

JMC : Christian Philosophy / by Louis de Poissy

Chapter II. The Transcendentals.

I. NUMBER OF TRANSCENDENTALS

12. We distinguish five transcendentals: Being, Something, Unity, Truth, and Goodness.—They are called transcendentals, because they may be affirmed of everything.{1} The transcendental properties add nothing to being, but present it under a special aspect. Thus a being is called one, because it is undivided in itself; true, because it is knowable; good, because it is desirable. Though all these properties are essential to every being, yet three—Unity, Truth, and Goodness—are the most important, and are those of which metaphysics treats more particularly.

II. UNITY.

13. Unity is indivision of being. Whatever can be called one is a being undivided in itself.—Every being is necessarily one, otherwise it would not be a being, but several beings. A being continues to exist so long as it retains its unity, but ceases to exist when its unity is lost. But unity adds nothing to being; it merely indicates its entity's indivision, and denies division. Since unity is the indivision of entity, it means first and directly, the negation of division, secondarily and indirectly, positive entity.

14. Unity is of three kinds: generic, specific, and numerical.—Since unity is indivision of being, there are as many kinds of unity as there are kinds of division. But things are divided chiefly according to genus, or species, or individuals. There are then three kinds of unity: generic unity, which denies the division of genus; specific unity, which denies the division of species; and individual unity, which denies the division of number.

We may also classify unity as metaphysical or absolute, and physical or relative: the former not being really separable into parts, as the “human

soul;” the latter being divisible though not yet actually divided into parts, as a “stone.” But this second kind of unity is not properly unity; it should rather be called union or unity of imitation. To these may be added artificial unity, or that effected between things which, though not naturally ordained for this union, are now actually united, either physically, as are the “parts of a building,” or morally, as in “society, domestic or civil.”

15. The merely individual or numerical unity and multiplicity of substances arise from matter.—The principle of individuation, which must not be confounded with the seven individuating notes that serve to distinguish one individual from another, is that by virtue of which certain perfections belonging to the same species differ from one another and are multiplied numerically. But this principle of individuation can be nothing else than matter. For natural composites are constituted of matter and form. Now, numerical multiplicity comes originally from that which renders a form numerically multipliable; but that which renders a form numerically multipliable is proximately divisibility, a property of quantity; but quantity is an accident of matter; therefore, matter determined by quantity is the ultimate principle of the individuation of material substances. Hence it is evident that angels, being pure spirits, are not susceptible of individual multiplicity, and that each angel constitutes a distinct species.{2}

16. Accidents derive their numerical unity and multiplicity from the subject as acted upon by some cause which produces the accident.—With respect to accidental form, the subject holds the place of matter; it must, therefore, individualize it, as explained in the preceding article. There are, for instance, as many impressions of the American eagle as there are pieces of bullion impressed by the die.

17. The unity of a being brings with it a distinction from every other being then existing. Distinction is of three kinds, real, logical, and virtual.—From the very fact that a being is one, it is necessarily incapable of being confounded with any other being; hence it is distinct from it.

Distinction is real, if it exists in beings independently of any mental consideration; as the distinction between “Peter and Paul.” Distinction is logical, if the intellect separates into various concepts a thing which in itself is one; as the distinction between “animality and rationality” in man, or between “man and rational animal.”

Real distinction is subdivided into major or entitative, into modal, and virtual. Real major distinction is the “distinction of thing from thing,” whether the things be substances, or substances and accidents, or accidents only. Modal distinction is the “distinction of a thing from the mode by which it is affected,” as of a “line from its curvature.” “Virtual distinction is the distinction of the perfections of a thing by reason of its power to exercise many functions, so that while the thing is one it gives us a foundation for distinguishing in it several formalities according to its different functions.” Such is the distinction of the “vegetative and sensitive functions” of the human soul from its “purely rational functions.”

18. Metaphysical degrees are distinguished not actually but only by a mental operation.—By metaphysical degrees is meant that hierarchy of formalities^{3} which can be observed in everything; for example, in General Sherman, the formalities of “rational being, of animal, of living being, of substance,” etc. But before the operation of the intellect these realities are not distinguished actually but only virtually. For these metaphysical degrees constitute only one and the same reality, which is multiple not actually but virtually. The rational soul in man is not a triple soul composed of several souls in one; it is one and simple, and can only virtually be called multiple. But since one soul is equivalent in its operations to several inferior souls, the intellect represents it actually by several different concepts. Thus it distinguishes in the human soul three degrees—vegetative, sensitive, and rational.^{4}

19. Besides transcendental unity there is also quantitative or numerical unity. Several quantitative or numerical unities make a multitude or number properly so-called, which is defined as Multitude measured by

unity.—Numerical unity is transcendental unity with relation to number added. Unlike transcendental unity, which is not any thing really distinct from entity, numerical unity is an accident of things which are numbered. In other words, it is transcendental unity determined to the category of quantity, and bears to transcendental unity “the relation of contained to the containing, of the determined to the undetermined.” For though discrete quantity is divided in itself, it is not essential whether it be numbered or not; this unity then is accidental. Several quantitative unities form a multitude or number properly so-called. {5} Number must not necessarily be composed of unities of the same kind specifically. Hence it is not inaccurate, as some affirm, to speak of “two cardinal virtues,” “two angels,” etc., for one cardinal virtue and another cardinal virtue, one angel and another, etc., make, two numerically as well as do one line and another line make two lines.

20. From the unity of being is derived its identity, which is defined as The sameness of an entity with itself.—Being considered as one and undivided without addition or diminution, must be regarded as the same with itself. This relation of a being with itself is called identity. When several beings numerically distinct have the same essence, they are said to be specifically identical, because there is among them an identity of essence. Identity is physical when the being remains really unchanged in itself; it is moral when the object is the same only in the estimation of men. The mineral kingdom abounds in examples of the first kind; living bodies afford instances of the second, for though, as physiology teaches, the constituent molecules are periodically changed, yet the plant or animal is reputed by man to be the same. To this identity of essence diversity stands opposed; thus, two beings of different species, as “a tree and a horse,” are called diverse. If several beings agree in quantity, they are called equal; if they have the same quality, they are said to be like. To equality is opposed inequality, to likeness unlikeness.

III. TRUTH.

21. Truth is the conformity between the intellect and its object.—The truth of a being is not an entity distinct from that being: by the very fact that a being is, it is true. Nevertheless, truth is the being viewed not precisely as such, but considered in its relation to intellect. For truth appertains properly and primarily to the intellect, as health belongs properly and primarily to the animal; and just as nothing is styled healthy but with respect to the animal, so nothing is said to be true but relatively to the intellect. But the object of the intellect is being; therefore every being can be called true, because there is none that is not placed in relation to the divine intellect. But an object is necessarily in relation to the intellect if it depends on it for its being; it is accidentally in relation if it is simply known by the intellect. And since every thing depends for its being on the divine intellect, its truth is found chiefly in relation to this intellect. The conformity of being to the divine intellect is called metaphysical truth. The conformity of the human intellect to being is called logical truth. Hence truth is not mutable nor progressive, except in so far as man's knowledge is capable of increase. For all creatures realize their divine prototype, and our ideas represent the immutable essences of things.

22. The truth of the intellect taken simply is prior to the truth of beings; but the truth of the created intellect follows the truth of beings.—A being is said to be true only in as far as it is conformed to the divine intellect; therefore truth is found primarily in the divine intellect. On the contrary, the created intellect is said to be true, when it is conformed to the being which is its object; therefore the truth of being precedes the truth of the created intellect.

23. Falsity is the non-conformity between an object and intellect.—Since every being is necessarily conformed to the divine intellect, it is always true with respect to God. With respect to the human intellect, a being is said to be false when it is of such a nature as to appear what it is not, or under a character which it does not possess; as for example, a

“dream.”{6} But the object always remains true in itself. It is only relatively that it is said to be false. Properly speaking, falsity exists only in a judgment which is pronounced by the human intellect, and which is not conformed to the object.

IV. GOODNESS.

24. Goodness is the conformity of a thing to the will, especially to the divine will. The good is defined as Being considered as appetible.—Every being,{7} as such, has a real existence, and is good and in some sense perfect, since the nature of any thing is so much perfection. But a thing is appetible by reason of its perfection, and whatever is desirable is referred to the will. But since the perfection of any thing depends on the nature of that thing, its goodness can have no other measure than its being, the good and being are one and the same thing, and differ only in that the good expresses a relation of conformity to the will, which being does not express. Every being is not only good in itself as having the perfections essential to its nature, but also good for others, since every creature bears some relation to some other creatures.

25. A thing is good only in so far as it refers in some way to existence; possible things, as such, are not good.—Unlike the intellect which contains ideally in itself whatever it knows, and consequently prescind from their existence, the will is borne toward things and thus can properly seek them only when existing. Hence a merely possible thing can only be called good in a certain way, viz., as about to exist really, and as now existing ideally.

26. Goodness belongs to a being in its relation to its final cause or end.—As the truth of a being is its conformity with the idea which is its exemplar formal cause, the goodness of a being is its conformity with its end or final cause. Thus, a house is said to be good, not because it realizes the plan of the architect, but because it offers a secure and commodious shelter to those who live in it.

27. Goodness is divided into transcendental and moral.—The transcendental or metaphysical goodness of an entity is its capability of drawing the appetite toward itself. Moral goodness is the conformity of the thing willed to the rules of morality.

The good is also divided into useful, honorable, and pleasurable. For the objects sought by a rational nature are desired as a means to some end, and then are called useful; or for their own sake, in which case they are called honorable; or, finally, as giving repose to the appetite of him who possesses them, and then they are called pleasurable.

Good is also true or apparent, according as it suits the special tendency of the whole being, or so me particular tendency not in harmony with the whole nature of the being.

28. The highest degree of the good is the perfect.—Goodness consists in the conformity of a being with its end; but because the end of a being can be attained more or less completely, there are degrees of goodness. A being is said to be perfect when it has attained its end in all its plenitude; i.e. when “none of the conditions requisite for its existence are wanting, when it possesses all the power necessary for the exercise of its proper operation, and is thus fitted to attain its proper end by its own operation.” (Jouin.)

29. Evil, the opposite of goodness, is the privation of a good due to a being.—Since every thing, inasmuch as it is, is good, it follows that evil is not being, but a privation of being or of good, and that it is real only so far as the privation of the good is real. Still, as every privation is necessarily referred to a being, for that which does not exist cannot be deprived of any thing, it is said that evil is in being as in its subject.

30. Evil is divided into metaphysical or nominal, physical or natural, and moral evil. For voluntary agents, it is divided simply into the evil of sin and evil of punishment.—Created beings, from the very fact that they are created, are deprived of some perfections. But since this privation belongs to their very condition as creatures, it is not a true evil, but only a

nominal evil. All the creatures in the world have not the same perfections; but this inequality by which some beings are deprived of perfections possessed by others, far from being an evil is a true good, since it is a condition of the admirable hierarchy of creatures and of the order of the universe. Moreover, it is part of the order of the universe that, besides incorruptible creatures, there should be others that may lose some of the perfections proper to their nature. This explains why God, though not the author of real evil, yet permits evil in the world in view of a greater good.

Physical or natural evil is the privation of a good required by the nature of a physical being, as “the want of wings in a bird.”{8} Moral evil consists in the privation of a moral good; it is a non-conformity to the rules of morality. This non-conformity to the rules of morality, which can happen only in creatures endowed with free will, is called the evil of sin or sinful evil. The evil in creatures which destroys the integrity of their being is the consequence of the evil of sin, and has the character of punishment; it is, therefore, called the evil of punishment or penal evil. And because this evil is found in a special manner in creatures endowed with free will, and because the good of which evil is the privation is the absolute object of the will, it follows that, strictly speaking, there are but two kinds of evil, the evil of sin and the evil of punishment; the latter is a privation of integrity of being, the former of justice of action. It is further to be remarked that the evil of punishment is an evil only in its subject; in its cause it is a good; for from a moral standpoint the order of the universe is founded on justice, and justice requires the punishment of the evil of sin.

31. Evil has no direct efficient cause, it has an accidental cause, which is the good.—Evil necessarily has a cause. But there can be no cause without being, and every being, inasmuch as it is, is good; therefore the good alone can be the cause of evil. But, although it be the cause of evil, it is not a direct efficient cause, but merely an accidental cause. For if the evil, as, for instance, a “boiler explosion,” is produced by a natural agent, it is owing to some defect in the agent, as “unskilfulness in an engineer,”

or in that on which its power is exercised, as “the thin walls of the boiler of a steam-engine.” If the evil is moral, and therefore produced by a voluntary agent, it is owing to some defect in the will. Therefore it is not the good directly and as such that is the cause of evil, but the good accidentally and as susceptible of defects.

32. Since God is the infinitely perfect Being, it is only by permitting evil that He can be said to be its cause.—It is consonant with the order of the universe that there be certain beings which can be defective. Therefore God, in causing the good which agrees with the general order, causes, as it were, in certain beings, by permitting it, the defect of which evil is the consequence. Hence whatever of being and perfection there is in created things should be referred to God as to its cause; but whatever is defective has not God for its cause; it is the result of the imperfection of second causes. God is, however, the author of the evil of punishment, by which sinners receive the chastisement which they merit. But this evil is a true good, for it helps to satisfy the justice demanded by the order that should reign in the universe.

33. It is a gross error to maintain, with the Gnostics and Manicheans, the existence of two contrary supreme principles, the principle of good and the principle of evil.—A supreme evil, the cause of all evil, is an absolute impossibility, for evil is nothing but a privation of being; if, then, any absolute evil existed, it would be a privation of all being, and hence would be absolutely nothing. The believers in two first principles have allowed themselves to be drawn into this error by the sight of two particular contrary effects, one good, the other evil, which they attributed to two particular contrary causes, but which they knew not how to refer to a common and universal cause.

V. BEAUTY. SUBLIMITY. GRACEFULNESS.

34. The beautiful is that which pleases when known.—The good is that which satisfies when possessed, the beautiful is that which pleases when known. Hence the good is referred to the appetite, the beautiful to the

cognitive faculties; but because an object when known pleases only in so far as it has harmony of proportion, it follows that the beautiful consists essentially in harmony of proportion, just as the ugly, its opposite, consists in the absence of this harmony.

35. The means of discerning the beautiful are the cognitive faculties, viz., the senses and intellect.—In treating of the beautiful, the faculties that perceive it must first be noted; these are the intellect and the internal and external senses. Among the external senses sight and hearing are, strictly speaking, the only ones that perceive the beautiful. The other senses are, so to say, immersed too deeply in matter; they help to perceive the beautiful, not of themselves, but by transmitting their impressions to the internal senses. Of the internal senses only the common sense (*sensus communis*) and imagination perceive the beautiful, the former by receiving the image, the latter by preserving it. The union of these senses and the intellect forms what is known as the aesthetic faculty commonly called taste.

36. The elements of the beautiful are truth, order, and life.—Two conditions are necessary to a beautiful thing, truth and proportion; a third condition should be added to make the beauty perfect; viz., life. All beauty is founded on truth,{9} the natural object of the intellect; hence beauty is not arbitrary, but, like truth, immutable; for it has its eternal type in God, the supreme beauty as well as the substantial truth. But that a thing be beautiful, it must have not only truth, but also unity in variety, or order and harmony of proportion. Since splendor is the perfection of this order, Plato could say with justice that the beautiful is the splendor of the truth.{10} Lastly, when life is joined to order{11} the beauty is perfect; for the true, the foundation of the beautiful, is chiefly in the intelligible. But a thing is the more intelligible the higher its grade of being; and the higher its grade of being, the higher the life that it possesses. Since life is the perfection of beauty, action, whether physical or spiritual, which is the manifestation of life, must be the source of beauty. And since life perfects beauty, the higher the life is, the more perfect the beauty. Now, there are five kinds of life: the vegetative, the

sensitive, the intellectual, the life of grace, and the life of glory. The last constitutes the highest grade of created beauty, because it is the most perfect reflection of the divine life, the eternal type of all beauty. As beauty is capable of degrees of perfection, it follows that when beauty of an inferior order is opposed to that of a superior order, it is really only deformity, because the superior order prevails over the inferior.

37. Beauty is either ideal or real, natural or artificial—The ideal beautiful is that which is conceived by the intellect as a model to realize. The real beautiful is that which is found in the object itself, and is sensible if it exists in material things, spiritual if it is in a spiritual thing. The latter kind of beauty is defined by Zigliara as “the order of virtual parts with due spiritual lustre,” and is intellectual or moral according as the virtual parts are referred to an intellectual or a moral standard. The natural beautiful is that which is presented by nature. {12} The artificial beautiful is that which is an effect of art. To produce the beautiful, art must imitate nature. Yet not every imitation of nature, merely because it is an imitation, is therefore beautiful, as realism pretends. The reality imitated by art must also be beautiful, or art must add to it the idea that will give it beauty.

38. The sublime is that which exceeds the intuition of our faculties.—A thing is called sublime subjectively because of the weakness of our faculties, and objectively because of the excellence of the thing itself. It is the excess of light in the object that produce obscurity in our weak mental vision. The foundation of the sublime is the infinite, which we can never seize in any other than a limited and imperfect manner. As the deformed or ugly is opposed to the beautiful, so is the mean or contemptible opposed to the sublime.

39. The sublime is ontological, dynamical, or mathematical.—The sublime is ontological when its excellence lies in the nature of the being known; thus the “angelic nature” may be styled sublime. The sublime is dynamical when its excellence is in the physical or moral virtue of the being known; thus the “falls of Niagara” are sublime, “certain acts of the

saints” are sublime. The sublime is mathematical when it consists in the vastness of the object; thus the “immensity of space” is sublime. The sublime is found also in the productions of art when they surpass the ordinary conceptions of man and reveal something of the infinite.

40. Gracefulness is that quality which renders its possessor pleasing.— Gracefulness consists especially in the excellence of the sensible, as the sublime lies in the excellence of the intelligible. It is found in the object that pleases and attracts us, not in that which lies above and beyond our grasp; for the sublime is not graceful. Gracefulness is various and changeable, for it resides chiefly in the sensible, which is various and changeable. From this point of view, then, it is true to say that there is no disputing about tastes.

Notes

{1} In other words, they transcend or lie beyond all genera and species. But the term is by no means to be understood in the Kantian sense of exceeding the powers of man’s mind.

{2} This opinion of the Thomistic school is rejected by the Scotists, who hold that in each individual there is a haecceity or thisness, which renders the individual such apart from matter. Again, some Schoolmen consider the whole concrete nature of the thing, whether matter and form together, or form only, as the principle of individuation.

{3} A formality is the manner in which a thing is conceived or constituted by an act of the intellect.

{4} This distinction is sometimes called virtual, sometimes conceptional, the foundation of which exists in the perfection of the subject. It is also known as distinction of the “mind motived” (*rationis ratiocinatae*) to mark it off from distinction of the “mind motivating” (*rationis ratiocinantis*), where the distinction exists in the mind only. See *Metaphysics of the School*, vol. i., p. 354.

{5} “If Transcendental Unity adds nothing to Being but actual Indivision, it is manifest that the Transcendental Unity of continuous Quantity will consist in undivided continuity within the one common limit. If that continuity be broken, Quantitative Unity is broken. . . . To take an illustration: There is a worm crawling before our feet. It is one Substance and one continuous Quantity, whose limit gives the animal its sensible configuration. Now cut it in two. There are two distinct living Substances; but there are also two distinct continuous Quantities under two limits, which give to the two animals respectively their external form. So separate are they now, that one may remain in England, and the other find its way to china. Thus, after the operation, the previous Substance (i.e. the worm) has lost its Transcendental Unity, and has become two Entities and two Unities. The continuous Quantity which informed it has lost its Transcendental Unity, as well as Entity; and has become two Entities, two Unities, consequently, the Unity which it conferred on the Substance of the worm has ceased, and is replaced by two Unities, extraneous and accidental to the substantial Essence of the two worms.”—Metaphysics of the School, vol. i., p. 205.

{6} “Properly speaking, there can be no such thing as Ontological Falsity. For all being is ipso facto conformed to the Divine Intelligence, both practical and speculative. Neither can it properly be called, in a secondary sense, false, in regard of the human intellect. For there is no Being, as such, which is not apt to generate in our minds a just estimate and conform representation of itself. But it may be sometimes improperly called false, according to analogy of attribution of the first class, inasmuch as it allures the human mind to form a false Judgment. This arises from no defect in Being; but partly, by reason of the similarity of the sensible accidents of an entity with those of other entities distinct from itself; partly, by reason of the imperfection of the human intellect, which depends in great measure on sensible accidents for its cognition of Being.”—Metaphysics of the School, vol. i., pp. 467, 468.

{7} Real being includes both actually existent and possible being. Possible being is included under real being because it is not a mere mental

creation moreover, it involves no intrinsic contradiction, and there are now existing beings capable of giving it physical existence. (See note, 6.)

{8} Even pain implies the existence of a natural good, for it warns the sufferer of the presence in his system of some obstacle to perfect health besides, as a feeling it is a perfection, being an exercise of sensibility. In both these senses it exemplifies the axiom. “Good and being are convertible.” It is only as being a defect in the physical integrity of man or brute that it is an evil, an absence of due perfection.

{9} “It is impossible that anything be beautiful in itself, if it be not also true and good, or if it be dishonorable for, Order must necessarily exist, inordinateness must cease to exist. . . . But there is no being that is not true and good; . . . and what is dishonorable is morally defective, and therefore repugnant to the idea of beauty.”—Zigliara, *Summa Philosophica*, O. 19, vii.

{10} “The three elements that constitute beauty are (1) the completeness or perfection of the object; for what is maimed and defective is disagreeable or ugly; (2) due proportion, harmony, or order of parts, for if the parts do not harmonize the object does not please but offends (3) lustre, by which the object manifests itself wholly to the mind.”—Zigliara, *Sum. Ph.*, O. 19, ii.

{11} “Order results from the subordination of particular ends to a common end.” See *Cosmology*, § 8.

{12} “Natural beauty is found in each species; for since God is the author of created nature, it is impossible that there should be either absence of any constituent principle or of harmony among the principles. But if we regard the essences as realized in individuals by particular marks, they may be beautiful or ugly. For natural causes may be impeded by one another.”—Sanseverino.

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