fry-cooks. It is a world ordered by rules and customs, laws and constitutions. It is a world saturated

eardrums of receivers, auditory nerves must undergo stimulation and in turn cause cortical areas to be stimulated, and so forth. Physical interaction is the necessary channel thanks to which a sign-vehicle is able to affect the senses and elicit the subjective structures of percepts—this dimension is required, but is only what Peirce called the “body” of the sign (see Peirce 1908: “A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God”, *EP.2*: 435). What makes a sign essentially such is the power to generate an interpretant—that is, to mediate an object to a being that is capable of “catching on”: “[E]very sign certainly conveys something of the nature of thought, if not from a mind, yet from some repository of ideas, or significant forms, and if not to a person, yet to something capable of somehow ‘catching on’... that is, of receiving not merely a physical, nor even merely a psychological dose of energy, but a significant meaning.” (Peirce c.1907: “Pragmatism”, MS 318 in Robin 1967: *Annotated Catalogue of the Papers of Charles S. Peirce*, quoted in Deely 1994: *New Beginnings: Early Modern Philosophy and Postmodern Thought*, 190.)

with discourse—scientific, philosophical, literary, religious, political. It is a world of territory and artifact, state and nation, housing developments and heavy equipment, farms and financial districts, city parks and junkyards. It is also a world of meadows and wildflowers, forest streams and granite boulders, squirrels and beetles and kingfishers; of earth and sky, the sun and the other stars, galaxies and quasars and black holes.

This world, the objective world, is not a collection of things but a fabric of experience woven of natural as well as cultural strands, all alike objective or existing as known, and all alike public in principle. As we have seen, the cultural or mind-dependent strands contribute in varying ways to this fabric. Even when our attention seems focused on some “physical thing” such as a table, that thing—or rather, that object—will often on reflection turn out to be some kind of amalgam of nature and what is not mere nature, inasmuch as the object bears a cultural significance which is for us more formal and essential in the object than its physical constitution.¹⁶ Often enough, objects in the human lifeworld have nothing in them of nature, but are pure objects. The Constitution of the United States, an object of supreme importance to many, is a being of reason (*ens rationis*)—indeed a great artifact of reason—a pure object with nothing in it of *ens naturae*.¹⁷ It is the same with fictional creations of literary and cinematic arts that add their magic to the life of culture.

¹⁶ Artifacts furnish one obvious example. A “table” with no physical constitution at all is a being of reason, and not much use; nevertheless, an existing and usable table is more (as an object) than its physical constitution. It is the mind-dependent functional relationship that is more formal and essential to “what a table is”, for, after all, even a boulder could, in a pinch, be commandeered for use as a table. A somewhat different kind of amalgam is involved when we cross the Delaware River (a thing of nature) and remark, “Now we are in New Jersey”. The civil boundary is real indeed, but it is something more than the river: it is the river clothed with a mind-dependent cultural significance, so that it is accurate to say that the river—so objectified within the lifeworld—is the boundary between two state jurisdictions. Social and cultural roles furnish another example, as when one says, “Look, there’s the mayor!” These roles are relations constituted by cognition within the objective world, but, unlike mind-dependent relations of genus and species which obtain between universal conceptions of reason, social and cultural relations obtain between persons naturally existing.

¹⁷ There is natural being in the written sign-vehicles of the Constitution, such as the august parchment that is housed in the National Archives. The destruction of such an historic vehicle, however, while tragic, would have no effect on the Constitution, which survives as long as any sign of it does (including conceptual sign-vehicles).

Such is the world in which we actually live. To be sure, the understanding or objectification of the being of nature is in our world a great value, to which some of us give the best part of our lives. Nevertheless, most of us are at most times occupied, not with the being of nature insofar as it is such, but with objects that turn out to be irreducible to that being even if they contain something of it, and frequently with pure objects that have nothing whatever in them of the being of nature. Indeed, the “world of nature” as we commonly conceive it, the world conceived as the object of natural science, is a kind of *prescissive abstraction*,¹⁸ a projection onto one axis of the world in which we live. In light of this, what sense does it make to continue to take “reality” as a synonym for *ens naturae*, as is commonly done? If “reality” is meant as a sort of ontological compliment (which it generally is, and without distinguishing this meaning from that of mind-independent being)—that which “matters” or “makes a difference”, then it must be said that purely objective being, the being constituted by cognition, has its own sort of reality, without which we cannot understand the life of families or neighborhoods or nations or even communities of scientific inquirers.¹⁹ It is in

¹⁸ Peirce c.1905: *The Branches of Geometry; Existential Graphs* (MS 96 in Robin 1967: *Annotated Catalogue*): “Abstraction names two wholly different operations. One of them consists in supposing some feature of the fact to be absent, or at least leaving it out of account. I call that *prescissive abstraction*.”

¹⁹ Even an excellent and penetrating text such as that of W. Norris Clarke (2001: *The One and Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics*), while devoting more space than usual (29-31) to the purely objective, does not emerge fully from this alternately one-sided and ambiguous application of the term “reality”. Clarke admits that the primary division of being is that between the being of nature and *ens rationis*, the former (“that which is present by its own intrinsic act of existence”) receiving the understandable but nevertheless unhappy denomination “real being” (likely following the later Scholastic usage *ens reale*), and the latter receiving the equally unhappy denomination “mental being” (“that which is present *not* by its own act of existence, but only within an idea, i.e., as being-thought-about”). His examples of the latter include the past and future as such, dreams, abstractions, and mental constructs (including hypotheses for testing and plans for action). All these are said to be “present in real minds, but they are not themselves the ‘really real’, as Plato thought they had to be to ground eternal truths and values.” Clarke would have done better at least to say that *entia rationis* are present *by* (rather than “in”) real minds, so as not to leave the reader to the modern tendency to envision these beings under the heading of “private thoughts” rather than socially constituted objects public in principle. In any event, no sooner are these beings mentioned than they are devalued as “radically *secondary, dependent, parasitic on real being*, which is primary. Real beings (real minds) can generate ideas; ideas of themselves

this world (the world in which we actually live) that *moral acts* are posited and have their meaning, as specified by their objects. Being themselves signs that generate interpretants throughout the objective world as public, acts of this kind bind together (or rive apart) these human communities. To repeat, inasmuch as human life is lived intentionally, it is objects and not things that rule.²⁰

cannot generate real beings.” One could respond that a “real mind” cannot “of itself” generate an idea, either, but does so only as already inserted into a community of sign-users (other “real minds”) and *shared objects*. Then, there is the matter of how we detect the difference between the two kinds of being (31): “What is real is what can act on its own... Real beings *make a difference* in the real world.” Clarke means here to emphasize the capacity of *ens naturae* to resist expectations; what is left out of account is the formal causality of the object as structuring action and uniting those who communicate in knowledge and love. As we have said, there is no communication without efficient causality as *channel*, but communication involves a form of causality, distinct from both efficient and intrinsic formal causality, that is essential to the “action” of the sign as triadic event. Unfortunately, as soon as the subject of this “primary division of being” is left behind, mental being seems to fall between two stools (43): “Thus being signifies all that is, in everything that is, i.e., everything that is real in any way. Outside of this lies only ‘nothing’ or nothingness, non-being.”

²⁰ Contemporary Thomists would do well to ponder the admonition of Deely (1971: *The Tradition via Heidegger: An Essay on the Meaning of Being in the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, 89): “Is there any need to point out that history, and with it, historical, cultural, social, and psychological determinisms are little more than strangers in the Thomistic house? Human solidarity, personality in culture, subconscious determinisms, creative intuition in art and poetry, the metaphysical character of motivation and meaning — all these are fundamental *data* of the human condition which find their primary basis in the mode of being human precisely not from the side of the *esse* of *existentia ut exercita* but from the side of the *esse* of *ens intentionale*, from the side, that is to say, of a *Daseinsanalyse*.” Cf. also Benedict Ashley 2006: *The Way toward Wisdom*, who, while rejecting the transcendentalist reading of Aquinas, nevertheless writes (employing “objective” and “subjective” in the accepted modern sense), 49: “The achievement of modern thought has been to bring to attention the subjective aspects of human knowledge, which Aristotle and Aquinas certainly recognized, but to which, because of their concern to get right the objective elements of knowledge, they gave relatively little attention. While they placed problems in a dialectical context of opinion, they seldom touched on the way history and sociology color our view of the world, or on the way in which individual and social tendencies enter into its construction. The Transcendental Thomists have opened up such questions, and I am convinced that, if Thomism is to survive in our times, it must also deal with these issues.” We would add that a basis within the Thomistic tradition for dealing with those issues is precisely what one finds in the semiotic of John Poinot, as John Deely dedicated much of his scholarly life to demonstrating.

3. Evil from the Standpoint of Nature and Agency

3.I. Deprivation in Nature

There are excellent reasons for the position of our graduate student that any evil as such has the nature of privation. Thomas Aquinas gets to the heart of the matter in the opening question of his great work on evil:²¹ every being, insofar as it is actual, is good. For what the notion of good (*bonum*) adds to being (*ens*) is nothing but a relation to appetite or desire. “The good is what all desire,” as Aristotle put it, and what every being desires, or tends toward, is its own fullest actualization. Being tends toward its own fullness: this is the very meaning of action. Along the way, partial actualizations have the intelligible character of goodness and desirability insofar as they represent a greater fullness of being. It is true that diverse actualizations can be mutually exclusive in relation to the same subject: becoming a marine biologist generally excludes becoming a psychiatrist, since both are absorbing professions. If I follow the one path, I cannot follow the other. And yet, the good that I do not choose is still a *good* according to what it is in itself (*secundum se*) as fulfilling some potentiality of a human being, though not perhaps as suitable to me as to another, and I can appreciate it as the attainment of another who follows a different path.

Now evil (*malum*) signifies that which is directly opposed to good. Hence, if “good” signifies being under the aspect of fullness (including partial actualizations of being), then “evil” must needs signify that which is directly opposed to the fullness of being, and this is deprivation, or the loss of being. Further, if desire is universally directed to good as the fullness of being, then the loss of being is that which no being can desire or intend *secundum se*. One may endure the loss of one’s leg to save one’s life, but this is to intend one’s loss, not *secundum se* insofar as it is loss, but insofar as this loss is unfortunately entailed in the benefit of avoiding still greater loss. For there is nothing in loss or deprivation *as such* to positively attract desire.

And yet, deprivation happens. The unique undesirability of privation as such, its direct opposition to the fullness that “every being desires”, its incongruence with the very meaning of action—this is what justifies the identification of evil itself

²¹ 1269-72: *Quaestiones disputatae de malo (De malo)*, q.1, a.1. Parallel discussions are found in 1266: *Summa contra gentiles (SCG)* lib.3, c.3-9 and in 1266-68: *ST Ia*, qq.48-49.

(*ipsum malum*) with privation. The justification rests on a truth of metaphysics that seems unassailable; hence, the confidence of our graduate student.²²

If privation is the one condition of existence that no being in the universe can tend toward, how does it occur? As our female interlocutor pointed out, unknowingly echoing Aquinas himself, any privation implies a depriving agency. Whenever we see a thing deprived of what it ought by nature to have, we seek a reason why.²³ As our graduate student pointed out, natural agencies are able to bring about deprivation simply by doing what they naturally do, which is oriented always toward actualization and not loss. Neither the lion in pursuit of its prey, nor the prey in fleeing the lion, are seekers of each other's death or starvation *per se*. Both are seekers of life, by means of inclinations that are as wholly natural as they are inevitably contrary: they are bound to clash whenever the lion is hungry and their paths cross. Or we might observe the clash between the natural activity of a toxic chemical or virus and the organismic processes it disrupts. Because natural activities are incessantly clashing in the material universe as a whole, such examples can be multiplied without end. Deprivation is ubiquitous in nature, but it is not necessary that the "depriving agents" be oriented toward anything other than their own actualization. Deprivation is thus brought about continually, but also "incidentally" (*per accidens*)—as an effect

²² The example of the amputated leg illustrates that when we speak of loss or privation, we are not speaking of what we might call "opportunity costs" attached to life choices, e.g., the exclusion of life as a marine biologist by the decision to be a psychiatrist. One may at times be pained by this sort of "loss" and wonder what it would have been like to have done something else, but such consequences of our finitude are not privations as we are using the word (though this kind of rumination or daydream can furnish the occasion for moral evil, as we will see). Privation here signifies a loss in relation to the physical or moral integrity of a being or an action, as when an organism is born sterile or suffers a debilitating injury, or when a person becomes morally vicious. This is loss relative to nature or natural constitution as defining the meaning of "integrity", including the ordering to natural ends. If nature is not in this sense purposive, good and evil have no meaning apart from the gratification and frustration of chance impulses, themselves events without meaning. The purposiveness in nature is of course most evident in living things. A bird is born to fly, because it is ordered to natural ends for which flight is a path of actualization. A human being is born to be wise, just, brave, and self-controlled, because the excellence of virtue comprehends other excellences and leads to blessedness.

²³ 1269-72: *De malo* q.1. a.3: "Omne autem quod praeternaturaliter inest alicui oportet habere aliquam causam." — "Everything that comes about in a thing outside the condition of its nature must have some cause."

concomitant to some good aimed at *per se* by a natural agent. The impala manages to escape with its life—concomitantly, the lion is left hungrier than before. This incidental or *per accidens* cause is the only kind of cause such privations need.²⁴

Some deprivations in nature are damaging enough that they render a being thenceforward deficient in its own agency, as when some infection or unfortunate encounter leaves an animal lame, psychologically impaired, or sterile. The now-deficient agent then gives rise to activities that lack normal integrity: a limping gait, rabid behavior, sexual unions that produce no offspring. In this way, something already deprived—the deficient agent—becomes the incidental cause of further privations. Note well that a deficient agent is still an *incidental* cause of privation and not a cause *per se*. For the ability to act at all depends upon the remnants of some natural power; the *deflection* of that power from its proper end and use is itself the expression of *no nature at all*, but rather the consequence of the damage sustained by this individual or its ancestors. And while various kinds of damage may propagate through long chains of deficient agents, privation in nature must finally be traced back, not to an evil principle of deprivation *per se* bringing about privation as its proper effect, but rather to the clashing of natural activities proceeding from the diverse natures of things.

In sum, evil (privation) in nature is brought about in two ways. Primarily, it is brought about by a clash of natural goods, that is, by natural and *non-deficient* agencies in pursuit of their own natural ends. Secondly, it is brought about by the *deficient* agencies of beings already affected by evil. Thus, as Aquinas puts it, “while it does happen that evil is caused by some other evil (in the sense of a deficient good), we must finally arrive at the position that the *first* cause of evil is not evil, but good.”²⁵

3.2. Evil and the Voluntary

Now moral evil, says Aquinas, is a distinct case that shares some features with the evil found generally in nature, but not others, and this difference is due to

²⁴ I.e., it is the only kind of *efficient* cause such a privation needs. Privations also depend upon a subject or material cause.

²⁵ 1269-72: *De malo* q.1, a.3 (emphasis added): “Contingit autem et malum, quod est defectivum bonum, esse causam mali; sed tamen oportet devenire ad hoc quod *prima* causa mali non sit malum sed bonum.”

the particular nature of the *voluntary*. For just as when the lion spots its prey there is a movement of animal appetite in respect of a perceived good, so also in voluntary action—including morally evil action—there is a positive movement of the will in respect of something apprehended as good in some respect (*secundum quid bonum*), as the prospect of sexual pleasure here and now may move a man to commit adultery. The difference in the movement of the will lies in its particular nature as a “self-mover”—an appetitive power able to determine freely its own response or lack of response to what is presented in apprehension. Aquinas writes:

If the will were to receive the impression of something attractive and enjoyable with the same necessity that a natural body receives the impression of an agent, the case would be entirely the same as with natural things. But it is not so, because however much an exterior sensible attracts, it is in the power of the will to receive it or not to receive it. Thus, the cause of the evil that may stem from this thing’s reception is not the enjoyable thing as mover, but rather the will itself.²⁶

In other words, *the voluntary agent does not act simply by virtue of being acted upon*, as iron filings are attracted by a magnet, or as various animal appetites are stimulated by a smell or a touch (or even the sound of a bell, as with Pavlov’s dogs). Rather the voluntary agent *determines itself* to will, and then to act, in respect of some apprehended good. Moral deprivation is not imposed on a voluntary agent from without.

When this self-determined willing and acting is *contrary* to the norm of morality, moral evil comes into existence. Here is the second difference of moral evil in comparison with natural evil: moral evil has to do with *deflection from a norm of which the voluntary agent is conscious*. This is the *norm of morality*, “the order of reason and of divine law” (*ordo rationis et legis divinae*) that properly measures the goodness of self-determined or free action. It is a norm that the rational being inevitably affirms in its most basic directives, for reason is connatural with this norm as the authentic measure of the very exercise of reason in the guiding of free actions. Thus, in being true to this norm, the

²⁶ 1269-72: *De malo* q.1, a.3: “Si ergo ita esset quod voluntas ex necessitate reciperet impressionem delectabilis allicientis, sicut ex necessitate corpus naturale recipit impressionem agentis, omnino idem esset in voluntariis et naturalibus. Non est autem sic, quia quantumcumque exterius sensibile alliciat, in potestate tamen voluntatis est recipere vel non recipere; unde mali quod accidit ex hoc quod recipit, non est causa ipsum delectabile movens, sed magis ipsa voluntas.”

rational being is being true to its own nature, willing an end that is *due*—an end, in other words, that represents the excellence of its own way of being and acting.²⁷

At the same time, the norm of morality is distinct from the agent's own (factual) volitions. In other words, it is not enough that I actually will *this*, for *this* to be simply or unqualifiedly good—good with the goodness proper to a free action. As obvious as this point may appear, it has an important consequence: in order to will and act well, it is required not only that I actually *will* whatever I will, but that I *will to apply* the norm of morality to whatever I will *as an appropriate measure* thereof. If, in a particular case, I will and act *contrary* to the norm of morality, it is evident that I am not thus applying the norm. In this way, my action contrary to the norm—that is, the morally evil action to which I consent—hinges on a *prior deficiency* in me, namely, my *non-application* of the norm of morality to the action as I conceived it prior to consent.

Now an apparent dilemma arises. For this evil to arise at all, the agent's attraction and adhesion to the apparent good clearly must be voluntary—that is, falling within the scope of the will's freedom to elicit or not to elicit a response to any particular good. Equally clearly, the prior deficiency of the *non-application* of the norm of morality to the prospective pursuit of this good must be voluntary—that is, falling within the scope of the will's freedom to elicit or not to elicit the willing of the norm's application. For if the agent is hindered from that application by something extrinsic to its own volition—if it is not free, in other words, actually to measure its own prospective action by the norm of morality—then the resulting evil is involuntary, moral responsibility vanishes, and the whole account of moral evil collapses.

Here then is the problem: if the agent freely omits or suspends the application of the norm of morality to a prospective choice, is this already a moral defect? For if it is, all we have done is to account for one moral evil by a prior moral evil that in turn demands to be accounted for. To avoid an infinite regress, explanation must stop at something that is *not* a moral evil, nor indeed an evil

²⁷ For example, the norm of morality commands that one shall not harm one's neighbor inasmuch as one's neighbor is another like oneself—that is, a person. This command is grounded in the intrinsic value of the person as such, a value that demands to be honored. The correct application of the norm depends, not only on awareness of the norm itself, but a correct judgment regarding the singular case: namely, that *this* individual is in fact a person.

of any sort, but a good. If the agent is to remain morally responsible, this good at which the explanation of moral evil stops must somehow be the good that *is* the voluntary agent as such. That is to say, the nature of such a being must somehow admit the possibility of a voluntary fault that undermines the goodness most proper to such a being. This terrible possibility may justly be called the “mystery of iniquity”.

3.3. The Moment of Free Nihilation

It is mystery that presents more than one dimension. At present, we are looking along the dimension of the causality of agents as agents, the register of efficient causality. We are considering the evildoer as a deficient agent in nature, with the peculiarity that this deficient agent is the voluntary cause of its own deficiency, putting forth a deficient action by willing to do so. Let us see how Aquinas’s illuminates this dimension of the mystery:²⁸

Whenever one thing is the due rule and measure of another, the good in that which is ruled and measured comes from its being ruled and conformed to that which is the rule and measure, whereas evil comes from not being so ruled and

²⁸ 1269-72: *De malo* q.1. a.3, emphasis added: “In omnibus enim quorum unum debet esse regula et mensura alterius, bonum in regulato et mensurato est ex hoc quod regulatur et conformatur regulae et mensurae; malum vero ex hoc quod est non regulari vel mensurari. Si ergo sit aliquis artifex qui debeat aliquod lignum recte incidere secundum aliquam regulam, si non directe incidat, quod est male incidere, haec mala incisio causabitur ex hoc defectu quod artifex erat sine regula et mensura. Similiter delectatio et quodlibet aliud in rebus humanis est mensurandum et regulandum secundum regulam rationis et legis divinae; unde *non uti* regula rationis et legis divinae praeintelligitur in voluntate ante inordinatam electionem. Huiusmodi autem quod est non uti regula praedicta, non oportet aliquam causam quaerere; quia *ad hoc sufficit ipsa libertas voluntatis, per quam potest agere vel non agere*; et hoc ipsum quod est non attendere actu ad talem regulam in se consideratam, non est malum nec culpa nec poena; quia anima non tenetur nec potest attendere ad huiusmodi regulam semper in actu; sed *ex hoc accipit primo rationem culpae, quod sine actuali consideratione regulae procedit ad huiusmodi electionem*; sicut artifex non peccat in eo quod non semper tenet mensuram, sed ex hoc quod non tenens mensuram procedit ad incidendum; et similiter culpa voluntatis non est in hoc quod actu non attendit ad regulam rationis vel legis divinae; sed ex hoc quod non habens regulam vel mensuram huiusmodi, procedit ad eligendum; et inde est quod Augustinus dicit in XII de Civitate Dei, quod *voluntas est causa peccati in quantum est deficiens*; sed illum defectum comparat silentio vel tenebris, quia scilicet *defectus ille est negatio sola.*”

measured. If, then, a carpenter were bound to cut a piece of wood straight according to a rule and did not cut it so—which is to cut badly—this bad cut will be caused by the [prior] defect that the carpenter was lacking the rule and measure.

Similarly, sensual enjoyment and everything else in human affairs ought to be measured and ruled by the rule of reason and divine law. And so, *not to use* the rule of reason and divine law must be understood to be in the will before the disordered choice. It is not necessary to seek any cause for something of this sort, i.e., the non-use of the rule, because *for this the very freedom of the will, by which it either acts or does not act, suffices*. Now this actual non-attention to a rule is not an evil (either of fault or of penalty) considered in itself, because the soul is neither bound to, nor can it, always attend actually to a rule of this kind. Rather, the soul *first receives the character of [moral] fault from this: that, without the actual consideration of the rule, it proceeds to a choice of this kind*. For just as the carpenter commits fault, not by always failing to hold the measure, but by not holding it when he proceeds to cut, so similarly the fault of the will is not the lack of actual attention to the rule of reason or divine law; rather, [the fault] is that, not “holding” this kind of rule, it proceeds to choose. It is for this reason that Augustine says in the twelfth book of *De civitate Dei* that *the will is the cause of sin inasmuch as it is deficient*, but the defect he compares to silence or darkness—for *this defect [of free non-consideration] is that of negation only*.

Before considering the main thrust of this argument, we must take special notice of Aquinas’s comparison of the non-application of the norm of morality with the non-use of a carpenter’s square. Here in *De malo*, Aquinas makes it clear that the “actual consideration of the rule” that is omitted or suspended prior to consent to an evil action is not *any* kind of consideration of the norm of morality, nor indeed any kind of comparison of this norm with a prospective action, but the *particular* kind of consideration involved in the *actual use of the norm of morality as a practical measure*, in the same way as the carpenter *holds* the square and then *makes* a cut conformed to its edge.²⁹ Cognition is involved in comparing and guiding an action in accordance with the measure, but “use” is principally an act of the will motivated by the agent’s desire to consent to no action that does not conform to the norm of morality, just as it is the will of the carpenter to make no cut that is not straight.

²⁹ See Aquinas 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.16, a.1 on meaning of “using” a thing as the will applying that thing to an action.

Now to the main point of the argument. If an agent is to fail morally by consenting to morally evil action, there must be a moment *prior* to this consent in which the agent omits or suspends the application (in the sense just discussed) of the norm of morality to the preconceived action. As we have seen, this omission or suspension must itself be voluntary, if the evil action is to be voluntary. And indeed it is voluntary: it always falls within the scope of the will's freedom to apply or not to apply the norm of morality in this way. Now the *mere* omission or suspension of this act of application of the norm of morality to an action prior to consent is, Aquinas argues, a kind of "deficiency" (*defectus*) indeed, but *not yet* a moral evil or sin. It is only a *negation* (*negatio sola*)—a free non-action or absence of an act—but not a *privation*, since in fact it is not possible for the finite intellectual creature to be always actually "attending" to such a norm, but must rather continually will afresh the application of the norm in the course of life and the stream of conscious activity. It cannot be, then, that the free non-application of the norm can have *by itself* the character of moral evil. Rather, when a particular choice is imminent, this free nihilation (as Maritain called it) of the application of the norm sets the stage for moral fault, makes it a proximate possibility, and so becomes in retrospect the "prior deficiency" that gives rise to moral evil as stemming from a "deficient agent", whenever a voluntary agent, in the condition of this free nihilation, elicits consent to an evil action. Like the carpenter who cuts crookedly by not holding the square and then proceeding to cut, such an agent voluntarily commits sin by freely not "holding" the norm and then proceeding to choose.³⁰

By this argument, Aquinas succeeds in illuminating something of the origin of moral evil as *freely defective action*, construed in a manner similar to deficient agency in the rest of nature. The cause of moral evil is not a good *per se*—not human will insofar as it is human will, which would impugn its Creator—but *a good together with a negation*, that is, a "good accompanied by the absence of some other good."³¹ Since the inclination toward a *secundum quid bonum* as

³⁰ This insight was hailed by Jacques Maritain (1963: *Dieu et la permission du mal* [*God and the Permission of Evil*], 34) as "a metaphysical discovery of the first magnitude, absolutely fundamental, and without which no philosophy of evil is possible."

³¹ See 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.75, a.1, ad.3, which parallels the current discussion in much briefer terms: "Ad tertium dicendum quod, sicut dictum est, voluntas sine adhibitione regulae rationis vel legis divinae, est causa peccati. Hoc autem quod est non adhibere regulam rationis vel legis divinae, secundum se non habet rationem mali, nec poenae

well as the non-application of the norm of morality to this object are both voluntary, the evil action that arises from these two conditions is voluntary, including that very aspect of the evil action that is its moral fault.

Voluntary evil arises, then, not immediately, but by a two-stage process in the wake of the apprehension of a *secundum quid bonum*: a particular *non-act* (non-application of the norm of morality) followed by a particular *act* (of consent). Both the non-act and the act are *free*, lying within the scope of the will's freedom to elicit or not to elicit any particular volition,³² and—most importantly—neither the non-act nor the act presupposes an agent *already morally deficient*. For the non-application (in and by itself) of the norm of morality prior to consent renders the agent “deficient” in a manner that reflects merely its finitude and the non-identity of the finite will with the norm of its own goodness.³³ The succession of the two moments—the free non-act followed by the free act—in the wake of an

nec culpa, antequam applicetur ad actum. Unde secundum hoc, peccati primi non est causa aliquod malum, sed bonum aliquod cum absentia alicuius alterius boni.” — “The cause of sin is the will in the absence of employment of the rule of reason or divine law. Now in itself, this non-employment (*non adhibere*) of the rule of reason or divine law does not have the nature of evil, either of penalty or of fault, before it is applied to an act. And so for this reason the cause of the first sin is not something evil, but a good accompanied by the absence of some other good.”

³² If consent to evil followed *of necessity* from the condition of non-application of the norm, then the latter could not avoid having the nature of moral fault. In fact, the will remains always free to will a fresh application (or re-application) of the norm to the course of action under consideration. On the other hand, actual consent to evil does *presuppose* the prior free non-application, since an evil action is, by definition, an action unmeasured by the norm of morality.

³³ 1269-72: *De malo* q.1., a.3, ad 9: “Ad nonum dicendum, quod bonum ex hoc quod est creatum, aliquo modo potest deficere illo defectu ex quo malum voluntarium procedit: quia ex hoc ipso quod est creatum, sequitur quod ipsum sit subiectum alteri, sicut regulae et mensurae. Si autem ipsum esset sua regula et mensura, non posset sine regula ad opus procedere. Propter hoc Deus, qui est sua regula, peccare non potest; sicut nec artifex peccare posset in incisione ligni si sua manus regula esset incisionis.” — “A good, from the fact that it is something created, is able to become deficient in this way (i.e., that deficiency from which voluntary evil proceeds), because from the very fact that it is created, it follows that it is subject to another as its rule and measure. Now if its rule and measure were its very self, it would not be able to proceed to act in the absence of the rule. It is on account of this that God, being His own rule, cannot sin, even as an artisan could not commit a fault in cutting wood, were his own hand the rule for cutting.”

encounter with a *secundum quid bonum* is sufficient, it would seem, to account for the coming into existence of moral evil in the line of efficient causality.

Very good. But it is one thing to explain moral evil in this way as a (moral) deficiency following freely upon another (non-moral) deficiency. It is quite another thing to explain how evil is chosen as a matter of moral psychology, or better, moral psychosemiotics. Aquinas's account is important—a landmark, as Maritain says—but it is an account of moral evil, not in all its dimensions, but as projected onto the plane of *ens naturae* and efficient causality. To be sure, the being of the object appears in this account—for without a will there is no moral evil, and without an object there is neither any willing of a good, nor any voluntary suspension of willing the practical comparison of a good with another object, the norm of morality. What is omitted in the account, for it belongs to a different line of consideration, is the manner in which these objects are construed in particular cases within the objective world—the cognitive and affective interpretants engendered by these objects as signs, from which energetic interpretants (actions) then emerge.

For instance, granted that free nihilation of the application of the norm of morality belongs to moral evil as a necessary condition, does voluntary evil represent no more than the toleration of a loss—the loss of the excellence of conformity to the norm, a lack of order to a due end—for the sake of the gain represented by a *secundum quid bonum*, a “good in some respect”—say, a self-evident yet limited good such as wealth or pleasure or honor?

What, in fact, does it mean to will what is evil?

4. Moral Evil from the Standpoint of the Object

4.I. Two Ways of Predicating Evil

Significant indications are offered by Aquinas himself. In the earlier-referenced foundational discussion of *De malo* 1.1 on the nature of evil as privatively opposed to the good that every being is insofar as it is actual, the twelfth objector argues that evil must be something (*aliquid*) of a positive nature, since evil and good are the *constitutive differentiators* of vice and virtue, and whatever is such a differentiator is something that is both a unity and a being (*unum et ens*). This would suggest that moral evil is itself a form of some sort. Aquinas replies that evil is not such a differentiator, “*except in the domain of morals, in*

which 'evil' means something positive, insofar as the very act of will is denominated evil from *what it wills*, although even this evil itself is not able to be willed except under the aspect of good."³⁴ Earlier, in his response to the fourth objector, Aquinas had agreed that the opposition of good and evil *in the domain of morals* is *not* a privative opposition between a form on the one hand and the simple lack of that form on the other, but is rather an opposition of contraries.

This is because moral matters depend on the will, and the object of the will is good and evil. Now every act is named and receives its species from its object. In this way, then, the act of the will, insofar as it bears itself [positively] *to evil*, receives the intelligible structure and name of evil, and *this evil* is, in the proper sense, *contrary* to the good.³⁵

The immediate import of these statements is that the malefactor, as our female interlocutor says, indeed does not merely *will wrongly*, as one might play a violin wrongly while intending to play well, but *wills what is wrong*. If I hurt someone inadvertently, my willed action is in that respect "beside" the norm of morality (*praeter rationem*), inasmuch it is deflected from what would have been morally right (that is, I should have omitted this action or done something different). Now if the inadvertence stemmed from neglect on my part, then I am blameworthy to some degree, but not to the degree I am blameworthy if I rather inflict pain and injury deliberately, out of cruelty. In that case, the action itself as proceeding from my will is not merely *praeter rationem* but *contra rationem*, not merely beside but *contrary* to the norm of morality. The same is true, though in a different mode, if I do wrong under the influence of a passion such as anger or lust. Moral evil is *transgression*: it does not merely fall away from the norm of moral goodness, it positively opposes it. It is set against it, even setting itself against it. My morally evil action is not merely deflected from the norm; it is

³⁴ 1269-72: *De malo* q.1, a.1, ad.12, emphasis added: "Ad duodecimum dicendum quod bonum et malum non sunt differentiae nisi in moralibus, in quibus malum positive aliquid dicitur, secundum quod ipse actus voluntatis denominatur malus a volito, licet et ipsum malum non possit esse volitum nisi sub ratione boni."

³⁵ 1269-72: *De malo* q.1, a.1, ad.4, emphasis added: "Ad quartum dicendum quod ideo in moralibus magis quam in naturalibus malum contrarium bono dicitur, quia moralia ex voluntate dependent, voluntatis autem objectum est bonum et malum. Omnis autem actus denominatur et speciem recipit ab objecto. Sic igitur actus voluntatis, in quantum fertur *in malum*, recipit rationem et nomen mali; et *hoc malum* contrariatur proprie bono."

deflected because *in some manner I will it to be so*. That is to say, in willing this action, *I will this being-opposed* to the norm of morality.³⁶ Not merely killing, but murder, is what the murderer wills. It is this willed positive opposition that constitutively differentiates evil from good in the domain of morals.

The moral act itself is fundamentally a being of reason. Aquinas says that whether an act is good or bad depends on its object. The object “is not the matter of which (a thing is made), but the matter about which (something is done).” The nature of this object has been a matter of considerable dispute. What is clear is that the object involves not just the thing that happened (a trigger was pulled and someone died), but the understanding and will of the doer (who may, for instance, intend the act as either self-defense or murder). Aquinas teaches that, in choosing to do evil, one desires the good to which the evil is attached more than the good of which the evil is the privation (as one may desire the perceived good of being free of a blackmailer to which the act of murder is attached more than the good of justice of which murder is the privation. When evil is desired in this way, the act must be viewed not as essentially good and

³⁶ In interpreting Aquinas’s discussions of deficient agency in moral evil (as in *De malo* q.1, a.3 and parallel passages), it is important to avoid the misunderstanding that would construe “voluntary non-consideration” or “voluntary inattention” to the norm of morality as mere forgetfulness of the norm, or the absence of any actual awareness of the norm whatever during the interval prior to evil choice. This explains our previous emphasis upon Aquinas’s comparison of “non-consideration” to the carpenter’s use of the square in our discussion of *De malo* q.1, a.3 above. What is essential in this matter is what we have emphasized by our preference for the expression, “voluntary *non-application*”: the free omission or suspension of the *use* of the norm of morality *as the guiding norm* for the action to be put forth. What *other* forms of “consideration” the norm of morality may receive from the agent in this interval depends on the mode of transgression as stemming from an occasion of emotional arousal (sins from passion or weakness), or from factors intrinsic to the will and the considerations of reason—sinning from “malice” or “determined evilness” (*ex certa malitia*), which is characterized by a consideration of the norm of morality different from its practical use as a norm, the attitude of “contempt.”

incidentally evil (as involving some privation), but as essentially evil...

Dodds, “*Made of Flame and Air*” [p.208-09].

We may thus distinguish between two distinct ways in which evil is predicated. Following Gregory Reichberg, we refer to them as the *ontological predication* and the *moral predication* of evil.³⁷ Taken simply and without qualification as to domain—that is, taken as it is in opposition to good in the sense in which the good is interchangeable with being-as-actual (*bonum quod convertitur cum ente*)—evil is *nothing but* privative non-being. It represents the loss of being. It is applicable to all natures, and thus applicable in a special way to free actions (and their agents) that suffer loss of the specific actuality or excellence they ought to have. This is evil predicated ontologically. This is the point of view of the discussion of voluntary evil as deficient agency in *De malo* 1.3 and the discussion of the previous section.

In the moral domain of vice and virtue, evil is predicated differently. In this domain, evil and good are specific differentiators of voluntary actions, inasmuch as they qualify the *objects* of these actions in light of their relation to the norm of morality, namely, whether these objects (and hence the actions of which they are the objects) *accord* with the norm of morality or *oppose* it. This is largely the point of view of the treatment of morals in the massive second part of the *Summa theologiae*, questions 8-16 of *De malo* on the capital sins, and other similar discussions.³⁸

³⁷ Reichberg 2002: “Beyond Privation: Moral Evil in Aquinas’s *De malo*”. This article contains the best exposition we have found of moral evil as privation that also includes a clear discussion the limits of this notion.

³⁸ Reichberg (2002: “Beyond Privation”, 776) suggests that the two modes of predicating evil, as they are employed in moral matters, can be seen as an instance of an analogy of attribution, with moral loss or privation (ontological mode of predication) as the primary referent, and the willing of the evil end which positively excludes the due end (moral mode of predication) as the secondary referent. From this standpoint, the primary or *unconditioned* meaning of evil remains simply privation, even in the domain of morals. The secondary or *conditioned* meaning of evil is distinct, but contains a reference to the primary meaning: to will an evil end is to *refuse one’s own true good*, including the

The two modes of predicating evil are, of course, not equivocal, but connected. Freely opposing the norm of morality *always*, and *by its very nature*, incurs the loss of being:³⁹

First, on the part of the act itself, insofar as it is deprived of its due excellence, and second, on the part of the agent who, having freely posited a disordered act, is himself deprived of valuable internal goods, natural and supernatural. The loss of psychic harmony, the obfuscation of moral consciousness, and the penchant for accrued wrongdoing are among the natural effects of sin, and from the privation of divine grace there results the loss of supernatural goods such as faith, hope, charity, and the share in the divine beatitude which they confer. The malefactor thereby harms himself most grievously by his misdeeds. Indeed, he harms himself in a way that he could never harm others (or them him) since it is in the invisible root of selfhood—the soul—that he suffers this damage.

Augustine even went so far as to call sin “nothing”, a non-being (*peccatum est nichil*). Aquinas interprets:⁴⁰

A sin is ‘nothing’ in the manner in which human beings become ‘nothing’ when they sin: not that they become nothing itself, but that insofar as they sin, they are deprived of a certain good, and privation itself is a non-being in a subject. Similarly, a sin is an action deprived of due order, and according to that privation it is said to be ‘nothing’.

The loss suffered by the agent is not the evil of sin as such, but the inevitable *consequence* of it. Sin itself is “an action deprived of due order”. But here is where the matter becomes interesting. There is privation in the evil action indeed, but the evil action *as such* is *more* than an action that lacks a certain rectitude. It is an action with a certain kind of object, an *evil end*. What is an evil end? An evil end is an *un-due* end—that is, an end whose pursuit *positively*

excellence that ought to belong to one’s actions, and *thus* to endure its loss as a consequence of choosing an end incompatible with that good.

³⁹ Reichberg 2002: “Beyond Privation”, 759.

⁴⁰ 1269-72: *De malo* q.2, a.1, obj 4: “Eo enim modo peccatum nichil est, quo nichil fiunt homines cum peccant: non quidem ita quod sint ipsum nichil, sed quia in quantum peccant, privantur quodam bono, et ipsa privation est non ens in subjecto; et similiter peccatum est actus privatus ordine debito, et secundum ipsam privationem dicitur nichil.”

excludes action in accordance with the norm of morality.⁴¹ By virtue of its evil end, the evil action is positively opposed to the norm of morality, and it is *because* of this positive opposition to the norm that *both* forms of deprivation are incurred: the loss of rectitude in the action itself put forth, and the loss of being incurred by the agent.

4.2. Moral Evil as “Mixed” Privation

In *De malo* 2.9, Aquinas rejects the definition given by some Stoics (whom he does not name) of evil action as nothing but an action lacking moral rectitude. For instance, adultery is a sin, according to them, not because intercourse with the person is evil in itself (*secundum se malum*), but because it is beside the rule of reason (*praeter rectitudinem rationis*). Their analysis thus cleanly separates the positive intentional character of an action from its morally deficient character, with the latter held to consist in the pure privation of rectitude. Since the very same pure privation would belong to any sin whatever, one consequence of this clean analytical separation is the conclusion that all sins are equal, which is the very point at issue in *De malo* 2.9. A second consequence pointed out by Aquinas is that every evil action would become a sin of omission: for what the Stoic definition fails to capture is precisely the element of *transgression*—voluntary opposition to the norm of morality.⁴² While even sins of omission are in fact susceptible of degrees according to extrinsic factors such

⁴¹ The moral specification of acts from their ends comprehends also acts that are willed as means to further ends, whether the further ends be evil or not. To use one of Aquinas’s examples (borrowed from Aristotle), the man who steals in order to commit adultery is *both* an adulterer *and* a thief, though he is *more* an adulterer than a thief, inasmuch as it was only the prospect of adultery that made it seem good to him also to steal. See 1271: *ST* Ia-IIae, q.18, a.6.

⁴² See Reichberg 2002: “Beyond Privation”, 756-758. In particular (757): “A wrongful deed has the character of privation insofar as it lacks a due ordination to the agent’s rightful end; it is something more than privation insofar as it is an act posited in opposition to the moral rule. Significantly, Thomas expressly indicates that of these two elements, transgressing the rule [of morality] is more essential to the intelligibility (*ratio*) of moral evil than the corresponding failure to achieve the end. The former undergirds the latter.” Reichberg cites *De malo* q.2, a.1 on the nature of fault in general (in nature, art, or morals): “[M]agis est de ratione peccati preterire regulam actionis quam etiam deficere ab actionis fine.” — “It is more of the nature of fault to disregard the rule of an action than even to fail to achieve the end of the action.”

as the dignity of the precept violated, it is above all from the varying modes of transgression that degrees of gravity accrue to sin. Not all sins are equal.

In rejecting the Stoic analysis, Aquinas is led to distinguish between two kinds of privation. One kind is pure privation (*privatio pura*) in which nothing is left of the form taken away, as death leaves nothing of life. The other kind is non-pure or mixed privation (*privatio non pura*) in which something is left—something positive (*aliquid*), as sickness does not remove the entire equilibrium constituting the health of an organism, but leaves something of that balance remaining:⁴³

With the first kind [i.e. pure privations], the cause or manner in which something is deprived is irrelevant as regards possible differences of degree, because the removal is entire, and whatever we then say in a positive way does not fall within the intelligible sense of this privation. For the man who dies from one wound is not less dead than the man who dies from two or three... But with the second kind [i.e., mixed privations], the removal is not entire, and whatever is said then in a positive way does fall within the intelligible sense of that which is said in a privative way. And for this reason, these latter [privations] are susceptible of degree according to the difference of that which is said positively, just as sickness is said to be greater according as the cause taking away health be greater or more multiple.

Whereas sins of omission involve a pure privation insofar as they are omissions,⁴⁴

⁴³ 1269-72: *De malo* q.2, a.9: “Quia ergo in primis privationibus totum privatur, et id quod positive dicitur non est de ratione privationis, non differt in talibus privationibus quacumque ex causa vel quocumque modo aliquis privetur, ut propter hoc dicatur magis vel minus privatus; non enim mortuus est minus qui uno vulnere percussus interiit, quam qui duobus vel tribus; In secundis autem privationibus non totum privatur; et quod positive dicitur, est de ratione eius, quod dicitur privative; et ideo talia recipiunt magis et minus secundum differentiam eius quod dicitur positive: sicut aegritudo dicitur maior si fuerit causa tollens sanitatem aut maior aut multiplicior.”

⁴⁴ 1269-72: *De malo* q.2, a.9: “Peccatum vero transgressionis consistit in deformitate alicuius actus, quae quidem deformitas non tollit totum ordinem rationis, sed aliquid eius: puta, si aliquis comedat quando non debet, et remanet quod comedat ubi debet vel propter quod debet. Nec potest actu remanente totaliter rationis proportio tolli; unde dicit philosophus in IV *Ethicorum*, quod si malum sit integrum, importabile fit, et se ipsum destruit. Sicut ergo non omnis deformitas corporis est aequalis, sed quaedam est alia maior, secundum quod privantur plura ad decorem pertinentia vel aliquid principalius; ita non omnis deformitas vel inordinatio actus est aequalis, sed quaedam est alia maior. Unde nec omnia peccata sunt paria.”

the fault of transgression consists in the deformity of some action, which deformity indeed does not take away the whole order of reason but something of it. For example, if it is at the wrong time that someone eats, it remains the case that he eats in the place and for the reason that he ought. Nor while the [evil] action persists can the whole proportion of reason be entirely taken away from it, as the Philosopher says in the fourth book of *Ethics*, that were evil entire (*integrum*), it would become insupportable and destroy itself.

Aquinas's point here is that it belongs to the very nature of transgression that there can be no clean separation between the positive intention of the will and its defective character, for it is the positive willing of some object—in Aquinas's example, to eat *now*—that is actually *transgressive* and bears the morally evil character. Moreover, this positive intending of the object is conceptually prior to the lack of rectitude that affects the action in consequence.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ From Michel Labourdette's lecture course on the morality of human acts (1958-59: *Cours de théologie morale*, "Les actes humains", 135, emphasis added): "Qu'est-ce qui fait une moralité objective mauvaise? — Ce n'est pas seulement l'absence d'une conformité positive à la règle de la raison: on aurait simplement un objet moralement indifférent; c'est un rapport de répugnance, une opposition de contrariété au bien que la raison demanderait. L'acte humain qui se porte à un tel objet l'atteint précisément comme opposé à la raison, opposé en toute sa positivité; c'est cela qui le spécifie. // *s'ensuit*, bien sûr, dans l'acte la privation de la conformité à la raison qu'il devrait avoir; il n'a plus son intégrité humaine. Par là, il *s'oppose privativement* à l'acte moralement bon; mais c'est parce qu'il lui est *déjà positivement opposé* d'une opposition de contrariété à raison de l'objet qui le spécifie. Dans la moralité mauvaise, spécifiquement opposée à la moralité bonne, il y a donc deux choses: (a) la spécification de l'acte par un objet contraire à l'exigence de la raison; (b) et, *par suite* la privation de la rectitude qui ferait son intégrité humaine. C'est par cette privation que l'acte mauvais entre dans la grande catégorie du mal au sens transcendantal; mais ce n'est pas cette privation comme telle qui spécifie l'acte mauvais; ce qui le spécifie, c'est l'objet positivement contraire à la raison, sur lequel cette privation se fonde. Cela est déjà d'ordre moral et d'une moralité déjà justement dite mauvaise parce qu'elle implique immédiatement la privation conséquente de rectitude." — "What makes the object [of a human action] morally evil? It is not solely the absence of a positive conformity to the rule of reason, for then one would have simply an object morally indifferent. It is a relation of repugnance, an opposition of contrariety to the good that reason would demand. The human action which bears itself toward such an object attains it precisely as opposed to reason, opposed in all its positivity; it is this [opposition] which specifies it. *There follows* in the action, of course, the privation of the conformity to reason which it ought to have: the action is deprived of human integrity, and it is on that account *privatively opposed* to the morally good act; but this is because it is *already positively opposed* to it with an

Now “to eat” is the expression of a natural appetite, and food for a living organism is a good that needs no explanation. When food is readily available (as it is not, for too much of humankind), it is the sort of good that one simply *takes* (even if it is with effort, as in a hunt) or leaves. The same may be said of various pleasures, including the sexual kind. Such goods are self-evident and ready to hand, and it is perhaps understandable that goods of this kind furnish the matter for elementary examples of moral transgression, even as it is stressed that, for moral agents that have the “use of reason” and access to the requisite knowledge, transgression involves not merely a voluntary turning-toward (*conversio*) a relative good, but a voluntary turning-away-from (*aversio*) the norm of morality.⁴⁶

opposition of contrariety by reason of the object which specifies it. In the morally evil as specifically opposed to the morally good [action], there are thus two factors: (a) the specification of the action by an object contrary to the requirement of reason, and (b) *by consequence* the privation of that rectitude which would constitute its human integrity. It is by this privation that the evil action enters into the great category of evil in the transcendental sense, but it is not this privation as such which specifies the evil action. What specifies it, is the object positively contrary to reason, upon which this privation is founded. This is already of the moral order and of a moral character already rightly called evil insofar as it immediately implies the consequent privation of rectitude.”

⁴⁶ Consider the relative goods that figure in this discussion of Aquinas in i.1259/65: SCG, lib.3 c.9: “Quod igitur in moralibus sortitur speciem a fine qui est secundum rationem, dicitur secundum speciem suam bonum: quod vero sortitur speciem a fine contrario fini rationis, dicitur secundum speciem suam malum. Finis autem ille, etsi tollat finem rationis, est tamen aliquod bonum: sicut delectabile secundum sensum, vel aliquid huiusmodi. Unde et in aliquibus animalibus sunt bona; et homini etiam cum sunt secundum rationem moderata; et contingit quod est malum uni, esse bonum alteri. Et ideo nec malum, secundum quod est differentia specifica in genere moralium, importat aliquid quod sit secundum essentiam suam malum: sed aliquid quod secundum se est bonum, malum autem homini, in quantum privat ordinem rationis, quod est hominis bonum.” — “In moral matters, that which is specified by an end that is in accord with reason is called good specifically; and that which is specified by an end contrary to the rational end is termed evil specifically. Yet that contrary end, even though it runs counter to the rational end, is nevertheless some sort of good: for instance, something that delights on the sense level, or anything like that. These are goods for certain animals, and even for man, when they are moderated by reason. It happens as well that what is evil for one being is good for another. So, evil, as a specific difference in the genus of moral matters, does not imply something that is evil in its own essence, but

4.3. Moral Evil as Interpretant

On the other hand, constant recourse to examples of this self-evident kind can encourage the habit of thinking that transgression is always a matter of selective attention, or singular fixation upon something self-evidently “good in a particular way”—upon pleasure or bodily health or status—in such a way as to freely neglect consideration of the true “good according to reason” represented by conformity with the norm of morality. In transgressions that stem from a failure to arrest the progression of sensual or emotional arousal, this may be the case. But it is not always the case.⁴⁷ Any man who commits adultery is in an obvious sense motivated by arousal, but some particular man might have been quite ready to do this even before encountering some particular woman. When such a man commits adultery, he does not act out of passion or weakness (*ex passione vel infirmitate*), but rather out of a sense of purpose—out of an evil conviction that has now found an opportunity for greater realization (*ex industria, ex certa malitia*).

The difference between acting out of weakness and acting out of a sense of purpose lies in *the objective context within which the moral object signifies*. In the case of the man who has an affair out of a sense of purpose, it is the prior constitution of the objective world (that part of it that is public, as well as that part of it that is *de facto* private to him) that determines him to have the affair, far more than—and in a more formal way than—the particular occasion determines him. For him, who does evil *ex industria*, it is not a question of the

something that is good in itself, though evil for man, inasmuch as it takes away the order of reason which is the good for man.” The concern of this passage is the same as that in *De malo* q.1, a.1, namely, to show that evil itself is not *aliquid*, something “having an essence” in nature that the malefactor seeks, even though evil is, according to a different mode of predication, a specific differentiator of human acts.

⁴⁷ Some authors seem to overinterpret Aquinas’s theory of voluntary non-consideration in psychological terms as a lack of “thoroughness” in deliberation, or a partial consideration of an action that focuses only on self-evident benefits (e.g., the material benefits of theft), followed by consent to an action from this “freely chosen myopic perspective.” See Dewan 1992: “St. Thomas and the First Cause of Moral Evil”, 1228–29, and also Sherwin 2005: *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 104, who follows Dewan’s lead. While one can agree that moral evil must be “myopic” in some way or other (*sub specie aeternitatis*), general psychological characterizations of this sort tend to obscure the phenomenon of contempt that rejects application of the norm of morality in favor of a norm that the agent consciously prefers.

norm of morality slipping from view or becoming weightless on account of emotional arousal. It is a question rather of the opposition between the norm of morality and a *counter-norm* that the agent takes as a superior measure of what is to be done. This is *contempt* for the norm of morality, a deliberate devaluation that can reach the extreme of conscious hatred for the norm of morality itself and for the goodness that accords with it, and even the practical effort, within an agent's scope of influence, to bring that goodness to ruin.

The *sense* in an agent's contempt for the norm of morality stems from the patterns of signification that obtain in the objective world. This sense, in other words, is the interpretant of some action of a sign. The objective world is also where the expressions of this contempt—further interpretants including wicked actions (energetic interpretants) themselves—*live* in the whole of their being. These expressions do not live merely in the natural cosmos subsisting independently of awareness. Finally, it is in the objective world where we can find the key to the “positivity” of moral evil. For discoverable in the webs of signification sustaining particular moral evils are pure objects functioning within the objective world as *counter-norms* opposed to the norm of morality—that is how they are taken, that is how they signify.⁴⁸ In our view, Aquinas's notion of moral evil as a mixed privation comprehends, even as it also conceals, the reality of such pure objects. And here we discover the link between the questions of the nature of moral evil and the meaning of “reality”.

For our graduate student and those of a similar habit of mind, that which is “real” in a positive sense is that which exercises (or can exercise) the being proper to nature, *ens naturae*, precisely insofar as it does (or can) exercise it. Since every being in nature desires its own fullness, mind-independent being thus comes to be thought of as the repository of all that is appetible in the manner of an end, and an “evil end” comes to be reduced to the intention of some particular good whose appetibility is grounded in the givenness of nature and its possibilities, *albeit creatively taken up by human intelligence*.

It is that final clause that contains the clue to something more. “Reality”, for human intelligence, is not merely the being of nature it has managed to grasp; but the being that it creates. It happens that the creativity of human intelligence

⁴⁸ We explore this genus of pure object in a monograph in preparation, which advances our previous work (Kanzelberger 2011: *The Mystical Daydream: Fictive Being and the Motive of Evil*) in the direction of a psychosemiotics of moral evil.

can engender a positivity that oversteps the understood possibilities of nature, including moral possibilities.

Jacques Maritain once censured a “Cyclopean Thomism” that sought to illuminate every matter exclusively from the perspective of the line of being (*ens naturae*) without due consideration of the line of non-being. It is in the line of non-being, he wrote, that the sinner has the first initiative: absent this acknowledgment, the divine innocence itself is impugned.⁴⁹ The non-being Maritain had in mind was privative non-being and the darkness of voluntary non-consideration, the absence of an act. But if “being” is equated with the being of nature, then it must be said that there is another kind of “non-being”, namely, the pure object—*ens rationis*, mind-dependent being posited in the practical order—the creative fantasy, the castle in the air, or what we have called a mystical daydream. It is true, as Aquinas says, that “every sin is founded upon a natural appetite.” Among these natural human appetites lies a most primordial desire, the desire to create.

5. The Moral Causality of Signs

5.1. Moral Evil as Semiotic Disorder

Let us return to the example of adultery and consider the cases of two men. For both, the marital covenant along with its duties are objects in the semiotic web. Each man understands that these objects are not his inventions, but intersubjective realities and specifications of the norm of morality that are relevant to such a matter as an extramarital affair, relative to which pursuit these objects represent a constraint. This understanding is “practical” inasmuch it concerns a matter of action, but the standing of this course of action relative to the norm of morality may be “considered” in a theoretical way only, or it may be “considered” in the manner of a fully practical—that is, a directive—cognition that guides deliberation and the subsequent actions in the way that the use of the square guides a carpenter’s action of cutting. While the two forms of “consideration” may yield similar judgments regarding the moral standing of a course of action, it is the latter form of consideration alone whose omission or suspension is posited by the theory of defective voluntary agency as a necessary moment prior to evil choice.

⁴⁹ See Maritain 1963 [1966]: *God and the Permission of Evil*, 30-31.

First Case. Consider the series of interpretants in the case of a man whose marriage is unhappy, but whose “consideration” of the norm of morality is that of full practical application, inasmuch as he intends to act virtuously. First, there is the practical judgment concerning the standing of a course of action in relation to the norm of morality; then, a feeling of aversion and fear of moral danger (affective interpretants); finally, the declining of an invitation to dinner for two with an attractive female colleague in an exotic yet charming locale while traveling on business (energetic interpretant).

That is one possible action of signs. The *ground* or rationale of this particular semiosis lies in collateral conditions: the connaturality of the man’s rational nature with the norm of morality, his cognitive and affective habits, his consciousness of the vow he took, and—most central to this exercise of his freedom—the free identification of the good of his married state⁵⁰ with his own good. The man’s freedom is expressed in the critical control he exercises over his own semiosis: for he would always be free to shift his construal of objects to one that engenders a very different series of interpretants, and there is no object save one that he desires with a necessity of nature.

That sole object desired by a necessity of nature is “his own good” taken in formally and simply—“his own good” in an unqualified and therefore complete sense. This is “happiness”, the objective correlate of the metaphysical truth that the rational being, like every being, seeks its own fullness. It belongs to a rational nature to be able to think expressly in terms of its own fullness, and to will it as the “ultimate end.” As the ultimate end, happiness functions as the principle of principles in matters of action, the norm of all norms. As Aquinas writes: “That in which one reposes as in an ultimate end is the master of one’s affections, for from it one takes the rules for one’s entire life.”⁵¹ The man feels the attractions of dinner and the woman, their significance for some kind of fullness in life, but he masters these attractions on account of his vision of what is simply good for him. He has freely identified **his own good** with a good that transcends these goods and his own ego. The norm of morality as he relates it to his situation is nothing but the representation of such a transcending good as freely identified with his own good. This free identification is why these “relative goods” *are* relative, not merely in truth, but *to him*. The action he puts forth, or the

⁵⁰ Not in the abstract, but concretely: that is, union with *this* woman, forsaking all others.

⁵¹ 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.5, a.1, s.c.: “[I]llud in quo quiescit aliquis sicut in ultimo fine, hominis affectui dominatur, quia ex eo totius vitae suae regulas accipit.”

restraining of an action, bears this precise meaning—a meaning which makes of his action (whose exterior and natural aspect is but the “body” of this sign) a good that is unrepeatable under heaven.

In putting forth this action, this man has acted as a creator: a good has come to be that could only come to be through his freedom. His moral struggle consisted precisely in this: that he, immersed in these conditions of existence—a less than happy marriage, an attractive colleague with an open smile meant for him on her face, the beginnings of a daydream of a new and unburdened future...—fulfills himself as creator instead by a transcending of himself as a lover of God and his family as other selves.

Second case. Now consider the man who begins an affair out of a sense of purpose. He has convinced himself that what is simply good for him (his happiness) is at odds with the norm of morality. To be sure, as Aquinas says, even the evil that consists in the transgression of this norm is not able to be willed except under the aspect of a good. In other words, the decision to transgress is not merely a question of “what a thing is”, but of “how it is taken”. With regard to “what it is,” the norm of morality constrains by virtue of a relation to his action that is not subject to the man’s will. With regard to “how it is taken”, his consideration of the norm of morality engenders a series of interpretants by which he relates to it in a practical way as corruptive of a good that is specified by his own vision of happiness, in which he reposes as in an ultimate end. Taken in this way, the norm of morality has the aspect of an evil and is hateful to him (affective interpretant), even as it is lovable when taken otherwise.⁵² The transgression of this norm therefore represents the removal of an obstacle to what he takes as simply good for him. The outcome of his deliberation is that he acts in contempt of the norm of morality (energetic interpretant) in light of a preferential judgment which is not merely a judgment in favor of the particularity of a certain pleasure or other self-evident good that is ready to hand and merely taken “out of context”, but a judgment representing the application of a counter-norm as superior to the norm of morality.

⁵² Cf. Aquinas, i.1256-59: *De veritate* q.22, a.1, ad.7: “Eiusdem autem rationis est in appetendo et fugiendo, aliquid esse bonum et corruptivum mali, vel esse malum et corruptivum boni” — “In matters of seeking and avoiding, it pertains to the same rationale for something to be good and to be corruptive of evil, or to be evil and to be corruptive of good.”

The disorder in such a man, says Aquinas, is that, from the point of view of the order of reason and virtue, he “loves more a lesser good”⁵³ and judges it preferable to what is greater. This is the practical error that Aquinas says is inseparable from a perverted appetite.⁵⁴ For moral goodness, “acting for a due end,” belongs to the intrinsic excellence of free actions. There can be no fullness of being for the rational creature, no genuinely complete good, in the absence of moral goodness. Thus, this man is a fool, like Esau who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. But this fool is wise in his own eyes. He will strike a moral pose. He will say that he has a right to this. He may even utter a sentence such as, “I have my own truth,” which is meant quite literally: “truth” for him is the meaning with which all things are imbued as they fall under the norm of norms, his construal of the ultimate end from which his choice here and now acquires the character of a *pseudo-debitum*.

It is no wonder that the temptation arises to explain moral evil away as a form of ignorance. To be sure, there is always some form of “not knowing” in evil action. Aquinas himself is clear, however, that this man who acts from evil conviction (*ex certa malitia*) knows that what he does is evil (against the norm of morality)—not just generally, but in this particular case. What he does not “know” is that *this evil is not to be accepted for the sake of attaining the good he wants*.⁵⁵ In other words, his “ignorance” consists in the “not knowing” embodied in the very practical judgment he makes.

This practical judgment, though it lacks moral rectitude, does not lack a rational character, for if it did it would not be a practical judgment at all, and evil would have annihilated itself.⁵⁶ The man makes a comparison between two proposed

⁵³ 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.78, a.1.

⁵⁴ 1269-72: *De malo* q.16, a.6, ad.11: “[A]ppetitus perversus semper est cum aliqua falsitate practicae cognitionis.” See the comments in Reichberg 2002: “Beyond Privation”, 779-780.

⁵⁵ 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.78, a.1, ad.1: “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod ignorantia quandoque quidem excludit scientiam qua aliquis simpliciter scit hoc esse malum quod agitur, et tunc dicitur ex ignorantia peccare. Quandoque autem excludit scientiam qua homo scit hoc nunc esse malum, sicut cum ex passione peccatur. Quandoque autem excludit scientiam qua aliquis scit hoc malum non sustinendum esse propter consecutionem illius boni, scit tamen simpliciter hoc esse malum, et sic dicitur ignorare qui ex certa malitia peccat.”

⁵⁶ Here our analysis makes its point of contact with Aquinas’s notion of mixed privation, as discussed above.

deprivations, and in its light he chooses to sustain the deprivation following from moral transgression, not for its own sake as deprivation (which is impossible), but for the sake of avoiding another deprivation—the deprivation of what he loves more.

We infer, then, that, in his private semiosis at least, such a man has fashioned in objectivity a context in which the lesser good may be, and is, taken as greater. Purposeful evil is not a matter of ignoring the moral context of courses of action, but a semiotic disorder involving a particular kind of fictive construction or pure object that functions collaterally as the ground for patterns of interpretation guiding practical life: a particular vision of life, an imagined future.⁵⁷ It is within that invented context that such a man convinces himself concerning what is necessary for fulfillment and thus what is “due” to him simply. As for the norm of morality, it is not at all absent from this context—it is even an object of a certain form of preoccupation for him—but it is reticulated into this context in ways that depend upon the stages of descent into evil, from self-deceptive rationalization in the beginning, to the unfortunate possibility of outright hatred of moral goodness in the end.⁵⁸

The error of the malefactor is a practical error. That is, it does not affect human reason precisely as a mirror of nature, as if the malefactor were engaged for the moment in a bit of “theoretical nonsense.” The malefactor is not necessarily in error that way. This kind of error affects human reason as creative.

5.2. The Creative Dimension of Reason

The creative dimension of reason brings us back to a consideration of the order of mind-dependent being (*ens rationis*). To gain further purchase on it, we need to review some of the categories of mind-dependent being (a true menagerie) that pervade the objective world. Here are a few broad ones:

⁵⁷ Aquinas alludes to such a construction in i.1256-59: *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* q.22, a.6, where he explains the indetermination of the will in respect of good and evil in terms of actions “as orderable to a certain pretended image of happiness” (*ut ordinabilem in beatitudinem, velut quamdam imaginem eius*). See our discussion of this passage in Kanzelberger 2011: *The Mystical Daydream*, 170-77.

⁵⁸ It is beyond the scope of our argument here to outline that downward course. See Kanzelberger 2011: *The Mystical Daydream*, 183-200.

- 1) *Negations of ens naturae grasped on the pattern of being.* The simplest kind of example of a mind-dependent being is reason's conception of a negation or privation obtaining in the order of mind-independent being (*ens naturae*). For example, blindness is conceived as if it were a sort of quality of the blind animal, though on the side of nature blindness is nothing but the (privative) negation of something positive, namely, the power of sight in an animal. Thus, the *pattern or model* on which blindness is conceived is something positive (a quality). Nevertheless, *what* is conceived by this means, the object properly speaking, is (as the conceiver well knows) not something positive at all, but a negation in the order of *ens naturae* as pertaining to animals. This *non-being (non ens)* in the order of nature, which is not knowable in itself because it is not in itself a being (*ens*), is *rendered knowable* by the intellect on the pattern of a quality, and so becomes a certain kind of "being of reason" (*ens rationis*, mind-dependent being).⁵⁹

- 2) *Mind-dependent relations in the order of second intentions.* These mind-dependent relations relate objects to objects insofar as they are objects—that is, insofar as they exist already in cognition (which is what "second intention" signifies). These relations are involved in scientific classification and the study of logic. For example, "animal" is a *genus* (that is, relatable to inferior genera and species) only insofar as it is already an object (existing in cognition).

- 3) *Mind-dependent relations in the order of first intentions.* These mind-dependent relations relate, not objects as such, but mind-independent beings in nature. That is, the subject of the relation is an existing (mind-independent) thing, but the relation itself is purely objective or mind-dependent. One kind of example is an extrinsic denomination such as "known" or "seen", which relates a thing to the one who knows or perceives it. A more interesting and important kind of example, already mentioned, is the social and cultural roles in the objective world of a given human community. For instance, a particular woman has the role of a municipal judge in the city of Pasadena. The role belongs to the existing woman herself, not to a conception of her. The role (that is, the relation) itself, however, depends upon the common awareness that cognitively

⁵⁹ As Aquinas remarks in connection with the notion of truth as applied to non-being (1266-68: *ST Ia*, q.16, a.3, ad.2): "Ad secundum dicendum quod non ens non habet in se unde cognoscatur, sed cognoscitur in quantum intellectus facit illud cognoscibile. Unde verum fundatur in ente, in quantum non ens est quoddam ens rationis, apprehensum scilicet a ratione." — "Non-being does not have anything in itself whereby it can be known, but it is known insofar as the intellect makes it knowable. Hence, truth is [still, in this case] founded upon being, inasmuch as non-being is a certain kind of 'being of reason', apprehended, namely, by reason."

constitutes her in it. It would mean nothing for her to “be a judge” if no one agreed to recognize her as such.

- 4) *Beings constructed as patterns of mind-dependent relations.* This is a most irregular category, embracing outright fictional characters (Mister Darcy, Peter Rabbit), hypotheses about nature that are thought to be true but turn out to be false (the heavens of Ptolemy), purely objective practical artifacts (civil laws, treaties), mythical “secondary worlds” (Middle Earth), wish-motivated “as if” or “what if” or “if only” scenarios (daydreams), and other constructs.

Every mind-dependent being of whatever sort is a *being* inasmuch as it is an *object* known in the way that being is known; but it is a *mind-dependent* being inasmuch as it is an objective construct to which no (positive) being corresponds on the side of nature. In the case of the first category given above, *what* is conceived “on the pattern of being” is *in* nature, but it is a negation or privation in nature. Because this “non-being” is not knowable as such (insofar as it is non-being), reason must overcome this deficit of being and *render* this non-being knowable by conceiving it on the pattern of some being of the natural categories (for example, a quality). Nevertheless, *what* it knows by this rendering “on the pattern of a being” is a (mind-independent) negation or privation.

The succeeding categories are different. They do not merely reflect a necessary means for conceiving structures of nature and their negations, but they represent *realities that are positive, even as they are purely objective* (that is mind-dependent). We draw attention to the last category: patterns of mind-dependent relations that constitute fictive beings, whether or not their fictive status is recognized by the one who conceives them. We have already noted the formative power of false beliefs about nature. The formative power of any fictive being stems from the *positivity of relation in the order of mind-dependent being, just as relation is positive in the order of mind-independent being*,⁶⁰ and is exercised by means of the action of signs, the engendering of interpretants.

⁶⁰ A relation, any relation, is always what it (positively) is. It is that kind of relation, and no other. The “category” of relation itself, however, belongs *neither* to the order of nature *nor* to the order of mind-dependent being, but straddles the two orders. Indeed, one and the same relation may migrate from one order to the other depending on circumstances. A simple example: you have a conception of the layout of furniture in your parents’ home: a pattern of physical relations that are also objective inasmuch as

As with the conceiving of negations, fictive constructions overcome a deficit of being.⁶¹ But here the construction reflects not the mere attempt to understand nature as given, but a desire to *create*. The toolshed in the backyard does not exist, but it ought to. My status as a well-known statesman does not exist, but it ought to. My marriage does not make me happy, but it ought to. Sherlock Holmes does not exist, but he ought to. Hobbits and Elves do not exist, but they ought to.

Kirk explains that a moral act involves both a free movement of the will and a consideration of the norm of morality which entails both “the order of reason and of divine law (*ordo rationis et legis divinae*)”. This norm is not just some arbitrary code of morality, but a standard that is connatural to the human being since “in being true to this norm, the rational being is being true to its own nature, willing an end that is due—an end, in other words, that represents the excellence of its own way of being and acting”.

The question is, if this norm is connatural to the human being, how or why would a human ever act against it? This brings us back to our capacity for story-telling. This ability

you know that pattern. At Christmas one year, you visit and discover that that layout no longer exists, thanks to the wholesale moving around and replacement of items. The pattern of objective relations remained undisturbed when the physical changes took place, even as they became *purely* objective and no longer physical relations. This “singularity” pertaining to relations as “having a positive structure or ‘essence’ that is indifferent to the difference between what exists independently of and what exists dependently upon thought” (Deely 2007: *Intentionality and Semiotics: A Story of Mutual Fecundation*, 124) is pivotal for a semiotically coherent realism, and is explored by Deely in many works. See, for example, 2007: *Intentionality and Semiotics*, 119-25; and 2009: *Purely Objective Reality*, 22-37.

⁶¹ Fictive constructions are classified as *negationes* in the Latin tradition alongside negations of *ens naturae* grasped on the pattern of being, despite their being essentially (as to what the mind puts forth) patterns of objective relations. The reason such a pattern of relations is called a “negation” is that it serves to *model* what in fact it is *not*: for example, a fiction such as a mountain of gold or a dragon is a pattern of objective relations *modeling* a substance which in fact it is not. See Deely’s discussion of this point in 2002: *What Distinguishes Human Understanding?* 85-109, which comments on texts such as Poincaré 1632b: *TDS*, 96/7-28.

can be a good thing, as Kirk notes in his wonderful review of Tolkien's account of fairy tales. The positive aspect of story-telling is also exemplified in the musical, *The Man of La Mancha*, when the priest character expresses a very favorable view of Don Quixote's story-telling delusions in seeing a wretched kitchen wench as a great lady whom he names "Dulcinea": "There is no Dulcinea. She's made of flame and air. And yet how lovely life would seem, if every man could weave a dream to keep him from despair. To each his Dulcinea, though she's only flame and air."

Dodds, "Made of Flame and Air" [p.209].

Fictive being enters into the conceiving of every object in the order of practical reason. There is a fictive or purely objective element contained in the intention of any end: the overcoming of the deficit of being represented by the end's futurity⁶²—in order that the toolshed, as the being-to-be-realized, may be envisioned as such and that it may motivate. Even in such a prosaic example, we can begin to see that the meaning of "reality," as it pertains to the problem of how one is to live and dispose of one's freedom, embraces not merely "the world" as it appears to me already given, but also that world which I would wish to bring into being through my free action. An end—any end at all—begins as a kind of dream of practical reason.⁶³

⁶² Aquinas 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.8., a.1, ad.3: "Ad tertium dicendum quod illud quod non est ens in rerum natura, accipitur ut ens in ratione, unde negationes et privationes dicuntur entia rationis. Per quem etiam modum futura, prout apprehenduntur, sunt entia. In quantum igitur sunt huiusmodi entia, apprehenduntur sub ratione boni, et sic voluntas in ea tendit." — "That which is not being in the sense of the things of nature is taken as being in the reason, and thus negations and privations are said to be beings of reason. So also, future things, insofar as they are apprehended, are beings, and inasmuch as they are beings, they are apprehended under the aspect of good, and in that way the will tends to them."

⁶³ When an intended end is something "realizable" in physical terms, it is not the mere conception of a "possible being", but that of a future existent whose "realization" hinges upon my actions. A possible being is mind-independent in its possibility (which is inscribed in the nature of things), but the end in intention is mind-dependent in its aspect

As our consideration ranges over the wide realm of fictive being, we confront the question of how the *desirability* of an end correlates with its *possibility* (in itself, or for a particular individual). While it is clear there need be no strict proportion between desirability and possibility, does *impossibility* necessarily extinguish desire? Or are desirability and possibility finally independent variables?

In the creation of a fictive being such as Sherlock Holmes—and all the more in the creation of dragons or Elves—desire outstrips the givenness of nature and even nature’s possibilities. This literary magic puts before our apprehension beings we come to know quite as well as we know many naturally existing individuals of whom we know only what we have heard or read.⁶⁴ The magic derives from the positivity of relations, a positivity that is indifferent to the mind-independent or mind-dependent status of the relation’s terms. This positivity-*cum*-indifference of relation is, metaphysically speaking, a fact: it is the ground of the possibility of human intellectual creation. Its moral correlate is the primordial human desire, God-like in character, to create and to take delight in what is created.

In his landmark essay, “On Fairy-Stories”, J. R. R. Tolkien explored the human art of creative fantasy, the creation of a “secondary world”, which takes the form of a narrative inasmuch as we desire to *live* in it. In a secondary world, the constraints of natural possibility and impossibility—“natural” within what we may call the primary world—are loosened, in order that, for example, the dragon might be. “I desired dragons with a profound desire.” As he grew up, fairy-stories, Tolkien discovered, “were not concerned with possibility, but with desirability. If they awakened *desire*, satisfying it while often whetting it unbearably, they succeeded.”⁶⁵

Some might object that this is but a lofty approach to what is in the end mere entertainment, an elaborate pretense, a jest. We do not “really believe” in such

of an *ens realizandum* (something to be made to exist) that overcomes the deficit of being represented by its futurity.

⁶⁴ As we have considered the functional equivalence of the patterns of relations that build up true versus false hypotheses about nature, we should consider also the functional equivalence of the patterns of relations that constitute ideas of fictional characters on the one hand, and ideas of existing persons (formed say, by reading biographies) on the other.

⁶⁵ J. R. R. Tolkien 1947 [1966]: “On Fairy-Stories”, 40.

things. To which Tolkien might respond: if the primary world is not a laughing matter, why should a secondary world be a laughing matter? If divine creation is not a jest, why should “sub-creation” be a jest? The motive of creative fantasy is that the secondary world should *be*—that it should *be*, indeed, in its very unlikeness to the primary world, an unlikeness that bespeaks “freedom from the domination of observed fact.”⁶⁶ As “sub-creation,” fantasy is the human art that Tolkien regarded as “most nearly pure..., and so (when achieved) the most potent,”⁶⁷ which sounds rather serious indeed. As for the matter of whether we “believe in it”, the fact is that we do believe in it, to the extent that the art of sub-creation has succeeded. Corresponding to the secondary world is not the oft-mentioned “suspension of disbelief” (if anything, a signal of poor art), but rather “secondary belief”, a form of belief that corresponds to the way the secondary world *is*.⁶⁸

5.3. Daydreams and Dark Magic

Now let us consider a daydream. I am a concert pianist, playing the Tchaikovsky piano concerto brilliantly before appreciative classical audiences. I can imagine my way through the whole score, fingers delicate when they need to be delicate, flying when they need to fly. At the final chord of the third movement, thunderous applause. In the primary world, many years ago, I had thought to study music, but became an insurance underwriter instead. In this secondary world, I am a concert pianist. Banal? Perhaps, but not as banal as life as an insurance underwriter seems to me.

Desire always tends in some way toward actual existence, in the primary world sense of “actual.” I would not even dream this daydream but as a means to perfect myself “actually” by this satisfaction, banal as it is. Desire tends toward actual existence, but, for lack of “natural possibility” (for it is far too late to become a concert pianist), it must rest in this case in the good of an “as if”. Desire tends toward actual existence, but lack of natural possibility does not compel the laying aside of desire, which may continue to adhere to an object “as

⁶⁶ Ibid, 47.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 36-37.

if it were possible.” “As if it were possible”... and it is, in the secondary world of the daydream.

We would desire the true power of enchantment, said Tolkien—a power that would enable us (the creators and the receivers of art) to enter a secondary world “to the satisfaction of [our] senses”, as “partners in making and delight.”⁶⁹ This would be the true Elvish magic, but this we do not possess. As it is, we must fall back on a lesser magic involving “another view of adjectives,” a magic that can

make heavy things light and able to fly, turn grey lead into yellow gold, and the still rock into a swift water... [W]e may cause woods to spring with silver leaves and rams to wear fleeces of gold, and put hot fire into the belly of a cold worm. But in such “fantasy”, as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator.⁷⁰

The danger in the magic of sub-creation is that of self-idolatry, of coming to worship oneself in one’s own works.⁷¹ Further, inasmuch as every object (pure object or not) is public in principle, one may use the magic of discourse—not merely literary discourse, but other fictions woven into the discourse of ordinary practical life—to seduce and dominate others.

Or, perhaps, the failure to face the moral demands of one’s state in life may sink one into a listlessness in which one attaches oneself to a different sort of daydream, preferring to embrace *this*, rather than the moral task lying before one. So, the man in the unhappy marriage carries on an imaginative life with someone else, an elaborate mythology replete with vivid compensations. In his ordinary domestic setting, he moves about like a sleepwalker, even as his mind and heart live in a secondary world.

A daydream becomes *mystical* when the “deficit of being” that is overcome by the fictive capacity is that very *futility* that moral demands would impose upon

⁶⁹ Ibid, 52-53.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 22-23.

⁷¹ Ibid, 55: “Men have conceived not only of elves, but they have imagined gods, and worshipped them, even worshipped those most deformed by their authors’ own evil. But they have made false gods out of other materials: their notions, their banners, their monies; even their sciences and their social and economic theories have demanded human sacrifice. *Abusus non tollit usum*. Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our measure and in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only made, but made in the image and likeness of a Maker.”

the daydream. The mystical daydream triumphs over moral constraints, as creative fantasy triumphs over natural constraints, through the positing of new forms of relativity that amount to a reimagining of the moral universe, in which the daydream is no longer a “relative good” (*secundum quid bonum*) but that which is *simply good*. The demands represented by the norm of morality become the demands of an adversary, the enemy of what is simply good. So, the man who chooses the affair: “This is my right. I will shed this old life of mine—the fragments of it must fall as they will—and emerge into the sunshine. The one who would blame me is the blameworthy one.”

Even as the non-application of the norm of morality is a necessary condition of moral evil from the standpoint of agency in nature, the distinctive fiction of the mystical daydream is a necessary condition of moral evil from the standpoint of the being of objects, some of which are mind-independent being “objectified”, and others pure objects. Every object is an object construed, engendered as an interpretant within the objective world, and every object becomes, in its turn, a sign within that world.

Moral evil is dark magic. It weaves a web that bewitches its author, and draws others into its web.

In a particular house on a particular street, there lives a man who is offended by whatever contradicts his will. He was born clever, his wife ingenuous. His discourse in her regard is nothing but reproach. He makes use of his “marital rights” (as he would put it) from time to time. Apart from that, he never lays a hand on her, either in violence or in tenderness. But she is continually violated. She is convinced that she is a poor wife, that she deserves every single one of his reproaches. In the end, she accepts that, being fundamentally inadequate, she is bound to fail him but, for all that, no less bound to keep trying. And in the end, he becomes cruel. His reproaches become ever more searching and ingenious, and an undercurrent of pleasure with himself begins to flow beneath the aggravations of the moment.

When he wounds her, it is most vital that she understand exactly what he wants her to understand: the precise mode of her failure, how particularly undeserving she is of consideration in this case, how remote she still is from the level of “what any man has a right to expect.” The heart of this evil, its vital reality, is the reality of signification.

From the standpoint of *ens naturae*, both his being and hers undergo loss. The locus of evil, however, is not mere nature, but the objective world. His dominion over her—the dominion in which he particularly exults—is a dominion of one who weaves webs of meaning, a dominion over chains of interpretants. The exercise of this dark power is an exercise, not of efficient causality which is only the body and the channel, but of the causality of signs.

THE END

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Made of Flame and Air

A Comment on Kirk Kanzelberger¹

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Abstract: I comment on certain aspects of Kirk Kanzelberger's article, "Reality and the Meaning of Evil", especially the distinction between "beings of nature" and "beings of reason" in the account of evil. For this, I employ the analogy of C. S. Lewis's "Meditation in a Toolshed." I also consider the nature of the object of the moral act as a being of reason. I conclude with some reflections on Kirk's notion of the "mystical daydream."

Kirk Kanzelberger begins his article, "Reality and the Meaning of Evil," with a bit of fiction. This seems appropriate since, in the course of his reflections, he will show how our ability to create stories for ourselves plays a crucial part in our capacity for evil. Here, I'll comment on some of his arguments, by no means doing justice to their depth and insight, but highlighting certain aspects of them.

Kirk's opening story is about an encounter at a cocktail party between an avid, neo-Thomist graduate student and his friendly conversation partner. Our tendency, on hearing any story, is to identify ourselves with one of the characters. In Kirk's story, I found myself identifying with both characters.

Over many years of teaching philosophy, I've often explained (as Kirk's graduate student does) that evil consists not in something positive but in a lack of being or actuality that should be present. Like Kirk's student, I've been quite pleased at how this explanation shows that God, the First Cause of all being, is not the cause of evil. I've suggested that Thomas Aquinas uses a kind of "metaphysical scalpel" to dissect the evil act, showing God to be the ultimate cause of the act

¹ Correspondence to editors@realityjournal.org.

insofar as it has being, but not insofar as it is lacking in being. It is precisely insofar as it is lacking in being, however, that the action is evil.²

Much as I agreed with Kirk's graduate student, however, I was also drawn by the arguments of the other character, who says: "Evil—evil itself—isn't only privation. It is like a dream, a shadowy reality but a reality nonetheless, and evil. It is what the wicked want... And it doesn't stay in their heads. It emerges and it spreads."³ Evil doesn't feel like, and isn't experienced as, just a lack of being. It feels like something more. Somehow the metaphysical account is not the full story, and Kirk's article fills us in on what's missing.

To find that, though, as Kirk explains, we have to take another look at the world we're living in. It's not just the metaphysical world of "beings of nature" but also the semiotic world of "beings of reason," the "lifeworld" of our language, thoughts and experience. This world is also real and, in comparison with it, the metaphysical world is something of an abstraction since it leaves so much out. As Kirk points out, when the world is taken simply as a collection of beings of nature, "[t]he meaning of 'reality' then collapses into an accepted synonym for the being of nature, and 'realism' itself turns into a form of myopia that fails to see realities constituted by cognition for what they are".⁴

² See Michael J. Dodds 2012: *Unlocking Divine Action: Contemporary Science and Thomas Aquinas*: 240-41: "The effect of the deficient secondary cause is reduced to the first nondeficient cause as regards what it has of being and perfection, but not as regards what it has of defect; just as whatever there is of motion in the act of limping is caused by the motive power, whereas what there is of obliqueness in it does not come from the motive power, but from the curvature of the leg. And, likewise, whatever there is of being and action in a bad action, is reduced to God as the cause; whereas whatever defect is in it is not caused by God, but by the deficient secondary cause" (St. Thomas Aquinas, 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.49, a.2, ad.2. For this reason, as Edward Schillebeeckx explains, it is not God but human beings who are the "first cause" of moral evil: "[H]ere we have finitude, as it were, as 'the first cause.' As soon as there are creatures, there is the possibility (not the necessity) of a negative and original initiative of finitude, if I can put it that way... For Thomas, it is a senseless philosophical undertaking to look for a particular cause, a ground or motive for evil and suffering in God; these do not necessarily follow from our finitude, but they do draw their fundamental possibility from there". Schillebeeckx 1980: *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*: 728-29).

³ Kanzelberger 2019: "Reality and the Meaning of Evil", *Reality: a journal for philosophical discourse* 1.1 (2020): 151.

⁴ Kanzelberger 2019: "Reality and the Meaning of Evil", 159.

In his article, "Meditation in a Toolshed," C. S. Lewis alludes to something like this distinction between "beings of nature" and "beings of reason".⁵ He makes a distinction between "looking at" an experience from the outside and "looking along" it by entering into it. He imagines himself in a darkened toolshed where a small beam of light shines through a chink in the roof. When he "looks at" the beam, he sees a bright patch with a few dust motes floating in it. When he shifts his position to let the beam strike him directly in the eye, he "looks along" it, and suddenly sees through the chink in the roof to the bright blue sky and white clouds beyond it. Similarly, if one stands outside of any experience and "looks at" it, one sees something quite different than if one enters into the experience and "looks along" it. If one simply "looks at" the experience of falling in love, for instance, one may be able to see and measure brain activity and gland secretions, but one will miss the true depth of the experience which can be found only by entering into it and "looking along" it. Lewis concludes that, in order to discover reality in its fullness, we must look not only "at" experiences (as empirical science tends to do), but also "along" them (to encompass the depth of reality that goes beyond the empirical).

I think that limiting oneself to "looking at" is something like limiting one's account of reality to include only "beings of nature" and leaving out the rich world of experience to be found in "beings of reason." When that world is included, the "beings of nature" are recognized as "objects" of experience, part of the broader "objective world" of human life. As Kirk explains: "This world, the objective world, is not a collection of things but a fabric of experience woven of natural as well as cultural strands, all alike objective or existing as known, and all alike public in principle".⁶

Our account of the nature of evil must include not only the metaphysical world of beings of nature but also the experiential world of beings of reason. An account of natural evils (such as blindness) can be given purely in terms of beings of nature, explaining the different ways that such beings are subject to privations (such as lack of sight). An account of moral evil, however, requires a broader vision of the world including beings of reason and the complex web of relationships to which these give rise.

⁵ C. S. Lewis 1945: "Meditation in a Toolshed," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*: 212-15.

⁶ Kanzelberger 2019: "Reality and the Meaning of Evil", 163.

This world, the objective world, is not a collection of things but a fabric of experience woven of natural as well as cultural strands, all alike objective or existing as known, and all alike public in principle. As we have seen, the cultural or mind-dependent strands contribute in varying ways to this fabric. Even when our attention seems focused on some “physical thing” such as a table, that thing—or rather, that object—will often on reflection turn out to be some kind of amalgam of nature and what is not mere nature, inasmuch as the object bears a cultural significance which is for us more formal and essential in the object than its physical constitution. Often enough, objects in the human lifeworld have nothing in them of nature, but are pure objects.

Kanzelberger, “Reality and the Meaning of Evil” [p.163].

The moral act itself is fundamentally a being of reason. Aquinas says that whether an act is good or bad depends on its object.⁷ The object “is not the matter of which (a thing is made), but the matter about which (something is done).”⁸ The nature of this object has been a matter of considerable dispute.⁹ What is clear is that the object involves not just the thing that happened (a trigger was pulled and someone died), but the understanding and will of the doer (who may, for instance, intend the act as either self-defense or murder). Aquinas teaches that, in choosing to do evil, one desires the good to which the evil is

⁷ 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.18, a.2, c.

⁸ 1271: *ST Ia-IIae*, q.18, a.2, ad.2.

⁹ See, for instance, John Abraham Makdisi 2017: “The Object of the Moral Act: Understanding St. Thomas Aquinas through the Work of Steven Long and Martin Rhonheimer.” Dissertation. The Catholic University of America, <<https://islandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/cuislandora%3A64685/datastream/PDF/view>> (accessed February 15, 2020); Martin Rhonheimer 2011: “The Moral Object of Human Acts and the Role of Reason according to Aquinas: A Restatement and Defense of my View,” *The Josephinum Journal of Theology*, 18.2: 454-506; John Finnis 1991: “Object and Intention in Moral Judgments according to Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 55.1: 1-27; Lawrence Dewan 2008: “St. Thomas, Rhonheimer, and the Object of the Human Act,” *Nova et Vetera* 6.1: 63-112.

attached more than the good of which the evil is the privation: as one may desire the perceived good of being free of a blackmailer, to which the act of murder is attached, more than the good of justice of which murder is the privation.¹⁰ When evil is desired in this way, the act must be viewed not as essentially good and incidentally evil (as involving some privation), but as essentially evil (just as the conversation partner in Kirk's opening story intuitively recognized): "The action done is a deficient good, which is good in a certain respect, but simply evil."¹¹

Kirk explains that a moral act involves both a free movement of the will and a consideration of the norm of morality which entails both "the order of reason and of divine law (*ordo rationis et legis divinae*)".¹² This norm is not just some arbitrary code of morality, but a standard that is connatural to the human being since "in being true to this norm, the rational being is being true to its own nature, willing an end that is due—an end, in other words, that represents the excellence of its own way of being and acting".¹³

The question is, if this norm is connatural to the human being, how or why would a human ever act against it? This brings us back to our capacity for story-telling. This ability can be a good thing, as Kirk notes in his wonderful review of Tolkien's account of fairy tales. The positive aspect of story-telling is also exemplified in the musical, *The Man of La Mancha*, when the priest character expresses a very favorable view of Don Quixote's story-telling delusions in seeing a wretched kitchen wench as a great lady whom he names "Dulcinea": "There is no Dulcinea. She's made of flame and air. And yet how lovely life would seem, if every man could weave a dream to keep him from despair. To each his Dulcinea, though she's only flame and air."¹⁴

¹⁰ 1266-68: *ST* Ia, q.19, a.9, c.: "Never therefore would evil be sought after, not even accidentally, unless the good that accompanies the evil were more desired than the good of which the evil is the privation".

¹¹ 1271: *ST* Ia-IIae, q.18, a.1, ad.1.

¹² Kanzelberger 2019: "Reality and the Meaning of Evil", 169.

¹³ *Ibid*, 169-70.

¹⁴ See <https://lyricsplayground.com/alpha/songs/t/toeachhisdulcinea.html> (accessed 14 February 2020). The lyrics seem to resonate with Cervantes' own poetry: "¡Oh vanas esperanzas de la gente! / ¡Cómo pasáis con prometer descanso, / Y al fin paráis en sombra, en humo, en sueño" (Miguel de Cervantes 1605-1615: *El Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quijote De La Mancha*, in the English translation by J.M. Cohen, *The Adventures of Don*

Often enough, however, we freely and consciously manufacture the wrong sort of story for ourselves—a story that deludes us into thinking that the good which is really connatural to us (and in which alone we can find true happiness) is evil. As Kirk explains:¹⁵

A daydream becomes *mystical* when the “deficit of being” that is overcome by the fictive capacity is that very *futility* that moral demands would impose upon the daydream. The mystical daydream triumphs over moral constraints, as creative fantasy triumphs over natural constraints, through the positing of new forms of relativity that amount to a reimagining of the moral universe, in which the daydream is no longer a “relative good” (*secundum quid bonum*) but that which is simply good. The demands represented by the norm of morality become the demands of an adversary, the enemy of what is simply good.

Kirk is to be commended for his article, not only for showing us the speculative importance of recognizing the “lifeworld” of ideas and signs, but also for alerting us to the practical importance of seeing how easily we may slip into our own mystical daydream.

Quixote, 460: “How vain are all the hopes of humankind! / How sweet their promises of quiet seem, / And yet they end in shadow, smoke, and dream”.

¹⁵ Kanzelberger 2019: “Reality and the Meaning of Evil”, 197-98.

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