

# Freedom and Intimacy in von Balthasar's Theo-logic 1

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## Preview

From the perspective of Christian theology, divine freedom is the paradigm of human freedom, but it is also completely unlike ours in its infinity. This is the paradox of the analogy of being: in its infinity, the Archetype of our being is also completely other. In contrast, likeness between contingent beings is limited in that each being is individuated yet similar to those of like species. No matter how alike beings are, unlikeness increases with generic distance. At the asymptotic limit, the Archetype is infinitely unlike us, but remains the ultimate blueprint for each being. If as Archetype, God's infinite freedom is qualitative of infinite being, then all finite beings must possess freedom to some finite degree. Herein lies the problem treated in this paper: how can both *animate* and *inanimate* being possess freedom? To answer this question, the author draws upon the first volume of part two of Hans Urs von Balthasar's sixteen volume trilogy, *Theo-logic: The Truth of the World*.

## Freedom, Intimacy and Nature in von Balthasar's *Theo-logic I*

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From the perspective of Christian theology, divine freedom is the paradigm of human freedom, but it is also completely unlike ours in its infinity. This is the paradox of the analogy of being: in its infinity, the Archetype of our being is also completely other. In contrast, likeness between contingent beings is limited in that each being is individuated yet similar to those of like species. No matter how alike beings are, “unlikeness” increases with generic distance. At the asymptotic limit, the Archetype is infinitely unlike us, but remains the ultimate blueprint for each being. If as Archetype, God’s infinite freedom is qualitative of infinite being, then all finite beings must possess freedom to some finite degree. Herein lies the problem treated in this paper: how can both *animate* and *inanimate* being possess freedom? To answer this question, I will draw upon the first volume of part two of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s sixteen volume trilogy, *Theo-logic: The Truth of the World*.

### **The Degrees of Intimacy**

Balthasar’s philosophy of nature states that all levels of physical existence, both animate and inanimate, possess a freedom peculiar to its level of being. We can recognize the validity of this proposition in our personal experiences of life. But how can inanimate objects or even primitive animate beings be free? Is insect freedom violated when we keep a lid on an insect cage in the laboratory?

Balthasar draws a connection between intelligibility and freedom. Truths apparent to us, in this case data from scientific investigation, depend not only on our senses, but also on the disclosedness to our senses of the object in question. The truth found in beings is both *in* the disclosure and *in* the understanding of the

observer. With Heidegger, Balthasar understands truth as *aletheia*, an unveiling. In their disclosedness, beings show themselves. Their quiddity is provocative and incomplete because it points beyond the phenomenal to mystery. In the revelation of being, there is an infinite component that is not apparent. This is true of the whatness of all beings, pre-animate, living, moving, and thinking. “The intimate character of being, which reaches its completed end in the conscious spirit, has its preliminary stages in unconscious nature. There is no being that does not enjoy an interiority, however liminal and rudimentary it may be.”<sup>1</sup> To recognize interiority in beings with no rational self-consciousness requires that we contrast it with its archetype: God.

Intimacy, spirit, and freedom have their infinite expression in God, whose revelation is creative of humanity imbued with spirit (soul) and a free intimacy, and finitely informative of divinity in the revelation of the Word of God. Yet intimacy, spirit, and freedom also have finite expression in human interactions. We know each other in the barefacedness of our interactions based upon the paradigm of self-knowledge that only reaches its full cognizance *in* interpersonal interactions. We reveal our hidden selves only to those for whom the mutuality of such revelations can be trusted. However, according to Balthasar, this intimacy is the quality of all being. It is from this intimate interiority that the hidden qualities of inanimate nature are accessible to us in scientific study. “This may be generally conceded in the case of living things, yet it is no less true of the lowest level of being, which is occupied by inanimate things. Even they are not merely a passive prey for knowledge. At work even in them are energies that display themselves externally and thus move from the inside to the outside.”<sup>2</sup>

In the scientific encounter with an inanimate being, the self-evident disclosure is always limited by the inanimate being’s inability to cooperate in mutual intelligibility. The experience of discovery, the morphological moment, is the grounding basis upon which we assemble our understanding of its scientific qualities. Although inanimate being’s essential nature becomes incrementally understood, the depth of its hidden interiority must, beyond the first encounter, be extracted by increasingly sophisticated empirical means. The initial passivity of the encounter follows the “what is it?” question, and rudimentary answers follow that lead to higher order questions like “how?” and “with what?” The cycle continues without end.

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-logic: Theological Logical Theory I: Truth of the World*, trans. Adrian J. Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Answers always generate further questions probing the infinite depth of “energies” within to which each being’s disclosedness points. According to Balthasar, essence is not hidden but partially revealed in the showing that is seen. “This essence is, of course, not simply an unknown factor hidden behind its appearances. That the natural laws discovered and formulated on the basis of the phenomena can be applied to the core of nature, in other words, to what is not directly available to sensory perception, is sufficient proof that the essence is not completely inaccessible to knowledge but rather does really manifest itself through the appearing phenomena.”<sup>3</sup>

Evident in its absence by what is tantalizingly shown, perpetual hiddenness grounds the provisionality of scientific laws, always in renewal as each novel observation requires. Although nature has a finite intelligibility, our access to it is limited by our cognition that is grounded in a self-consciousness that in our experience is forever augmenting. All beings have this two-fold level for us: that which is understood and that which is yet to be intuited by future understanding.

Yet it is just as clear that reality, not merely by reason of some accidental circumstance, but by reason of an intrinsic necessity, must always remain richer than any cognition of it and that the truth even of the lowest level of being contains a richness that so utterly eludes exhaustive investigation that it can continue to engage inquirers until the end of time yet never ends up as a heap of unmysterious, completely surveyable facts. Something of the coquetry of veiling found in living things seems to belong already to material things; whenever the knower believes that he has got them once and for all, they slip away, leaving behind them a cloak of appearance.<sup>4</sup>

This coquetry of being that drives our questioning both of self and of the other is a sign indicating the unity of being and the oneness of all beings. When we ask about any being, including ourselves, we plumb the depths of being itself and ultimately ask about God.

Balthasar summarizes his Christian philosophy of the interiority of being as an image of the hiddenness that God has revealed, yet remains eternally mysterious:

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Along with their own being, God has given to all created things their own operation, and this includes a spontaneity in manifesting themselves outwardly, an echo, however distant, of his infinite, majestic freedom. Every entity that has being-for-itself possesses an inside and an outside, an intimate and a public sphere. The intimate dimension of beings can appear in a great variety of forms and on a great variety of levels. It increases as things move up the scale of being-for-itself; it reaches its complete form on the level of self-conscious spirit. On this level, the exteriorization of the interior is left to the discretion of the spirit and is thereby protected from being grasped mechanically by any stranger's knowledge. Yet even sub-spiritual entities are not completely bereft of this kind of protection. Every level of being possesses a characteristic form of this protection that differs from that of the others, a special mantle received as a gift from the Creator. This protection gives each particular unveiling and revelation of a thing the character of a solemn act, occurring only once, in which the inexhaustible newness of truth overpoweringly manifests itself.<sup>5</sup>

This protection is pre-moral in non-spiritual beings. Only in the expression of will informed by intellect in spiritual beings is the unveiledness of being a free act of disclosure. Moreover, only in the free living being does intelligibility intend the free act to be intelligible by other like beings. "It follows that the more perfectly an entity possesses itself, the freer it is, the less closed in on itself it is, and, therefore, the more receptive it is to everything around it. Entities without consciousness, such as stones, have no receptivity. Their essence is closed to itself, and so they are unreceptive to everything around them; because they are not subjects, there are no objects for them."<sup>6</sup>

As a result, subjectivity is attendant with intelligibility and freedom. There is a proportional relationship between self-possession and openness to other beings. Self-possession is the willed outcome of the self-conscious being that has achieved self-understanding through its unity with the objective world. The interiority of the intellectual being is in part what it has internalized or intuited. Through cogitation it understands, ever provisionally, its place in relation to objects and other living beings, and it recognizes that they possess a similar subjectivity. However, the interiority that enables us to recognize the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

interiority of others is not exclusive to intellectual beings. All beings have varying degrees of interiority, albeit of a non-free, non-intellectual, less sensate nature. “Entities with less perfect interiority, such as plants, are capable of assimilating some little part of their environment, but they do so without becoming inwardly aware of the other as such.”<sup>7</sup>

Plants have no consciousness of the inanimate matter they incorporate into themselves in sophisticated biochemical ways. Their sensory limitations, phototactic movement, and limited natural ability to protect themselves from predators are all products of genetic heritage. Beings with limited nervous systems integrate sensory and motor functions but non-cognitively. “The same is true, albeit on a higher level, even of animals. To be sure, their sensorium unlocks them to the outside world and grants them a certain perception of otherness. Nevertheless, because they lack self-consciousness, they are likewise incapable of setting the other over against themselves *as other*.”<sup>8</sup>

Animals, both prey and predators, have a keen sense of otherness but at the instinctual level of concupiscence, not the intellectual level of mutual recognized self-consciousness, as do animals depicted in anthropomorphic fairy tales. The subject/object dichotomy is the privilege and the trap of human beings. “The world is unlocked in its objectivity only to man, because his self-consciousness gives him the measure of being.”<sup>9</sup>

In the disclosure of being, there is also the disclosed: the one to whom a being discloses itself. This receptivity is by necessity reflexive. The emergence of self-conscious being brings with it contingent intelligibility as the image of the infinite intelligibility of the creative act. What Balthasar means by the “measure of being” is based upon the standard of otherness emerging from self-understanding, what Fichte calls an “inner other.” The beauty of a flower opens up in the consciousness of the observer giving the flower its fullest expression of disclosure while simultaneously reserving its hidden intimacy that can only be further extracted by cutting the flower and placing it in a vase to enhance its disclosure, or by taking it apart to study its anatomy or biochemistry. Even when admired or studied to the fullness of contemporary scientific methods, it still hides its purposiveness. “The inside lies concealed within an almost impenetrable veil: no scientific research will ever be able to explain what the vital principle is

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 45.

in itself. We see the facts, and they seem like unalloyed miracles to us.”<sup>10</sup> Once uncovered, the problematic loses its wondrousness and becomes cold data, retaining its purposiveness but partially bereft of its mystery. “It covers the unknown with names and concepts but does not see that it has only glued a mere label onto a container of unknown content.” The “movement” from hiddenness to disclosedness indicates the manifold yet hidden, the “publicly evident essence.” In science, “while we may be able to record ever more precisely the outward manifestations of living things, no science will ever succeed in unveiling their mysteries.”<sup>11</sup> However, the hidden essence that would answer for us the question “what is life?” is not entirely opaque to us. The knower cannot say that he has grasped nothing of the mystery of life. In fact, this “intimate-public secret” [*heilig-öffentliche Geheimnis*] is not just permanently concealed but also, and to the same degree, permanently divulged. At bottom, we know more of this “secret” if we go by its appearances than if we attempt to spy out the hidden background from out of which these appearances move toward us.<sup>12</sup>

If truth is *aletheia*, then what remains hidden attains its truth-value in the very act of intelligibility. Living things show life by their animate sensibility. “Truth is the unveiling of a being insofar as it is, and the living being unveils itself by living its life: it unfolds this meaning stage by stage with an almost exaggerated obviousness. It displays nothing other than itself. No one who has witnessed the unfolding of a plant’s life ought to say that he has seen ‘only’ the appearance of life, not its essence.”<sup>13</sup>

The movement of the living thing, in both the kinesthetic and the figurative sense, indicates movement in the background, like the actions of the shadow puppeteer, who both creates and enables the dramatic performance. “Whatever could be communicated of this life, whatever was meant for the general public, whatever the Creator deemed worthy of being known by everyone—all of this has been declared word for word.”<sup>14</sup>

What is evidentially shown is “worthy” in that God’s creative prerogative is a *directed* showing. The animate being’s morphology is necessarily shown, first to lead us to plumb the depths that lie beyond *by way of* its disclosedness. “On the other hand, no one ought to conclude that he has somehow inspected the whole

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

essence of life or that he has penetrated to the mysterious center from which the plant's outward manifestations emerged. He knows, simply by looking at these manifestations, that the possibilities of life are infinitely more abundant than what is actually on display ... There is an incomprehensible prodigality in the very essence of life."<sup>15</sup>

We make this incomprehensible prodigality accessible to ourselves creatively in endless metaphorical expressions. God creates in mystery; we respond in creative expressiveness. The reflexive nature of this receptivity is never exhausted. A living being discloses itself to other living beings by their sharing in the common mystery of life. The truth is shown as living, grounded upon its animate /infinite hiddenness. If not for this hidden infinity in finite being, the impossibility for it to contain its overflowing abundance could not be explained either scientifically nor could *poesis* disclose the refulgence of *physis*. "It would betoken the poverty of being, and ultimately of the Creator, if everything possible were also actual. We know a great artist insofar as his works reveal how sovereignly he has created them and how little strain they put on his powers. In the same way, we recognize living nature by the fact that its appearance itself reveals the infinite surplus of the possible."<sup>16</sup>

Absence always points to substance in the well-spring yet to emerge from the depths. As Balthasar puts it: "The finite appearance as such is the coming to light of a certain infinity." The finite itself is imbued with what is mysteriously shown because its incompleteness provokes the question of how much more is not evident—because "the perfection of its finitude is precisely as such the revelation of its intrinsic infinity." Infinity's mysterious fullness, evident in finitude, cannot be hidden. That something *is* hidden is obvious; what precisely is *hidden* ever remains so. "This infinity truly becomes visible in its appearance as the excess that does not become visible; it is unveiled as what remains veiled; it is made known as the ineliminable mystery of being."<sup>17</sup>

The essence of being is not merely what is hidden, but also what is evident in the disclosed and in the that-ness that the disclosed indicates. Thatness in turn indicates the infinitely hidden whatness of the truth of life. We perceive and come to know evidential truth. We increasingly come to know hidden, problematic truth. We recognize what points to the "thatness" of life. We cannot fully know what life is any more than we can characterize our own personal truth.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



Self-disclosure to oneself is the insoluble problem of finite being. “Truth, insofar as it is the unveiling of a being for a knower, effects this unveiling, not in a one-to-one correspondence between a preexistent inner model and an outward replica of it, but rather in a primitive movement from an inexhaustible inside into an always determinately formed outside.”<sup>18</sup> This movement is not from an inner, multi-dimensional, objective, living, and non-individuated order inaccessible to empirical inquiry unless instantiated. “Things thereby show that they live their own life and that the point of their existence is not simply limited to being an object of some knowledge.” This movement is ultimately from personal Divine being to personal human beings in the infinite creative dialectic of creation. Because the disclosing source is infinite, and the “learner” is finite, “the knower has to catch as much of it as he is able to grasp.” The image of God reflected in all beings, reaching their created fullness in the self-consciousness of human being, points to the quasi-infinity and the true infinity of the Uncreated. “The truth of any being will always be infinitely richer and greater than the knower is capable of grasping.”<sup>19</sup>

### Freedom and Intimacy

Although all non-animate and pre-sensate beings possess intimate characters peculiar to their state, “this inward dimension remain(s) veiled to itself.”<sup>20</sup> From single-celled organisms to sub-human primates, there is an increasing subjectivity corresponding to a gradation of increasing self-consciousness and intelligence. Balthasar recognizes that the sub-threshold consciousness peculiar to animals “radically changes the situation of epistemology: the object is now itself a subject.” He writes of the emergence of self-consciousness:

From now on, we can no longer speak of *the* subject, as if there were just one, but only of a plurality of subjects, each of which possesses and knows its truth first of all for itself and whose intersubjectivity raises a host of new and difficult questions. At first sight, it is utterly bewildering for a subject that the objects waiting to be known also have an inner sphere and are thus knowers in their own right. The object’s inner space

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 88–89.

is itself filled to capacity with intellectual, subjective acts of cognition.<sup>21</sup>

In this distinguishing intersubjectivity, we cannot think of living things as objects of understanding but as living co-subjects, capable of experience. Their understanding is in some limited capacity comparable to ours. In the sensory encounter with a living thing, we reflexively experience a fore-theoretical understanding of its being alive prior to any ratiocination. If we encounter a skunk in the back yard, we do not take a long reflective moment to question the nature of its being, nor do we require further cogitation of whether its being is distinct from that of the lawn mower. We intuit on sight, just as the skunk does, what the possible outcomes of the encounter are. As we run for cover, questions for reflection arise, which demarcate the pre-rational moment from the scientific moment that follows—the truth as *aletheia* as distinct from propositional truth.

Studying living things, biologists attempt to minimize the intersubjectivity between the observer and the living thing observed to varying degrees, depending upon the sub-field of the investigator's expertise. Field biologists use "duck-blinds" when attempting to gain an objective distance from the animals they observe to minimize perturbation of the results. Higher primates, if they are aware of human presence, are impossible to study without accounting for their consciousness of being observed. Their behavior is influenced by their awareness of being observed by creatures recognizably similar to themselves. The scientist not so much observes the "wild" behaviour of the ape as studies how a wild ape becomes affected by scientific observation. The ape possessed of subhuman intellect cannot be regarded as merely an object. Conceptual truth, post-intuitional and gleaned from scientific methodology, is increasingly dialectic the more intelligent and self-aware the species observed is. However, reflexive judgment cannot characterize the dialectic between human and sub-human subjectivity without anthropomorphizing it. Anthropomorphization both inflates their nature and diminishes our own. Despite the unavoidable intersubjectivity, the scientific study remains valid.

At the highest created level of contingent self-consciousness, intersubjectivity becomes a factor. Multiple human views of a common object, as in scientific study, requires dialogue and must be interpreted from a hermeneutic peculiar to the methodology of the scientific discipline. Balthasar writes:

What is at stake, in fact, is nothing less than the basic question of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 89.

whether or not the subjective as such is objectifiable. But, supposing that it is not, the question then becomes whether we may not have to impose what seems to be a further restriction upon the principle that all being is intelligible. For even if two subjects know an object in common, even if they succeed in transforming their subjective knowledge into an objective cognition that can then serve as the basis for mutual understanding, the very subjectivity of their knowledge remains incommunicable.<sup>22</sup>

The uniqueness of human subjectivity persists independently of active dialogue. Without uniqueness there could be no true dialogue between subjects. The co-encounter with an object by two investigators generates a distancing, not from the object *per se*, but from each other, generated by their individual uniqueness. Their dialogue distinguishes the subjectivity of truth from intersubjectivity *as* truth independent of individual interpretation. The greater number of investigators involved in a study and in the attendant dialogue, the more their intersubjectivity asymptotically approaches objective characterization of the object. The most extreme form of the dialectic emerges amongst the total community of science whereby the scientific *logos* is manifest through the dialectic totality of the discipline *per se*. Still, individual subjectivities and the objective mystery of the object remain preserved because of the “prodigality of being” that remains out of reach. The pooled mystery of intersubjectivities far outweighs the mystery of any common object. The object remains an object. Subjects and subjectivities are constantly becoming.

Only in human intersubjectivity, albeit forever incomplete, can we be in any way certain that a common understanding is possible, although as the history of human thought has shown, there is no guarantee. The constant risk of our anthropomorphizing sub-human intersubjectivity illustrates how little we can know about what an animal cognizes beyond obvious emotional reactions such as pain, food, the pleasure of running, and the instinctive drives of reproduction.

What does an animal see, hear, and feel? We do not know now and we will never know in the future. The world of sensory images is purely subjective and, as such, cannot be objectified. To be sure, the scientist can, on the basis of comparative studies of sense organs in animals, draw certain analogical inferences about how animals perceive. That they do in fact perceive, indeed, that their perception is analogous to that of the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

subject performing these studies, is indisputable.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, how could we recognize them analogically except through some form of common experience pre-cognitively evident? For example, we share the same instinctive fear of snakes as do all anthropoid and pre-anthropoid primates. Primal fear may have its origin in what systematic biologists call phylogenetic memory inherited from the primitive mammals that scurried underfoot to avoid being stepped on by dinosaurs. Irrational emotionality, common to all human subjectivity, *necessarily* grounds our cognition. We are *never* free of emotion. Neither are animals ever free of a limited cognitive power, hence animal emotionality is all they really “know” of themselves. Balthasar says: “To classify animals as reflex mechanisms, is unworthy of serious natural science. Nevertheless, we shall never share animals’s experience of how they actually see or of what they actually feel when they show outward signs of pain or joy.”<sup>24</sup>

The incommunicability of human intersubjectivity, preserved even in the fullest expression of intellectual communion, is also evident in non-self-conscious being, forever reserving the intimacy of their limited subjectivity from human experience and cognizance. In this, animals are analogously “selves.” Even if we someday find a common language with whales, the evident joy of a dolphin’s leap will be forever hidden from us. Nor will they ever understand our delight at observing them.

Although in their limited showing of self all beings have a necessary hiddenness, Balthasar contends that none but humans are self-conscious. Scientists speculate that higher mammals have sophisticated “cultures” because of their ability to communicate with a vocabulary that imparts information. Yet, how could we ever scientifically determine this with certainty? Subjectivity, although unique to sentient beings, has a skeletal presence in inanimate being in the intimacy common to all being. The non-animate intimacy of things is incrementally subjectivized by the increasing complexity in the scale of animate beings. “Subjectivity is intimacy, indeed, intimacy guaranteed by the very being of things. This intimacy cannot be forcibly invaded, nor can it even be communicated as such. Whoever has being-for-himself has, of course, the capacity to express himself outwardly, but he does not have the capacity to get rid of his essential solitude.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 89–90.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 90

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Intimacy grants all beings a subjectivity peculiar to their level of self-awareness. Only the self-conscious being can be conscious of solitude—the personal awareness of intimacy. Solitude is inescapable even in a crowd. Subjectivity is both the gift and sorrow of free beings. Even though we are free to reveal as much of what we understand about personal truth, the depth of our personal intimacy is as pervasively mysterious to us as is the full opacity of personal intimacy to sub-rational beings. Hence we are aware of solitude. We attempt to plumb the depths of our infinite interiority.

Inanimate being is oblivious to this search. No being could have being without an intelligibly unintelligible hiddenness. Yet human self-consciousness gives us access to a “measure” of being beyond even that of the most self-aware animal. Self-consciousness provides us with a unique overview of creation that, through our analogizing, becomes oversight and stewardship (Gen 1). We see the world through our own eyes *and* reflected in those of our peers. The self-conscious being, possessed of subjective interiority “must content himself with having a world view and answering for it in his own name with a responsibility that he can never shove off onto another. For he does not know how the other sees the world. Even if the other saw it in the same way, one could never be finally certain that the other’s world picture was in fact the same. Moreover, the knower must acknowledge these limits imposed by the other’s self-being by letting go of the other’s self.”<sup>26</sup>

The uniqueness of individual subjectivity determines that, for each subject, there is a unique worldview determined from the authenticity and wisdom of the uniqueness of each self-consciousness.

The self-conscious being created in love has as its source and sustenance the divine love revealed from the depths of the divine intimacy: the intersubjectivity of the Trinity. In the intersubjective scrutiny of truth—the created image of infinitely shared divine intimacy—freedom is not only a personal expression within intersubjective parlance, it must be granted to the other as the basis of shared love: letting the other be—both shown and hidden. “Genuine community in the truth can be built only on the foundation of this basic resignation. Without this renunciation there can be no reciprocal gift-giving; without this distance there can be no proximity of minds; without this reverence before the other’s self-being there can be no love.”<sup>27</sup>

Without the inaccessible distance in otherness, inter-subjective love is not

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

possible. Love enables shared freedom and motivates the stewardship of the lesser intersubjectivity of human/non-human interdependence. Moreover, our inaccessibility to shared experience of, or with, sub-rational beings must not deter us from acknowledging their subjectivity. No animal can possess a human worldview, but even animals have unique worldviews peculiar to the genetic necessity of their species, although never with the full self-awareness of a human worldview.

The animal kingdom gives rise to a variegated profusion of subjective images of the world, all of which are closed off from one another. Each of these images is completely finite; it operates within a peculiar environment that is snugly fitted to its particular sensory apparatus ... We cannot imagine what a sensorium without a mind would be. These images of the world live alongside us and partially overlap our own. Alien worlds that we will never know pass right through ours, and sentient beings are separated by distances for which there is almost no common measure.<sup>28</sup>

It is our responsibility to let sub-rational beings be what they must be, what they ineluctably “tell” us they are (*aletheia*), and what we understand about them in our limited conceptualizations. That we act as stewards is not a limitation determining our separateness from them, but an indication of our commonality with them. What we say about their being, which brings their showing to a fullness that is otherwise *always* hidden, gives language to the silent words that their being names for us.

Nevertheless, sentient creatures are rooted in a medium of life common to all. All of them have an outward form that, in its own way, is as significant as a clearly articulated word. Nature has produced an immense number of such words—as many as there are genera and species of living things. And whereas plants are only spoken words, animals speak as much as they are spoken. Animals, unlike plants, are not merely a voice that takes form from within: they have a concomitant sensibility by which they are aware of this process of formation. They do not merely express something; they express themselves.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 91–92.

Human self-consciousness parses the grammar of the human word, translating sub-human self-expression into intelligible human language. Only through our translation-mediation does the intimate character of non-rational being reach expression. Unfree as sub-humans are to disclose what lies within them, our freedom enables an ever-greater explication of their disclosed truth. We act as “middle-men” who market their hidden truth for human consumption. “They themselves have a share in the movement from inside to outside, in the exterior communication of themselves, in their truth. They stand midway between freedom and unfreedom. They have the freedom to express themselves outwardly in some form of audible or inaudible language. But they do not yet have the freedom to express themselves when and how they wish.”<sup>30</sup>

Clearly, the full character of human freedom is grounded in a necessary evolutionary link to sub-rational being. Human freedom emerges from unfreedom as much as we are genetically linked ancestrally to animals. We can interpret what sub-rational beings show of what they *are*, but we are unable to know fully what they are or *how* they show it. For, “everything about the animal eludes us, not because it is inaccessible to awareness, but because it is the animal, and not we ourselves, who becomes aware of it.”<sup>31</sup> Although the animal’s awareness is non-conceptual and their interiority hidden, what they show is “not just objective expressions of life but subjective ones as well”<sup>32</sup> issuing from a “defective” self-consciousness.

In their inability to self-express first hand without our help, animals remain more mysterious to us than we are to ourselves. This interdependence of dialogue makes understanding possible. The reliance of medical research on animal intimacy to increase understanding of our physiological “intimacy” illustrates this fact clearly. Their limited freedom enables our objective understanding of subjectivity.

The movement in which they express themselves happens necessarily and is bound to a predetermined natural language. We do not understand this language immediately. We believe we can, at least in part, interpret its meaning ... What we do know for certain is that even what is obscure to us is the expression of life, which speaks meaningfully in its own words insofar as its exterior communication corresponds to its interiority. Every

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

word in the vast language of nature speaks itself, without knowing the sense of the others.<sup>33</sup>

We draw all “meanings” together and interpret their interdependent unity to the best of our current cognitive powers. For without us the manifold voices of created being remain God’s word, naturally spoken, echoing eternally, waiting to be heard, interpreted, and understood. We can make coherence out of apparently random facts that show the living principle that informs our life. “Yet the immensely coherent discourse that results is proof that this language emerges from a common fund of life that finds endless ways in which to express itself. The testimony of life reaches beyond the solitude of the individual word, which bears witness to a separate interiority. Life attests that it is a totality by the coordination of so many voices and fields of expression.”<sup>34</sup>

We freely gather our individual human words together with the words spoken by each being, motivated by the hunger to know how multiplicity is grounded in apparent unity. The ever-expanding sensorial assistance, both natural and technological, continuously informs the community of scholars about the data we interpret to revise our understanding of the truth of beings.

### **Human Freedom**

In humanity, self-consciousness reflects an inner dimension that Balthasar calls “light for itself”. Self-possession, unique to us, makes us consciously free. We are “substantially spirit” and therefore unique in creation. Balthasar writes, “To the extent that man is spirit, he can dispose of himself. Hence, he can decide whether and how he shall make his utterances. Freedom enters between the spirit’s self-possession and its self-expression, between the interior and the exterior word; it becomes an integral component of the truth.”<sup>35</sup>

In human life, where the inner dimension of being opens us up to self-disclosure, subjectivity reaches full self-consciousness and freedom. Not only self-conscious, we are also freely self-actuated. With freedom comes self-reliance and judgment about the sufficiency of one’s knowledge in relation to truth. Freedom determines not only the ability to express interiority in the external forum, but also the authenticity of its expression. Truth expressed becomes

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 93.



inseparable from truthfulness of the expresser. “Man freely disposes of truth, for it has been placed in his hands and committed to him to administer self-consciously. He is the first entity that can freely tell the truth, but for the same reason he is also the first that is capable of lying.”<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps the freedom to deceive has given humanity an edge in evolution, enabling survival over sub-rational predators possessed only of instinctual guile.<sup>37</sup> Deception, to some degree, common to animals, both in their behavior and their morphology, is relational. It is our deliberate attempt to alter the flow of disclosure from the interior to the exterior. Self-deception is self-defeating in the deliberate distortion of self-consciousness.<sup>38</sup> The transcendental character of being-true, moving from interiority to exteriority, unveils the character of the good. The self-conscious being may freely choose to embrace the goodness of truth. Non-self-conscious being is good necessarily.

We interpretively render truth through the free act of contextualizing it as the exteriorized judgment of veracity. Unfreedom has no resources to interpret truth’s disclosure beyond its showing and the unshown that it signifies. “The truth of things has hitherto consisted only in the relation between their essence and their appearance: they participated in truth insofar as their essence moved in such a way as to remain veiled in the very act of showing itself.”<sup>39</sup>

A flower in bloom is incapable of denying that it is ready for insects to pollinate. A male silkworm moth cannot help but follow the concentration gradient of pheromones the female releases up-wind, a mile away. The truth disclosed is necessarily revealed and mindlessly interpreted objectively. Not so in us, for the most part. Balthasar states, “In man, this objective truth is accompanied by subjective truth, which is the capacity to possess for oneself the measure between the thing and its expression. The object of knowledge becomes the subject of knowledge. Being coincides with consciousness in self-consciousness, thus becoming its own object. This is the true meaning of the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Deception is a crucial behavioral device in primate evolution. Fooling your predator betokens the intelligence sufficient for personal survival and collectively that of the species. See Loyal Rue, *The Grace of Guile: The Role of Deception in Natural History and Human Affairs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> “Deception occurs when a discrepancy between appearance and reality can be attributed in part to the causal influence of another organism. That is, a deceiver is an organism (A) whose agency contributes by design to the ignorance or delusion of another organism (B). Self-deception may be said to occur when A and B are the same organism.” Rue, *The Grace of Guile*, 88.

<sup>39</sup> *Theo-Logic I*, 93.

*cogito ergo sum.*<sup>40</sup>

Interpretation is a process of rendering the disclosed truth into an intelligible form that generates understanding of the inner word. This rendering constitutes subjective judgment about the object's truth. Self-interpretation is the subject bringing self to judgment as object. We live the mystery of our own truth and, in objective reflection upon it, confirm the infinity of that mystery in the insufficiency of each self-judgment. Each truth of self points to the intimacy both accessible and inaccessible to self. Herein lies the gray area between ignorance and self-deception.

In the external expression of the inner word, further interpretation occurs when language brings truth to the external forum. Accompanying the ability to interpret truth is the option to ignore one's interpretation and leave it unexpressed, retained for cultivating further cogitation. Truth as *aletheia* becomes concept and judgment.

This unity in which truth is discovered has a double form. On the one hand, it is an immediate unity, a self-possession intuitively apprehended as such. On the other hand, it is also a mediated unity, insofar as the spirit is capable of formulating its self-being in a concept and of synthesizing this concept (as predicate) with itself (as subject) in an evident judgment. This judgment draws its evidence from the spirit's original, unmediated unity with itself.<sup>41</sup>

The illumination evident to us in the encounter with being already has self-awareness as the basis of recognition of otherness. This becomes evident when we contrast the animate with the inanimate, the living with the dead, danger with safety etc. The immediate sense of self is a necessary self-revelation and the basis of recognition of the *aletheia* of other being. "Ontological unveiling is one with the capacity to convey an authentic concept and expression of oneself."<sup>42</sup>

Self-conscious intellection is the precondition for judgment of self and otherness, and both are preconditions for self-expression of the truth judged. Self-expression is primordial self-actuation. Self-conscious knowing and acting are the distinguishing characteristics of the spirit-being. "The spirit receives two gifts simultaneously: the gift of knowing the truth and the gift of saying it. It

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

would be unthinkable if it obtained only the first gift without the second ... The very existence of the intensity characteristic of spirit immediately requires a capacity for extension."<sup>43</sup>

The realization that we only have a limited self-understanding opens up the realization of the limitless characteristic of being whereby whatever question we ask always leads to an unsatisfactory answer that provokes an eternal series of further questions. This privation of awareness is the core of hunger for an increasing awareness of what is essentially intimate matter. Disclosure of as much as one knows reveals what would otherwise remain the soundless inner word. The move from intimacy to disclosure has a necessary quality about it inasmuch as the disclosure of non-rational being, in the evidential character of "presencing," is outside of the discloser's control.

Beyond the necessity for cognition in self-conscious being (we cannot not think), Balthasar's salient point is that our freedom to disclose also empowers us to discretion.

Being's revelation to itself also immediately enables and thus requires its revelation to others. But from henceforth this revelation is free. Even though man is predisposed to communication in general, he is not compelled by nature to any one conscious communication in particular. He does not have to say what he knows. He has the command of his treasury of knowledge, so that he can make a free gift of every particular disclosure. No one can wring his truth from him or manipulate it without his knowledge and consent ... Precisely when truth comes wholly to itself, when a being's unveiling is possessed and understood as such, truth is no longer something accessible to everyone in general but is a free, personal reality.<sup>44</sup>

The freedom to self-reveal is the freedom to give as much as one wishes the other to know. Not everyone can be trusted with the deeply intimate nature of personal subjective truth. Friends can benefit from our truth, as we can in our revelation of it to them—hearing it anew reactionally as they hear it—but even they can abuse it. Enemies can distort our truth or use it out of context to diminish our freedom to disclose other truths.

Truth can also be of such a provisional nature that its utterance can too

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 93–94.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 94.

soon mislead the other's thinking, especially if they are not privy to the method used to understand it, do not possess a comparable breadth of intuitional experience, or are unskilled in the cogitative process. As a gift given, disclosed truth is a personal interpretation of the "inner" good and dialectally subject to the good intentions of both giver and receiver. "The communicator has the freedom to dispose of his truth as he wishes ... This decision is an ethical act, whose justification is subject to the laws of ethics. The actual communication consists in the fact that the communicator gives outward expression to the truth that he possesses in his intimate sphere ... It must have the curious ability to grant a glimpse into itself, without for all that laying bare its soul to the other's casual inspection."<sup>45</sup> Balthasar's point is Biblical. "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you" (Matt 7:6).

The value of truth is precisely the goodness of its message. This ethical aspect of self-revelation is absent in non-rational being because only we are the agents of their hidden disclosure. The receiver's intention determines whether the good is honored by what the truth gleaned is used for. Heidegger's critique of techno-science—the reduction of truth to utility—is well taken. In either case, no matter how much is disclosed, there is an infinite font lying in potency yet to be known in the enticing hiddenness of mystery. In pre-rational being "truth is never so unconcealed that no aspect of the thing is left outside of its revelation. In this respect there is no purely neutral, purely objective truth. But insofar as in this case disclosure is still a necessity of nature, its verification pertains to the competence of the subject."<sup>46</sup> However, in the mystery of self-conscious being, the infinite content is under the free stewardship of the subject, even though they are not fully cognizant of its entirety. Self-reliance comes before the self-actuation of free disclosure. "This situation changes as soon as the communication becomes free. For now the verification of the relation between content and expression no longer comes immediately under the purview of the knower's judgment. The freedom of the one revealing stands in the way. The word that he has pronounced is no longer a mere expression of the internal word but a testimony."<sup>47</sup> Self-revelation is also self-mediation. Not only is the content revealed, it is a testimony of truth that one reveals of oneself as a demonstration of the self-perception of our personal character.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Testimony is the medium within which the spirit takes responsibility for its own truth. Here authenticity has its first expression. Testimony is also the medium within which political hedging can distort the truth by omission or by selective juxtaposition with “apparently” related facts. The fine line between reserving intimate truth and sinning by omission determines the extent of the subject’s authenticity. The attitude of the subject giving testimony of self must be offered in such a way that the attitude of the one entrusted with the revelation accepts the truth with corresponding authenticity. Disclosure and receptivity are mutually free actions of intersubjectivity as shared authenticity. “The speaker establishes an equation between the content and the form of his utterance. The equation cannot be checked over from the outside; the speaker vouches for the correctness of the equation.”<sup>48</sup> If the listener is in any doubt about the veracity of the disclosure, he/she can wilfully toss the disclosure back into the subject’s intimacy for re-evaluation. The authenticity of the speaker must be without question for the flow of truth’s disclosure to be a true gift. Rejection of what is freely given reflects doubt about the speaker’s intention. “In vouching for this as a person, he creates for the receiver a substitute for its missing ability to verify. The declaration of the truth thus becomes a kind of deposition, and as such it implies the ethical characteristic of truthfulness.”<sup>49</sup>

Corresponding to the authenticity of testimony is the credulity of the one who receives the disclosure. The receiver must have faith in the testimony and the testifier.

Without this faith, any exchange of truth between free entities is unthinkable. To exclude testimony and faith from the way in which spirits communicate would be to dislodge their freedom from the center of their intelligence in order to grant it, at best, a sort of marginal existence in isolated moral acts. It would be to extract their relationship with the truth and, because possession and communication of truth are inseparable, their truth itself from the center of their being-for-themselves, and it would be to degrade spirit to a sub-spiritual mode of existence.<sup>50</sup>

The dialectic between spirits, between self-conscious beings, who recognize their

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

own self-consciousness reflected in the other, has the framework of testimony to the truth and faith in the subjective truth uttered.

Only in the freedom of self-consciousness that grounds self-reliance, which enables self-expression, can the spirit's being-for-itself be disclosed. In this free disclosure, both self and freedom are revealed, because "its freedom appears in its utterance, in that it offers its freedom as a pledge of the truth of what it has created. In this way, and in this way alone, its inmost being, its being-for-itself, appears."<sup>51</sup> Non-rational being has no freedom to withhold what is hidden within. This truth and freedom, which discloses the being-for-itself in the giving becomes for the receiver spirit. "But insofar as freedom is intrinsic to the uttered word that is the spirit's truth, the receiver can show that he has recognized this word in its truth only by simultaneously recognizing the freedom with which it is uttered."<sup>52</sup> The act of faith in the veracity of the disclosed truth requires an authentic, un-begrudged recognition of the freedom of the disclosing spirit. This is the gift of the receiver back to the giver: freedom is both possession of the spirit and the gift given in intersubjective dialogue. This does not mean the receiver relinquishes freedom or self-reliance to the freedom of the other, which as Balthasar says would be to extract "their truth itself from the center of their being-for-themselves."<sup>53</sup> <sup>3</sup> Personal intimate truth, once given, is an irretrievably shared freedom of being-together.

However the human spirit is also corporeally bound to its evolutionary past. Free disclosure depends upon man, the organism, enslaved to the necessities of nutrition, concupiscence, personal emotions, and psyche, which reflect and determine personal histories within the context of the biosphere of living natural history. As Balthasar says, in the truth we disclose "the specific features of spiritual intimacy are inextricably inter-woven with all the forms of sub-spiritual interiority, above all with the intimacy of the sensorium."<sup>54</sup> Self-knowledge is not merely thinking-awareness of being. All our self-understanding derives from intuition of sense data gathered by the flawed and easily fooled sense organs, the windows to human consciousness. That we have awareness of other beings at all is itself affirmation of self-awareness. The infinity of human interiority cannot be reflected fully in a self-possessed being-for-itself because we perceive ourselves via the same flawed sensorium linked necessarily to motor neurons that control

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

our movement, what Aristotle saw as objective evidence of anima. Balthasar writes:

[It is] not just that man's spirit can be present and unveiled to itself only when it comes to itself from the self-estrangement entailed in knowing objects. There is rather the further reason that man's very self-possession is never a perfect knowledge of his essence. The spirit is unveiled to itself only to the extent that it knows its existence and certain fundamental characteristics of its quiddity, but its gaze does not penetrate to its inmost essence. The full depth of its origin, structure, possibilities, and freedom remains concealed from it.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, *blindness to the full depth of personal being is a measure of the limit of our freedom*. We necessarily search for what is forever elusive. This is the ineluctability of spirit that enables our freedom but commits us to an endless search for absolute knowledge and freedom. Only in God will we find both.

### **Conclusion**

For Balthasar, intimacy is freedom, a quality of being that is known to us both in the privacy that we withhold from disclosure and the personal mystery we seek to disclose to ourselves. In the nakedness of free intimacy, all beings are one in freedom with the infinite source. We seek to unfold personal intimacy, and in our subjective frustration, project our inquiry onto the intimacy of other beings, endeavoring to understand objectively what is hidden in intimacy. The mystery within and the mystery without are both subject to an incrementally induced disclosure through human inquiry. But they may also be driven into further concealment. From a theological perspective, science violates the freedom of the object by plundering its interiority; it can never exhaust an object's infinite movement from essence to existence. Knowledge can be pursued otherwise. By amplifying the object's disclosure, the object's freedom to act is realized. Inquiry can thereby increase rather than restrict freedom. This is the task of a theology of nature.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.