**Sacred Beauty**

**July 31, 2014**

**Val**: Okay guys!

**Roger**: It is that moment when you actually realize that you are being… recorded.

**Val**: I was in the aesthetics section at the library of Sacred Heart University, looking for a different work, and I came across the Umberto Eco. I really felt led to it. I looked at it, and it is a work of amazing scholarship. I felt that I understood the whole nature of the problem in an historical context, much better having read this. Then I checked out Eco’s website, and I had to decide whether there is, with him, too much that is too inherently disordered to go with this as our choice.

One thing that I saw on his website – amidst several things that are quite strange – somebody said, “Do you believe in God?” Rather than answering directly, Eco answered: “Why does one love a certain person one day, and discover the next day that the love is gone?” This is a person who has dedicated decades of his life, probably, to the study of medieval philosophy, possibly with a very pure heart. I think that there is something here to be taken up in our discussion. I really did feel led to this, as if the Holy Spirit is not content to let this scholarship just sit.

**Sean**: That is interesting. A few years ago in Fisher [St. John Fisher Seminary], I was taking a course with Dr. Long, on Aquinas’ metaphysics, and I wrote a paper on beauty, and the transcendentals of beauty, and I used this text actually…

**Val**: Really!

**Sean**: …although I did not really understand it well, then, as I do now…

**Val**: So who wants to start us off with the text? Again, if the reading is too long, just cry “uncle” at whatever point…

**Roger**: We’re looking at the Eco.

**Mary**: The Problem.

At the very beginning of his *De Veritate,* Aquinas confronts the problem of being and its transcendental properties in the following words.

That which the intellect first conceives as, in a way, the most evident, and to which it reduces all its concepts, is being . . . Consequently, all the other conceptions of the intellect are had by additions to being. But nothing can be added to being as though it were something not included in being—in the way that a difference is added to a genus or an accident to a subject—-for every reality is essentially a being1

Being, therefore, is not a genus, and nothing can be predicated of it in an adjectival sense. Nonetheless, Aquinas goes on, there do exist certain properties which, it might be said, can be added to being ("dicuntur addere supra ens") in the sense that they express a mode of being or of presence which the term *being (ens)* itself does not make explicit.

**Amy**: Aquinas further distinguishes between properties which express a particular and partial mode of the being of being—namely the categories, which define being in determinate areas and apply to a particular set of beings—and a different kind of predicate, which applies to every being ("ita quod modus expressus sit modus generalis consequens omne ens"). In the Scholastic tradition, this second type of attribute is given the name "transcendental," or "transcen­dental property of being." In his *De Veritate* Aquinas distinguishes among and discusses the transcendentals *unum, res, ens, aliquid, bonum,* and *verum* (the one, a thing, a being, something, the good, the true).

**Matt**: The transcendentals add nothing to being. Nor do they in any way diminish its totality and extension. They inhere in being coextensively and can be discerned in every being, and they determine the character of beings both in themselves and in relation to other beings. They are a bit like differing visual angles from which being can be looked at. This is why they differ from one another concep­tually or logically *(ratione),* according as it were to the particular point of view that one adopts to being. But each transcendental is nonetheless the whole of being and is found in everything that ex­ists. This is why they are convertible into one another.2

**Val:** It is well known that the problem of the transcendentals origi­nated in Aristotle's *Metaphysics,* where he discussed being and the one *(ens* and *unum)* in several places.3 Later on the Arab philoso­phers, who transmitted the problem to Latin Scholasticism, en­riched the list of transcendentals by adding *res* and *aliquid* (thing and something). All Scholastic thinking manifests in various ways the fundamental belief that being (and also God, the most perfect being) possesses certain properties.4 However, the problem was of interest to the medievals in the first place primarily in connection with apologetics. The Catharist heresy, with its revival of Manichaeism, divided the universe into opposing forces of good and evil. To combat this heresy, it was necessary to reaffirm the inner value and above all the goodness of all being.

**Paul**: The result was that all medieval discussion of the transcendentals led back to a metaphysical issue of enormous significance. This is true also of Aquinas, by whose time the problem was fairly clearly defined in its general outlines. The issue of the transcendentals was in fact the issue of the fullness of being, of the indissoluble union of being and value. To remove any terms from the traditional list of transcendentals was to diminish being.

**Stefan**: It was therefore necessary that the transcendental properties of being should be enumerated with great care; the manner in which the question of truth is posed in Aquinas's *De Veritate* is proof of that. But of course this treatise is neither exhaustive nor definitive, and we may with some justice inquire why it is that *pulchrum* is not to be found in classical accounts of the transcendentals. Is beauty also a property coextensive with being, a mode universally attend­ant upon being in all its manifestations?

**Sean**: If beauty is considered to be a transcendental, it acquires a meta­physical worth, an unchanging objectivity, and an extension which is universal. As a result, the aesthetic pertains to the universe as a whole. The problem of beauty then takes on an importance that cannot be ignored, and any solution to the problem has decisive implications for metaphysics. This means in turn that our investi­gations here can be conducted only in the light of Aquinas's entire system.

**Roger:** If beauty is a transcendental, there are two fundamental conse­quences, one having to do with being, the other with beauty itself. First, the various determinations of being are affected: the universe acquires a further perfection, and God acquires a new attribute. Beauty, for its part, acquires concreteness and a quality of necessi­ty, an objectivity and dignity. This is why the question has been of interest not just to historical commentators but also in neo-Thomist apologetics, in which it is thought necessary to combat aesthetic subjectivism by reaffirming the objectivity of beauty. In fact contemporary neo-Thomists are inclined to insist that beauty is a transcendental, whereas those of a generation ago tended to exclude it.

**Joe:** Contemporary Thomists, therefore, tend to look upon the tran­scendentals in a doctrinal rather than a historical and interpretative manner. They are somewhat more polemical, and more influenced by a particular aesthetic problem (that of the subjectivity or objec­tivity of the aesthetic), than the medievals were. For the medievals, the fact that goodness was a transcendental meant that there could be nothing evil in being—not, that is, in the metaphysical sense. In the same way, defining beauty as a transcendental implied the elim­ination of the seeming deformities and dissonances in the universe. Such an enterprise involved a kind of ardor and an aesthetic opti­mism which, on its own theoretical level, reflected the sentiments of St. Francis's *Cantico delle creature.*

**Mary:** The Aesthetic Vision of Things

These beliefs and sentiments entered the Middle Ages from many sources. First and foremost was the Bible, in which the beauties of God's creation were constantly extolled. Similar views were com­mon also in the classical world. The medievals had no direct ac­quaintance with the works of Plato, save for his *Timaeus,* but this was enough to generate a certain kind of aesthetic sensibility. The cosmology of the *Timaeus,* articulated as it was in terms of mathe­matics, produced an image of the world as something endowed with artistic order and resplendent with beauty.5

**Amy:** The *Timaeus* and the Bible were not the only sources. For ex­ample, we should not overlook a number of influences derived from Pythagoras. These were most fully articulated in Boethius, whose idea of the universe was aesthetic in character, combining the musical with the mathematical.

**Matt:** Yet another source gave rise to what de Bruyne calls "l’esthetique sapientale"—an aesthetics based upon a verse in the Book of Wis­dom, "But thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight" (n: 21). This verse inspired the Augustinian concepts of *modus, forma,* and *ordo* (dimension or quantity, form, and order), which appear everywhere in Scholasticism, employed sometimes in the definition of beauty, sometimes to define the good.6

**Val**: However, the strongest impulse underlying the medieval aes­thetic conception of the world came from neo-Platonism—to some extent from Proclus and Porphyry, but principally from Dionysius the Areopagite, in whom the aesthetic vision of things found its fullest meaning and its fullest, and most influential, expression. The very obscurity of his language, which lent itself to multiple interpretations, for long prevented any critical awareness of the metaphysical principles upon which his thought was based; but it also helped in the formation of an aesthetic outlook on things by way of the emotions. Dionysius may not have been fully under­stood, but his authority was unquestioned.

**Paul:** The whole of Chapter IV of Dionysius' *The Divine Names* (espe­cially IV, 7 and 10) presents the universe as a cascade of beauties springing forth from the First Principle, a dazzling radiance of sen­suous splendors which diversify in all created being.

That, beautiful beyond being, is said to be Beauty—for it gives beauty from itself in a manner appropriate to each, it causes the consonance and splendor of all, it flashes forth upon all, after the manner of light, the beauty producing gifts of its flowing ray, it calls all to itself, when it is called beauty.7

**Stefan:** This abundance of images fascinated and won over medieval readers. Not only did they take from it many of their ideas on aes­thetics; it also seemed to them to reflect the sensibility which was being formed in them in any case by other influences.

**Sean:** One of these influences, and one that cannot be ignored, was John Scottus Eriugena. Eriugena's thought was in essence that of Dionysius the Areopagite, but rendered more congenial to the medievals, assimilated and translated into a system of enormous breadth. Eriugena taught the Middle Ages to look upon things with a penetrating eye, to read the universe, to read nature, as if it were a vast store of symbols. For him, the relations between God and things were not solely causal, but were also like the relations between sign and signified.8 The created world is a revelation. Na­ture is a theophany. In this theophanic harmony, objects are sym­bols, disclosures, indicators, It is their nature to point toward God, and to God conceived of as Beauty revealing itself through harmo­nious design. It is a theophanic vision which is openly and pro­foundly aesthetic.9 Eriugena's aesthetic perspective was the most far-reaching and the most lively in the whole of the Middle Ages. When the influence of his thought is added to elements from Plato, Pythagoras, neo-Platonism, Augustine, and Boethius, all of these together explain the widely-felt need for beauty which accompa­nied the medievals' observations of the world, a need which mani­fested itself in the search for proofs of this beauty. This outlook was always part of the medieval mentality, although it has not always been sufficiently noticed. It was also part of the Christian mentality. For if the First Cause is conceived of as creative and provident, the created comes to be seen, in the words of scripture, as "exceedingly good"; and this conception quickly leads to the notion of the ex­ceedingly beautiful.

**Roger**: The vision of the universe that is at issue here may be described by the term *pankalia,* the beauty of all things. It is a very interesting notion, and one which in a religious context is both edifying and stimulating. If it is looked at on a critical level, however, it is seen to have certain dangers. There are dangers involved in defining it, for all too often the attempts to establish the validity of pancalism are emotive and uncritical, and depend upon a conception of the created world which is mythical and anthropomorphic rather than philosophical. It is dangerous to handle in general, for the diffuse image of constantly emerging beauties can lead to the loss of a hard, concrete sense of the aesthetic.

**Joe**:The medieval need for beauty, to which I referred above, created the need also for a metaphysical verification. The perception of the world in terms of its beauty came to birth as a sentiment which was at once religious and aesthetic. But this initial passion came to in­fuse itself into various theoretical systems, and then later on became the object of rigorous metaphysical and ontological inquiry. Medieval aesthetic feeling had to be tested, and this occurred with the revival of Aristotle. With this there arose metaphysical structures and a rigor of method which would permit only those con­cepts of totality which were subject to law, classification, and measure.

**Val**: Before we go on, is this reading too long? Should we break it up? There is a lot left. It is hard to know what to cut, because there is some really fascinating stuff…

**Paul**: It is also quite systematic.

**Val**: I guess we go forward.

**Roger**: We go forward until someone just breaks into an ecstasy. Or screams out in disgust.

**Mary**: Aquinas's Texts

The medieval need for beauty in all things was, in the beginning, vague and uncomplicated. But no philosophical system could ig­nore it. Even philosophers who were personally insensible to the beauty of things found that the problem of beauty was forced upon them by works such as those of Dionysius the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius).

During the period that Aquinas spent in Cologne, he attended Albertus Magnus's lectures on Pseudo-Dionysius. This was in the years 1248--1252, before he embarked upon his career as a bachelor of arts, and therefore before his earliest writings. Thus, it was Dionysian thought which first presented the philosophical issue of beauty to the student Aquinas.

It would seem to follow that, al­though his *Commentary on the Divine Names* dates from 1265—66, the influence of the Areopagite's thought was present in earlier works—for instance, in the infrequent references to beauty in Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences* (1252). It will be best, how­ever, to begin with the *Commentary on the Divine Names.* Here we can discover how Aquinas assimilated, and attempted to justify sys­tematically, the medieval pancalistic sensibility, the sensibility which had been so vividly expressed in Pseudo-Dionysius' work. We can see that Aquinas's approach to the Dionysian text consisted in the attempt "to reduce to homogeneous mental categories the mystico-metaphysical attire of the Oriental doctor."10

**Amy**: *The Divine Names* is filled with references to beauty. Wisdom and beauty appear early in the list of divine names: "Sapientem autem et pulchram, quoniam existentia omnia propriam naturam incor-ruptam servanda, omni harmonia divina et sancto decore sunt plena" ("Wise and beautiful. For all beings are preserved in what is incorruptible of their own nature and indeed are filled with every divine harmony and sacred good form").11 Aquinas, influenced as he was by the Augustinian aesthetics of wisdom, refers the concept of harmony to the operations of Wisdom, "whose function is to order and measure things" ("cuius est ordinare et commensurare res").12 But he also accepts the close identification of the two terms, the view that God's ordering of things is both an operation of his wisdom and also the source of beauty.

**Matt**:The question of beauty is raised specifically, however, in chapter IV of *The Divine Names,* "Concerning the Good, Light, Beauty, Love, Ecstasis, and Zeal." Initially it deals with the good, which is conceived of in the first instance' as a name which is properly and preeminently predicable of God. Next it is attributed to angelic powers, who possess it in a manner that is more evident and acces­sible than in the divine nature. Finally, it belongs to all corruptible creatures. This hierarchy of living beings, a hierarchy which de­pends upon the degree of participation in the most perfect Being, is subsequently presented, not just as a hierarchy of goodness, but also as a hierarchy of beauty. In IV, 7, Dionysius examines beauty as a divine attribute, and also its causal role and its diffusion throughout creation. In IV, 10 (after an interlude concerned with the divine and the human intellects), he returns to an analysis of the causal efficacy of beauty. Beauty is attributed, at once and without equivocation, to God. The Dionysian text (IV, 7) reads:

Hoc bonum laudatur a Sanctis Theologis et sicut pulchritudo et sicut pulchrum, et sicut dilectio et sicut diligibile, et quaecumque aliae convenientes sunt pulchrificae et gratiosae habitae pulchritudinis nominationes.

This good is celebrated by the sacred theologians as beautiful and as beauty, as *agape* and beloved, and by many other divine names which are suitable to its beauty producing and rich char­acter.

**Val**: Aquinas stresses in his *Commentary* that "this good" is *ipsum bonum,* God himself. He sets out furthermore to show that the beautiful and beauty *(pulchrum* and *pulchritudo)* belong in a different way to God and to his creatures. In God, these two attributes are not divisible: "deus tamen utrumque comprehendit in se, secun­dum unum et idem" ("God enfolds both in himself as one and the same").13 But in the case of creatures, Aquinas writes,

pulchrum et pulchritudo distinguuntur secundum participans et participatum, ita quod pulchrum dicitur hoc quod participat pulchritudinem; pulchritudo autem participatio primae causae quae omnia pulchra facit: pulchritudo enim creaturae nihil est aliud quam similitudo divinae pulchritudinis in rebus parteci-pata.

the beautiful and beauty are distinguished with respect to par­ticipation and participants. Thus, we call something "beauti­ful" because it is a participant in beauty. Beauty, however, is a participation in the first cause, which makes all things beauti­ful. So that the beauty of creatures is simply a likeness of the divine beauty in which things participate.

**Paul**: The distinction is clear: the beauty which we find in all things is a participation in (rather than a mere reflection of) a beauty which is identified with the First Good and therefore with Being. God is s*upersubstantiale pulchrum (hyperousion kalon,* supersubstantially beautiful, beautiful beyond being). He is called Beauty because, as Aquinas comments, "he gives beauty to all created beings, accord­ing to the properties of each" ("omnibus entibus creatis dat pulchri-tudinem, secundum proprietatem uniuscuiusque"). In God there is no defect. In him, beauty is not present in one part rather than in another, nor is it present under some particular aspect. Rather, God is beautiful simply and in all respects ("Deus quoad omnes et sim-pliciter pulcher est"). He is, Aquinas goes on, *pulcherrimus* and *superpulcher.* He is beautiful in himself and not in respect of anything else: "Deus est pulcher in seipso." And in God, this preeminence of beauty is the same thing as a preeminence in the generating of beauty, "for he has within him, wonderfully and before all else, the source of all beauty" ("inquantum in seipso excellenter et ante om­nia aha, fontem totius pulchritudinis").

**Stefan**: God, then, is the creator of beauty in the world. And he creates it by means of consonance and light. I shall consider this latter as­pect of the theory in due course, for, as Aquinas said, it concerns the nature of beauty ("in quo consistat pulchritudinis ratio"). But for the present, we should note that God, the Supreme Beauty, creates all things in accordance with the order and the effulgence which are constitutive elements in the value which he shares with others. The divine beauty is creative because it produces order and harmony, and "it is always the case that whatever creatures may have in the way of communion and coming together, they have it due to the power of beauty" ("universaliter omnes creaturae, quan-tamcumque unionem habent, habent ex virtute pulchri"). Further­more, beauty is the effective cause of being, and the final and the exemplary cause of the created world. As Aquinas writes,

Omne quod est, est ex pulchro et bono quod est Deus, sicut ex principio effectivo; et in pulchro et bono est, sicut in principio contentivo vel conservative; et ad pulchrum et bonum conver-titur, ipsum desiderans, sicut ad finem . . . et omnia quae-cumque sunt et fiunt, propter pulchrum et bonum sunt et fiunt et ad ipsum omnia inspiciunt, sicut ad causam exemplarem, quam habent ut regulam suae operationis.

Everything that exists comes from beauty and goodness, thaus from God, as from an effective principle. And things have their being in beauty and goodness as if in a principle that preserves and maintains. And they turn toward beauty and goodness and desire them as their end . . . And all things are and all things become because of beauty and goodness, and all things look to them, as to an exemplary cause, which they possess as a rule governing their activities.14

**Sean**: Here we might pause to note how laboriously (and incom­pletely) Aquinas's commentary strives to impose an order upon the riotous and hermetic imagery which throngs the Dionysian text. The whole matter could be summarized in a few sentences, with the *term pankalia* as a central point of reference: everything is beau­tiful and comes together in beauty; everything is constructed in accordanceJ with beauty; everything shines with beauty and de­clares and manifests beauty; the order which the creator Good has assigned to things—the combining of parts, their unifying com­munion, their harmony—constitutes the rationale of being, good­ness, and beauty.

**Roger**: This, at any rate, is how Aquinas understands it. In his *Commen­tary* he identifies the creator Good with being and regards it as the foundation of single, finite goods in their existential concreteness— in short, he identifies the Divine Goodness, or the divine essence, with the fullness of being.

Unumquodque enim bonum est, secundum quod est res actu; Deo autem proprium est quod sit suum esse, unde ipse solus est sua bonitas.

Everything is good according to its function. It is the nature of God, however, to be what he is; and so, he alone is his own goodness.11

**Joe**: We cannot look more closely here at the extent to which this is a misinterpretation of the Dionysian text. For Pseudo-Dionysius, *esse* was an effect of the act of creation and was not identified, in its fullness, with God. God was *super esse* in the sense that he was be­yond being; he was the cause of the existence of things in their goodness and their beauty. However, the fact remains that Aquinas very clearly held that God was being, goodness, and beauty, and that things participated in these attributes.

**Mary**: The identification of God with the fullness of being went against the spirit of Pseudo-Dionysius. But this could happen easily enough; all that was needed were slight alterations in certain terms. In the case of beauty, however, it is rather different, for here the Areopagite's text is, so to speak, expansive; the idea of the beautiful *(pulchrum)* is ubiquitous in chapter IV of *The Divine Names.* I am not concerned to decide here whether *pulchrum* is one of the divine names by way of hyperbole or by way of analogy—two interpre­tations which might be attributed, with all their implications, re­spectively to Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas. Rather, I wish to es­tablish whether *pulchrum* was, to put it crudely, a divine name or not. And in fact Pseudo-Dionysius presents his readers with this name, and Aquinas accepts it as a name: "beauty," Aquinas writes, "which is God" ("quod est Deus"). There is no hesitation. The God of St. Thomas—*ens realissimum,* Oneness, Goodness, Truth—is also, therefore, Beauty. The identification is implicit in his overall acceptance of the Dionysian work.

**Amy**: However, in the economy of the Thomist system there was no allowance for vague or poetic expressions; so that his *Commentary,* reflecting as it did something of the Dionysian text, could not help being a trifle overblown and allusive. As a consequence, the view that beauty was an attribute of God found expression in the only manner that Thomist coherence and rigor could permit—and that was, by adding beauty unequivocally to the attributes of being. The rubric involved here is one which we have already seen in the passage from *De Veritate* examined at the beginning of the chapter. We should recall that *De Veritate* belongs to the period 1256-1259, just before the *Commentary on the Divine Names.* The discussion of the transcendentals in the earlier work ignores beauty; so the *Com­mentary* would seem to be the right place to make amends for the oversight.

**Matt**: Let us see how Aquinas does this. The Dionysian text reads:

Propter quod et idem est bono pulchrum; quoniam bonum et pul­chrum secundum omnem causam cuncta desiderant, et non est aliquid existentium quod non participet pulchro et bono . . .

The beautiful and the good are the same:

all beings desire the beautiful and the good with respect

to every cause, no being fails to partake of the beautiful and good.16

Aquinas's commentary emphasises this passage. Here, evidently, the beautiful and the good are one and the same. Both, as we have alreadmy seen, are efficient and final causes. And it seems natural to identify them because both attributes are predicable of the divinity.

**Val**: However, when Aquinas finishes his actual commentary he adds another sentence, concerned not with the Dionysian text but rather with the clarification of his own earlier remarks.

Quamvis autem pulchrum et bonum sint idem subiecto, quia tarn claritas quam consonantia sub ratione bord contmentur, tamen ratione differunt: nam pulchrum addit supra bonum, or-dinem ad vim cognoscitivam illud esse huiusmodi.

Although the beautiful and the good are the same in the sub­ject—because both clarity and consonance are included in the nature of the good—they are conceptually different. For beauty adds something to the good, namely an order which enables cognition to know that a thing is of such a kind.17

The beautiful and the good are identical in the subject. *Claritas* and *consonantia,* which are sources of beauty, are also an aspect of the good, insofar as they are effects of the Good which creates and orders. Nonetheless, the beautiful and the good differ conceptually *(ratione)*—that is, according to the way in which they are con­ceived, according to the chosen point of view.

This should not surprise us. For these two features—being iden­tical in the subject, but differing *ratione*—are features appropriate to transcendental attributes; this, for example, is the case with the good and the true.14 Still, this explanation seems rather to assimi­late the beautiful into the good than to identify both of them with being. The claim that they are distinguishable *ratione* is compatible with either view, but the former interpretation is suggested by the statement that *claritas* and *consonantia,* the criteria of beauty, "are included in the nature of the good." And this interpretation seems to get extra support from a passage earlier in the *Commentary.*

The earlier passage occurs at the beginning of Aquinas's discus­sion of chapter IV of *The Divine Names.*

**Val**: I think that concludes this reading; we have a coherent text. I want to get back to page 36 in a bit, after we unpack what is here, a little.

**Matt**: So you would not want to start with how beauty is contained in the good, but different from it, somehow? You would not want to go there quite yet?

**Val**: Well, I have a theory of the beautiful that I would be interested in bouncing off of you guys…

**Roger**: Here we go…

**Val**: …and I would want to look at this in connection with that a little more immediately. *But*, if you want to read it now, I am open to doing so.

**Sean**: We could let the material *breathe* a little bit.

**Mary**: Well, it is one paragraph, right, on the next page?

**Roger**: But Val thinks it introduces another idea… my inclination is to stick with Val, for the moment, because she has a strategy. We don’t know it yet. We may not understand it when she is finished, but she will feel, otherwise, “Well, we never got the point, because I never got the right…” Why don’t we let her do it?

**Val**: …which says nothing about whether it is comprehensible in and of itself…

**Roger**: Right, that is another thing.

**Val**: …quite independent of whether or not *you* all understand it!

**Roger**: As long as we can back-step, because this is extremely important, on page 36…

**Val**: I agree.

**Roger**: …as to where it all leads, actually.

**Val**: Alright. I hope that all of these ideas did not just get lost in all of that verbiage. There is *so* much interesting stuff in here. And Eco has his own take, which I think is kind of dour. But, he really gets this material, in a way that I have not seen in too many other authors. Please, I open the floor to your discussion. I can lead it; I can point out all kinds of things, but, I don’t know if anybody has any response to anything in particular.

**Sean**: Well, yes, we could respond to so many things. Here at the beginning, apparently this – the importance of incorporating beauty as a transcendental – originally arose, at least in part, as a response to heresies… the Manicheans claiming that certain beings are intrinsically corrupt, or evil.

**Roger**: Well, I understood Eco to be saying there that it was at that point that the whole problem of the transcendentals flashed into importance – especially the good, although beauty with it. Nobody had ever doubted that good is a transcendental. And that was the issue with the Catharists, I think.

**Sean**: Yes.

**Roger**: It remains true, that therefore with it came the whole problem of the transcendentals, and therefore the possibility of identifying the beautiful, in there also. But that is the way I understood him.

**Sean**: Historical precedents for beauty may have, as he says later, been attributed to the presence of so many theories of beauty: Augustine, Boethius…

**Roger**: That is the way I read it.

**Paul**: I was really struck with the very brief lines, it was just the one paragraph that he has on Scotus Eriugena. Even just rereading this:

One of these influences, and one which cannot be ignored, was John Scottus Eriugena. Eriugena’s thought was in essence that of Dionysius the Areopagite, but rendered more congenial to the medieval, assimilated and translated into a system of enormous breadth. Eriugena taught the Middle Ages to look upon things with a penetrating eye, to read the universe, to read nature, as if it were a vast store of symbols. For him, the relations between God and things were not solely causal, but were also like the relations between sign and signified. The created world is a revelation. Nature is a theophany. In this theophanic harmony, objects are symbols, disclosures, indicators. It is their nature to point to God, and to God conceived of as Beauty revealing itself through harmonious design. It is a theophanic vision which is openly and profoundly aesthetic.

I mean, particularly, coming at this myself as somebody principally concerned with language, and beauty in language, with literature, with poetry, with words, *sign* and *signified*, it really seems that Eco is not pulling this out of a hat. I think that this seems to be real. It seems to be a real bridge between understanding Pseudo-Dionysius, the way he speaks himself, and understanding the things that Thomas has to say about him. And it is very cool, that this is a *way* *of* *speaking*; *beauty* itself is a way of, as it were, speaking about God. Sean, I am sure you are on to this; this really taps into 20th century Continental philosophy, into *sign and signified.*  It could tap into deconstructionism.

**Roger**: You know, this idea of the primacy of the sign and signified – in Scotus Eriugena, I guess, it’s there – is often found in Bonaventure, and usually with the claim that that is not the way Aquinas basically sees things. And I think that there is some truth to that. I think Eco is saying – there is a little remark in there about “even philosophers themselves not terribly sensitive to beauty” had to deal with this, because it is in the Dionysian text – I have a feeling that he is saying, in a sort of back-handed way, that this was not really Aquinas’ approach…

**Joe**: Yes. Yes. Yes.

**Roger**: …and I especially do see that when I see the contrast between Bonaventure and Thomas; I look at it, and I say that this was and continues to be one of the criticisms of the Bonaventurians of Thomist thinking: it thinks causally, but not primarily in terms of sign and signified, and that Bonaventure thinks primarily in terms of the world as sign. However that may be historically, I get the feeling that Eco is saying, “You know, Aquinas had to deal with this because of Dionysius. And he did a good job, and he did it in a way that is faithful to a tradition that is happening, but there was something else going on.” I don’t know...

But you know, Eco is a modern philosopher, a post-modern philosopher as you know, and has assimilated a great deal of the continental tradition. So, who knows? But these are really historical things. I think that whole idea of seeing the world as a sign – you know, take how Bonaventure sees the Trinity in everything, looks everywhere and there it is – is a powerful one. And I often do feel it existing in the history of philosophy as a kind of supplement to the Thomistic reading of things. Be that as it may, I think that it is an important idea.

**Joe**: I think so, too. The first thing that came to my mind, Paul, when you were commentating on this, was St. Augustine’s definition of sign; in Book II of *On Christian Doctrine*, he defines a sign as that which,over and above the effect which it has on the senses, brings something to mind as a consequence of itself. So, it seems that all of creation would be a sign of God. St. Thomas says, over and over again, that we know God only through his effects, and those things are a participation in the beauty and goodness of God. You could look at the relationship; the relationship of the world to God is that of sign to signified, even according the strictest definition of sign, it seems to me.

**Roger**: But you see the distinction that he is making, between “causative” and “sign” as two ways of looking at the thing, is significant, at least for Eco’s thought – as well as, I think, for distinctions that have been made in the tradition, between the Franciscans and the Thomists.

**Paul**: He is making the point that in a certain sense, without exactly losing transcendence, Thomas’ God is more immanent. There is something more lateral about being among beings, being cause, rather than superbeauty, superbeing, super-… I mean to say, that issue of sign and signified puts things on a different level. Of course with God, both are true; the writer comes onto the book in this one case, that is what the Incarnation is. But I haven’t fully let go, and I’ll try to say this of Gilson’s whole idea about factivity. Because if it really is the sign and the signified, it isn’t just that the creation has the active role of signifying, but that it is also God’s creation, and in a certain sense it is his writing; it is his artwork; it is his expression.

**Roger**: Yes.

**Paul**: I think that there is a level at which Thomas’s way of doing things is almost more lateral, because it puts God as Being – even though, if God is Being and he is Cause, he is in creation, even independent of the Incarnation, he is in creation in a different way than if he is simply signifier and superbeing, superbeauty…

**Joe**: Yes, certainly.

**Mary**: Right. If you think of the atom holding together, if you go inside the internal mechanism of being… why don’t things explode? I mean God is participating, even if you set aside the Incarnation.

**Val**: Yes. Eco will go on to mention that for Aquinas this is a matter of participation, not mere reflection.

**Sean**: Sign/signified as opposed to causal efficacy, instilling a meaning. I was studying Descartes recently, and of course he rejects that there is a possibility of discerning the intentions of God in creating the universe. But earlier on in this text, Eco emphasizes that neo-Thomists try to discuss beauty as a transcendental from a doctrinal rather than an historical perspective, in their rebellion against the subjectivistic interpretations of beauty, as opposed to beauty being there, independent of us. So to tie that together…

**Roger**: I wonder what is at stake; that is, this is interesting to start here, but what is at stake in the way that we see the world? You know, what is really at stake here, in the way that we see that tree, for instance?

**Mary**: I look at it as a matter of intrinsic value and worth – of integrity.

**Roger**: Yes.

**Mary**: If there is purpose, then there is intrinsic worth; there is value – in fact it is highly valued, to the point that when we look at the value of life... that is not just something we believe, but echoes even deeper in our heart, like, “Whoa!” There is this worth, that we can look at levels of creation and we can look at that bug, and that is complexity – but then, that worth…. I am trying to get to a point here, maybe you can throw some ideas out there too, then – but the more complex the creation, not only is it the more that we can almost stand in awe of it, but also then the more we are all directed to see the glory of God in it.

**Roger**: So, for you, there is a kind of an immediate phenomenological perception of value – I mean, that is, you do not infer the value of the thing…

**Mary**: It is *there*. And it has to be. Right.

**Roger**: …You look at it, and you cannot but see…

**Mary**: And it is God-given, I do believe. But it is so valuable then. There is such a purpose, one which makes me wonder, “So what is the bigger purpose?” We have been given our faith, so we *know*; it is ultimately the glory of God: and that is like *Holy Spirit, holy fire*. I see it as: The dam busted – boom!

**Roger**: Okay, now when you say purpose… when you look at a flower – I guess I have in my mind these arguments that continue into the present from phenomenologically-oriented Christian thinkers like Dietrich von Hildebrand, and so on, who want to insist that there is this kind of value in things that you see, in a way that is different from a Thomist perspective. But apart from those guys; when I hear you talking, there is a “heart” response, since you are putting it that way, a heart leap, a heart response…

**Mary**: Knowledge is not the end. There is something so beyond, and I think that he [Eco] mentions too, there is something intrinsic – look at the atom. There is that complexity. Okay, we did not know that was there, until scientists delved into things. And there is so much complexity, so much that we do not even know. Consider our knowledge of the brain; there is so much brain research. There is such complexity, if someone who is not a believer is studying this, I find that they would have to be incredibly resistant to truth, not be open, to totally deny the existence of God, to totally deny that there is this master plan. It is beyond our understanding. The beauty really draws us, and there has to be the recognition that, “There is something beyond what I can understand here.” There is that moment of inspiration, I guess, so to speak.

**Roger**: Yes. I am trying to sort out two strands that maybe cannot be perfectly sorted out from each other. One is this kind of immediate perception that we have with the beautiful, that bypasses everything else. The other says, “Look at the complexity. Now how could that complexity get there without *etc. etc. etc.*” …in an inferential kind of way. And the other just sort of *impacts*.

**Mary**: But I think there can be both. They are both ways that God draws us.

**Roger**: I am just fishing around, I feel there are those two little levels there that need to be distinguished.

**Matt**: …so an immediacy versus something that is apprehended, to lead you? We are between the goodness – no, the beauty – which is apprehended, and the goodness is that in which the appetite takes pleasure more immediately.

**Roger**: When St. Thomas explains how we know that beings are good, he says, “Well, we can see that each thing loves its own being, that is, because it holds itself together”… it “hugs” itself, it holds itself together. Everything loves its own being. So we can identify with that love of its own being that everything has, and we can see that there is an end, a final end there, that governs the being.

**Joe**: Yes.

**Roger**: So everything is good because it has that final end, and our will can identify with that – that desire of the thing for its own being. It is a kind of inferential knowledge. He does not say, “Look at this thing! Can’t you see that it is good?” Whereas somebody else might: for example, this more phenomenological thing, which would bypass that inference. And beauty tends to do that, that is what I am saying. Beauty tends to override those other influences, and just smack you, in some way.

**Sean**: Yes.

**Roger**: That is what I think that I am trying to get at.

**Sean**: There is a tendency nowadays to look at the universe from a very *neutral*, objectified standpoint. An objectivity which is, as Hildebrand would say, devoid of any value responses, appropriate to what is being considered. And this is related back to – I think – the causal versus the sign/signified conceptions of the universe. As St. Paul says, it is a revelation. It is so easy to fall into, as Eco was saying, from the sign/signified perspective, a very relativistic standpoint, that is very different from the ordered, mathematical/causal perspective, which is, as you know, objective; which everyone can agree on.

**Mary**: Man likes to understand everything, and put it in a box.

**Joe**: I do not know if he presents such a sharp dichotomy there. He says, for him the relation between God and things was not *solely* causal, but were also in relation. So, it is not an either/or. You can have both.

**Roger**: Right.

**Sean**: I think the risk is turning it into an either/or, which is what is happening now, with science and relativism.

**Paul**: The other thing is, taking it in the opposite direction – that both/and – you can also sort of set against it an almost mystical backdrop – I mean, the language taken from Dionysius, or Eriugena, or Bonaventure. I was just looking up (I know he was talking about something different to some degree, but the in spirit of it); I was remembering saying the Office of Readings on the memorial of St. Bonaventure…

**Val**: *Oh* *that* *reading*. So beautiful.

**Paul**: For this passover to be perfect, we must suspend all the operations of the mind and we must transform the peak of our affections, directing them to God alone. This is a sacred mystical experience. It cannot be comprehended by anyone unless he surrenders himself to it; nor can he surrender himself to it unless he longs for it; nor can he long for it unless the Holy Spirit, whom Christ sent into the world, should come and inflame his innermost soul. Hence the Apostle says that this mystical wisdom is revealed by the Holy Spirit.

If you ask how such things can occur, seek the answer in God’s grace, not in doctrine; in the longing of the will, not in the understanding; in the sighs of prayer, not in research; seek the bridegroom not the teacher; God and not man; darkness not daylight; and look not to the light but rather to the raging fire that carries the soul to God with intense fervour and glowing love. The fir is God, and the furnace is in Jerusalem, fired by Christ in the ardour of his loving passion. Only he understood this who said: ***My soul chose hanging and my bones death.*** Anyone who cherishes this kind of death can see God, for it is certainly true that: ***No man can look upon me and live.***

It seems like a kind of emphasis – breaking up the both/and here, into an emphasis on transcendence, and an emphasis on… I feel like it is actually the sign/signified vision that has more mystical/transcendent potential, because it brings out a certain kind of distance, it brings out otherness. And, curiously – at least my sense of it – reading more of the Eco and taking a bigger picture, I think a step beyond, there is a way in which I could apply – Val passed this on to me, I did not hear you saying it, Roger – your expression, “Neanderthal Thomist.”

**Roger**: I forgot that.

**Paul**:There is a way in which Eco seems to be retaining as an atheist or an agnostic or a skeptic a certain kind of atheistic, agnostic, skeptical Neanderthal Thomism. He doesn’t want entirely to *go* *there*, for all of his interest in modern philosophy, he doesn’t entirely want to go there.

**Val**: Yes. Actually, he is. You [Paul] are exactly right; Eco *is* a Neanderthal Thomist. Now, just as a digression for one minute(!), the discussion cycle on *claritas*, I was planning to start with that Bonaventure.

**Paul**: I’m sorry.

**Val**: So, I have been *despoiled* of the Bonaventure.

**Paul**: I am *so* sorry.

**Val**: But going back, before Eco says that one of the influences on the medieval mind was Eriugena, in the paragraph before that, he says that Dionysius sees the world – and he uses very poetic language – as “a cascade of beauties springing forth from the First Principle, a dazzling radiance of sensuous splendors which diversify in all created being” – and that struck me as being very curious, because Dionysius talks so much of the hierarchy of the angels…

**Paul**: …“riotously hermetic”

**Val**: …and of spiritual beauty. So to nail that as array of sensuous imagery… and then later on, Eco uses the terms “mythical and anthropological” and he leaves out the level of the mystical. I feel that there is a very fundamentalist constriction of the text – he *gets* the Thomas – but I feel that he gets it in a way that is also very rigid, missing that whole level of transcendence and flexibility.

**Paul**: Pardon the interruption, but you [Val] pointed out with a note [on the hand-out], the phrase “riotous and hermetic imagery,” and reference Dionysius’s “whole theology of hierarchy and hierarchical ordering.” Think of the choirs of angels, all lined up: It is not riotous, it is a map.

**Roger**: It is diagrammatic.

**Paul**: For the modern mind, it is almost disturbingly exact about the angels. Like: “Why is it so exact?” But it is also a totally different vision, and it is odd that it seems like the vision that would be more in line with at least a reading of the post-modern sensibility, seems to be the vision that would also be more in line with a mystical sensibility.

**Sean**: The tendency of post-modernism leads to break down barriers, or restrictions, which tend to dominate, or to order, the mystical…

**Mary**: So do we need the Holy Spirit to transcend it all… to achieve that transcendence?

**Roger**: Well, maybe as an analogy, I guess what I am thinking of is that beauty has a kind of immediate *zap* to it. When something strikes us with its beauty, Plato says that it hits us. It is not so much that we analyze it and say, “Gee, let’s see how complex it is.” It hits us first with beauty. There is an immediacy to beauty, that is what I want to say – and the way it seduces us, it bypasses a lot of other thought. There is something important about that, something somehow connected with all of this. I am sorry to be so vague.

**Val**: Now I really cannot wait to get to my little theory.

**Roger**: Oh. Okay. Well…

**Val**: I’ll do that afterwards…

**Roger**: That is just striking me at the moment: That beauty is different from goodness, and oneness, and all of these other things, it has an immediacy of …force to it.

**Val**: And that Benedict XVI reading that I sent – despair not, it will return.

**Mary**: Oh, beautiful.

**Val**: In that little letter, he talks about beauty *disturbing* us, wounding us.

**Roger**: Yes.

**Mary**: Yes. Right, and we can pursue truth through it. We are struck, and then we can pursue truth through it. I actually heard this preacher on the radio today who was saying, “If we really want truth, we will seek it.” But, again, you have to be firmly in denial to not find it. And not to see beauty, you would have to be blind. Of course, God knows the complexity of each of us, but, generally stated…

**Roger**: But I guess I was saying in answer to your [Mary’s] thing: yes, the grace of the Holy Spirit. But, even on a *natural* level, beauty is available to all in some way. Everybody has some experience of it, however we relate that to the divine operation. It just seems that there is an availability to it…

**Mary**: Well, doesn’t it say in Scripture that beauty is made apparent… oh my gosh, I can’t get the words… by God, so that we’d have to be in denial… it’s apparent, his existence is apparent.

**Joe**: It is in Romans. \*(*Rom*. *1, 19-20*. ***For what can be known about God is evident to them, because God made it evident to them. Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made. As a result, they have no excuse.***)

✥✥✥

**Intermission**

…with lemon-glazed blueberry scones and Emily’s lemon bars

✥✥✥

[Lights lowered.]

**Roger**: Now that’s more conducive.

**Val**: More conducive.

**Roger**: But to *what*? Sleep?

**Val**: So then. Page 36, of the Eco.

**Roger**: Yes, you skipped a couple of pages there.

**Val**: Just because I was trying to keep it short.

**Roger**: I know, and I was thinking, “Wait a minute, this is getting somewhere.” So I ordered the book.

**Val**: Did you really? I have not read the whole book, by any means. The chapter on light is very interesting. I plan to get back to it, when we do *claritas*. They closed the library eventually and threw me out.

**Roger**: Incidentally, Umberto Eco has – I suppose it is sort of a coffee-table book. It is expensive and beautiful – but it is called *The History of Beauty*. It is just a lovely book. If you want a book of the history of the visual arts in the West – he does not get into music – it is a beautiful book, worth looking at or having. *The History of Beauty*.

**Val**: Joe, do you want to read this for us, on page 36? Just what it is in the brackets.

**Joe**: “Good” and “beautiful” have the same reference, but differ in meaning. For the good, being what all things want, is that in which the appetite comes to rest; whereas the beautiful is that in which the appetite comes to rest through contemplation or knowledge…”Beautiful” therefore adds to “good” a reference to the cognitive powers; “good” refers simply to that in which the appetite takes pleasure, but “beautiful” refers to something the mere apprehension of which gives pleasure.

**Val**: I don’t know, maybe this is obvious to everybody, and you will tell me that this is what you were thinking all along when you read this, but there is a Jesuit Thomist, Fr. Norris Clarke. He has a book called *The One and the Many*; I am sure that you are familiar. He makes certain epistemological claims, and he talks about how all being is radiating its knowability, and, in turn, all being has (I think he says) rabbit ear antennas.

**Roger**: It has what?

**Mary**: Rabbit ear antennas.

**Val**: Yes. So, insofar as all being has this function of knowability, it kind of “puts itself out there,” to be received by the intellect of another, I am wondering if it is not a matter of apprehension, in the sense of *what is pleasing to our senses*. But there is a much deeper metaphysical stance, that all being has, that which precisely permits intersubjectivity, and is ordered particularly toward relationship.

I do not know if I am making any sense at all. I explained this to Paul, point by point, on a walk. It is great, you go on a hike, and you’ve got a challenging ascent, and you have got to distract yourself somehow, and so you really have the time to work things out. And it made sense, when we went through all of the premises, point by point. I do not know if I can make it clear right now.

I feel that we have this idea that *apprehended by the senses* makes things shallower. But no: The more I read this, I think, it makes them realer and fuller, more available to interpersonal communion. I throw that out there. I can develop it more. And I plan to, in a paper, but that is beside the point.

**Roger**: Your first point is that being is “pushy,” that is, it pushes itself out there. It is radiating out. It is always…

**Mary**: … in overflow…

**Roger**: Yes. It is an overflow, and it is putting itself out there. And the opposite is also true: that everything is going around, wanting to pick that up – Let me back up for a second. The good is what the appetite rests in. But there is a good of the manifestation itself; that is, everything is good. But everything also manifests itself, in its truth. And, not only is the being good, the manifestation itself is good, is enjoyed, is appreciated. Why though? *Because*, you’re saying, as I understand it, because it is the way we get together; it is the means to interpersonal communication. And, yes…

**Val**: Exactly right. First of all, the idea is of beauty as the “intersubjective interface” between beings. One thing that tipped me off to that is, in the Benedict letter that I sent out, the pope quotes von Balthasar as saying, “Beauty… forms a halo, an untouchable crown around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another.” It is itself a *beautiful* formulation, and so poetic, and kind of mysterious. I was trying to unravel that, in which is something of the origin of this thinking.

**Mary**: Well, it makes sense. If we are created of God, and God is Beauty, if he is beautiful, then there is overflow. So he is showing himself. And if we are made in that image, then we would be showing ourselves. It is about relationship.

**Val**: The other thing is then – *if* this has any merit at all – you can start drawing a lot of analogies with regard to the idea of glory, I think, because of the very notion of manifestation, or epiphany.

**Mary**: Can you give us an example?

**Val**: Well, everybody is looking so puzzled.

**Sean**: I think it is important when, as is fitting, discussing such things as this, that are so immense, we have to be extremely careful in making many distinctions, emphasizing that we are avoiding certain perspectives. For instance, this notion that beauty, perceived through the senses, perceived in experience, is related to various different…

**Val**: Well I did not say anything about *sense* apprehension. I said just “apprehension.”

**Sean**: Apprehension. Yes…

**Roger**: … on analogous levels.

**Val**: Exactly.

**Mary**: But that makes so much sense, because beauty is connected to truth, and that would make sense with the Bible quote, ***Behold the beauty of the Lord.*** \* (*Ps*. *27:4*)So therefore, it can, perhaps, direct us to truth. So there is an overflow out there, and anybody searching for truth can find it. It is apparent… it’s there!

**Roger**: *Overflow* is your thing, isn’t it? Because doctrinally, at least in the classic view of this, it is like there is this “extra.” In God, there is an overflow. God even manifests Himself to Himself, so to speak. In other words, if you say, “Eternally there is a Divine Word” – well, who is He speaking to? God is *expressing* himself, and ultimately you get the expression of two Persons, back to themselves, and you get inter-Personal relation *through* the manifestation, which then the Spirit holds in Unity. So there is this *extra*, of moving out into manifestation, in invitation of response. And that is, in God, even in the immanent Trinity, quite apart from creation and Redemption; it is going on always, that overflow, that extra, that connects with manifestation, revelation, and receptivity then. And the Spirit comes in again as that Interface too, between them.

**Mary**: Is anybody else’s mind blown?

**Roger**: I think we should just take it down to immediate experience, in a way. We want to reveal ourselves, in some way, because we are looking for intimacy, in some way. Even criminals, you know, give evidence against themselves on the Internet, because they feel they want to tell somebody. Here is the most perverted case of this, but they *gotta tell somebody*.

**Joe**: [extremely pensive] Yes. Yes.

**Roger**: It is like, “What, are you crazy?” You read some guy goes on the Internet and says, “Hey, I just held up a bank.” But he cannot stand that he can’t tell somebody.

**Mary**: We want to be recognized.

**Roger**: We want to manifest in some way. And so, at every level, at just the sense level, you say, “I am going out of the house. Wait a minute, I want to comb my hair.” It is very simple, because I am going to *present* in some way… *presentation --* And so, where am I going with that? In the first place, we have got to understand – go back to *being wants being to be*. In “wanting to be,” part of that extra of it, is to be out there, and present in some way. And then establish relation through that. And beauty is right in there. Even at the most superficial level, people want to look beautiful.

**Mary**: …like a peacock wants to show its stuff.

**Roger**: Yes.

**Mary**: Of course, we want to be recognized. We want to be told, “Yes, you are worth it.” Because after the fall, we are separated. We find our true worth and identity in God, and the more we know that, with that solid foundation, we can go out and say, “No, I am already affirmed, I don’t need to go out and rob a store,” at the most extreme level, or even elicit attention in a way that is not healthy for me, that does not actually build me up, but maybe tears me down. That is the foundation, and then we are empowered. We reach out, but then also, having that radar for beauty, by God’s grace, are empowered to see that beauty in others. We can also then support and nourish – I believe that God provides that nourishing to the ultimate – but then we can nourish it, once we know our worth. So we are vessels to empower, but it is God, really, doing the empowering. He is the strength, and the foundation. But it is a beautiful thing, because when we find our worth, it is a perfectly operating system.

**Roger**: And that desire, to reveal, to put ourselves out there though – you see a certain (it seems to me) watering down of it, in a sort of desperate way, in today’s social media, because everybody wants to tell everybody everything. Everybody is my “friend.” But why? Because I want someone to tell this stuff to. So there is a dissipation of it at that level; that is another aspect of it, where it is not contained. You do not tell everything to everybody, but you want to find someone that you *can* tell things to.

**Mary**: But we cannot find our worth and value in people.

**Roger**: That is true… But given that there are other people, there are going to be distinctions, in terms of where a thing can really hold, and where it just gets dissipated. But also in the relation to God.

**Mary**: Right. But if we do not know God, we are going to just find it superficially somewhere else.

**Val**: I don’t know. One side of the room does not look okay.

**Matt**: Can you re-present your idea?

**Stefan**: Yes, that would help.

**Roger**: We’ve got all night.

[Laughter.]

**Matt**: Not because you were unclear.

**Roger**: The thing itself is so hard to express. This stuff, even if you said it as clearly as it can be put, it needs to be said a thousand times probably. It has many little angles. And all of a sudden, someone comes in and says, “Oh wait…

**Stefan**: …I think I understood it.”

**Val**: All right. At the end of this little section, which we did not read, Eco says,

My insistence on precision in this matter might seem overdone, were it not for a phrase which occurs in one of the passages quoted from the *Summa Theologiae*. That phrase is *visa placent* (beautiful things *please us when they are seen*), and it is a disturbing intrusion into the whole question and its context. As we shall see, it introduces a subjective condition for beauty, and thus points to a denial of its transcendental status.

To me, Eco is being – and really, I had forgotten about this phrase for…eons, you know, since earlier in the Cenozoic – a Neanderthal Thomist. It is a very fundamentalist reading; *things please us when they are seen –* so that is to say, therefore, it is all very shallow; it is all at the level of sense apprehension. What I am saying is, it is a universal function of being to be knowable, at least in and of itself. That holds true for God in an eminent degree; things are knowable and transparent; there is a manifestation which attends them, that is ontically inextricable from …themselves. So when Thomas says, or rather, when modern commentators say, that the beautiful is a derivative transcendental, relegating it to an almost second-class type of status – Eco is saying: Hey, maybe it is not a transcendental at all – it is once-removed from being. What I am saying is that there is a state of manifestation; when we perceive the beautiful, we are intercepting being at this level of interface, of intersubjectivity, and if I could just…One second, Paul… Paul is on fire… I mean, think about food. I try to make it beautiful. Its value is not determined by whether there is an orchid on the side or not.

**Mary**: Personal touch, in beauty…

**Val**: Well that too. But that little announcement, that little manifestation…

**Roger**: …presentation.

**Val**: Yes. There is a recognition of the goodness *before* there is any appetitive resting. What I am trying to say is, when God manifests Himself it is glory, it is epiphany, it is *glory*. There is an analogous *beauty*, a self-revelatory dimension to being, an uptake of that announcement, and that is exactly – metaphysically – where beauty is coming in.

**Paul**: I think that that is quite possibly the entire resolution, culmination, and quite possibly, explosion of the discussion that we were having before the break. The whole issue of *sign/signified* versus *cause* is, in a certain sense, a red herring, because, if this is a glory, if this is an epiphany, if the point is that the very being – I know that this is of very different consequence, but the Gospel says, ***if these were silent, the very stones would cry out***.\* (Luke 19, 40) Everything that is, is an epiphany, and speaking; being is speaking to us. If you take *causal* the wrong way, you get a chain of dominoes, you get materialism. If you take *sign/signified* the wrong way, you can get to the farthest reaches of deconstructionism, where there is actually no reality, there is only the text. This is neither, this is the epiphany in which being – in which ***the Word is made flesh*** [profound bow]: Being is speaking to us.

**Val**: I think two related words come into play, although I do not know exactly how they fit: One is *image*, going back to the Trinitarian model, and another one is *disclosure*.

**Sean**: I just want to add two further points which are related, harkening back to the idea of *pitfalls* that need to be avoided because we are dealing with such a sensitive topic: One of them is that – with the sense of taking pleasure in that which is seen, that which is experienced, before the appetitive fulfillment is attained, which is the good – there is a huge risk that people will emphasize the experience of the pleasurable, independent of that which gives the pleasure, that which triggers it, or evokes it, or deserves it.

**Roger**: You could want the appearance, enjoy the appearance, rather the reality.

**Sean**: This could be taken to such far extremes.

**Val**: Yes. That would *always* be sin.

**Sean**: …It is removing it from it.

**Val**: …at whatever level, whatever it is.

**Sean**: Yes, it would be sin.

**Roger**: And that is aestheticism.

**Sean**: Self-centeredness.

**Roger**: The level where you separate the appearance…

**Sean**: …from the meaning, the intelligibility.

**Roger**: …and then you live in the appearance, and then you live in unreality.

**Sean**: Then you could reduce things, to suggest means to the experience of pleasure. And then, on the other side, there is a huge connection between being and seeming, or beauty and seeming. Something can seem beautiful, or appear to be beautiful, but not actually in its depths carry that which it proclaims, or pronounces.

**Val**: [unintelligible sounds of distress] That is interesting, because last time you were sitting in, I think, almost the same spot, and you were saying that things which are artificial are, you know, nauseating, revolting. And they are; they are. There is a total seduction, and a total lie there. And I think that if you are really attuned to the integral reality of something, then you know that it will demand sacrifice. [The integral reality] is a spiritual reality; it is a reality which is a mystery, a reality which is never going to be plumbed, and one which necessarily makes a rightful demand of service. And therefore there is a real need to cultivate a *discernment of spirits*, even analogically, at the material level.

This is not well thought out – introducing it now, that is. Last year, I started to find out about what is put into processed foods. Things are really pulled together from scraps, and strange substances – it is not anything we would really want to talk about right now. But I found out that artificial colors are made out of coal tar, and they are in *everything*. You buy a jar of pickles and think, “Wow, they are nice and green and fresh and crisp.” No, they are not.

**Roger**: They are full of coal tar?

**Val**: The processing takes out all of the color, and then they pump it with all of these artificial colors. The textures of things are altered with silicon, sands, foaming agents that you use in wall insulation… azodicarbonomide, it makes bread nice and fluffy; find it in your Subway sandwich, use it in your attic. I realized very pertinently: I do not want to be manipulated, at that level; if, even at the most basic *sense* level, I am being manipulated into thinking, “Wow, this is a really nice, delicious burger” – and in the meantime, this is not Bessie; it’s a minimum of eight different cows. It is an *aggregate* – an aggregate in Aristotelian terms! – of strange things. I stopped buying any processed food; I have learned to read labels very carefully. I think that you can be hoodwinked and manipulated, knowingly or unknowingly, at any level. So yes, I do think that there is a *discernment* that must accompany the whole of reality. Reality, the manifestation of reality, is not cheap and shallow; it is the opposite.

**Mary**: I am just thinking that the real beauty is eternal. What is lasting is what gives glory to God. We can ask God for that discernment, but his beauty is apparent.

**Amy**: It is interesting what you [Roger] said about self-revelation leading to intimacy. I was reading something about friendship. The author, and I do not remember who it was, used an odd terminology, the “philosophy of the secret.” There is a secret between two friends which is part of an intimacy, between the two. And it is interesting how we were talking about epiphany. In the catacombs there are the three Magi, and they all have different colored hats. They are representative of all peoples from all over the world, and they are coming to seek that epiphany, the Self-revelation, of the Face of God. The most perfect revelation to us is general revelation, but God is infinite, and he can have a personal relationship with each one of us. So there is the secret between the two lovers, or the two friends. He is irresistible beauty, so he draws us in, or smacks us over the head, into this deeper relationship.

**Mary**: Yes.

**Val**: That is beautiful.

**Joe**: I think that that seems to fit in with what Val was saying. Can you [Val] explain your thought a little bit more? I feel that I do not get the whole of it. I mean, are you trying to explain the essence of beauty, or an effect of beauty, or… the intersubjectivity of it? Does that pertain to what it is, or is it an effect?

**Val**: What I am doing is giving a metaphysical definition of it, almost, locating “where” it is in the realm of being.

**Roger**: Joe is very sensitive to types of definitions. He is going to tell you, “That is a nominal definition, or that is a …” But it is important. There are different levels of definition. So the question is, “What are we saying here?” And I would say that we are kind of mapping it. But what would it be if you said – now we are stuck using metaphors here, obviously in a big way – Beauty is an overture to relationship, or something. I think that that is part of what you are saying, that it is connected with relationality.

**Val**: *Yes*.

**Roger**: And it is because it is the place where the being goes out of itself, in self-manifestation, and invitation, in some way. Now what kind of a definition that is, I am not sure – but it has to do then, ontologically, with the connection of relationality and being.

**Joe**: Right.

**Mary**: Right.

**Roger**: It will be in there, somewhere. I can’t say more at the moment, but that is one place where it is, on the map of the thing. The good draws to itself; it is a value. And beauty attracts also, but there is something about the beautiful that has to do at the same time with this expressivity. But I do not know where it is, definitionally.

**Sean**: The correlation between that which is in our ability to perceive it as such, objective correlation to our subjective experience…

**Roger**: Right.

**Sean**: So you could say that which is desirable in our desire for it, upon seeing it, is being invoked…

**Joe**: It is interesting though, that the first definitions of good and of beauty that we have are in relation to something else. The good is what all desire. I mean, you are bringing in something else’s relationship to that.

**Val**: Aha. Exactly.

**Joe**: And in beauty, *ipsa apprehensio*, in apprehension itself, it pleases. So you are talking about its relation to something else.

**Roger**: Yes.

**Joe**: So you are saying that it is part of the essence of it, I guess, that intersubjectivity of beauty.

**Val**: Yes. Yes, it is precisely… the only word I can put on it is “interface,” as pertains to that moment of exchange, or manifestation… but I think that it is impossible to think in a way which is non-spatial, and so the temptation is to think of manifestation as being “forward” or “beyond” being. I am saying that it is woven *into* being.

**Roger**: Yes.

**Val**: It is hard to get that idea.

**Joe**: Yes.

**Val**: See, once you remove it spatially, then you have got this disembodied, notional kind of point of view.

**Sean**: …subjectivistic.

**Val**: I mean, that can be easily exploited. (Yes, of course, knowability requires that a subject prescind a form. Yes, so it is “disembodied” after that aspect.) But not in the sense that it is separate, or disconnected from the reality.

**Joe**: Roger is saying that you can have that in the Trinity…

**Roger**: …that there is manifestation going on there, giving a Word. You see, expressing, *expressing*, a Word.

**Joe**: Yes.

**Sean**: Which can be understood as it is intended. The intersubjectivity of beauty involves, implies, the objectivity of beauty, because objectivity refers to what is independent of a particular perspective, which is arrived at through communication, through intersubjective dialogue. Is that the way it actually is? Am I seeing it differently than it is? And then we enter into discussion to see if what is being experienced by one is experienced by all… or cultural relativism…

**Val**: Just working with all of this, I mean… Sean, I just wonder, your objections are ones which I never thought of, that never would occur to me in a million years. It makes sense when you say them, but I think that maybe, as moderns, we think of image as being crafted, as being artifice. So, you have a magazine cover or something, that is airbrushed and repolished; it is a very crafted product. I am talking about a manifestation that being cannot help but put forth – if I were to say it is an emanation, then that sounds very Plotinian – but it is just a knowability, a mystery of the thing, which attends all being; it is not a craft, not a product, although that can be there, and when you read von Balthasar, there is the idea of role – right, Roger? – and mask, and where you meet people. But I am talking about something absolutely prior to that.

**Sean**: Oh, yes. In the post-modern world, we have so many objections to this objectivity of beauty. It is so private, so highly individual, that any attempt to establish a beauty which is intersubjectively verifiable, or that we can enjoy together in community, is often seen as a form of restriction or oppression, a rejection of the individual. But these are some of the things that give rise to some of the objections to which we need to respond.

**Matt**: Do any of the other transcendentals have this same quality? Or is beauty privileged?

**Val**: Well, what I am saying, if my theory has any merit at all, what I am saying is that beauty is that which relates to this knowability. So I am making an ontological claim; not really an aesthetic claim at all, in and of itself. I am making an epistemological claim, and an ontic one, I think. Because what I am talking about is such raw material, so prior to any, *any* type of…

**Sean**: …the luminosity, shining forth.

**Roger**: An old definition is *beauty is the splendor of truth*. Now, *splendor* is going to maybe beg the question a little, but the point is, it is related to truth in terms of intelligibility – the knowability Val keeps talking about. But the knowability of something involves manifestation of expression. The manifestation and expression itself is splendid, almost in addition to the goodness of the thing. The manifestation is itself good. Why? Because it opens to intersubjectivity.

But we do not have to instrumentalize it that way; we can *enjoy* it. When they say it is a derivative transcendental, they mean that there is the good, and the one, and the true, and then the true (it is related to the true) which has to do with a word, speaking a word, a manifestation. The word itself is a good; it can be enjoyed as a good. There is an enjoyment of the extra that then flows in, well, that we share with each other, or something like that.

**Mary**: No, that is great. Absolutely.

**Roger**: But it is related to truth. In terms of the ordering of the transcendentals, it is definitely related to truth. But, it is something like: Truth is good, and the thing is good. But the truth of the thing, because that involves a kind of a word… the word is also good, not like some second thing, but it is part of the goodness of the thing. It is an extra. It is – oh man, I don’t know. It’s too hard. How did I ever get into philosophy? This is the craziest labor there ever was. But this is good. Maybe even beautiful. I don’t know if it is true, but…

**Joe**: I have a question. It may be based on a misunderstanding of what you [Val] are saying, so I caution you there. In contemporary philosophy/theology, there is a kind of mistake I perceive, and a misapplication of relation in God, to relation in creatures. So in other words, God is the only place where you find subsistent relation; everywhere else, relation is something added to the being of the thing, right?

**Roger**: Right.

**Joe**: …it is an accident. So, [Gilles Deleuze?], he takes personhood, even among created persons, to be essentially in relation, which seems to me to be appropriating to creatures what is uniquely true of God. My thought is that the defining of beauty as essentially a relation – I do not know if that is where you are going…

**Val**: No.

**Joe**: …or essentially intersubjective…

**Val**: No.

**Joe**: …would incorporate the idea – that is why I was saying that maybe this is a misunderstanding of what you are saying – that idea of it being essentially relational, which does not seem to me to be the case.

**Val**: The relationality is an effect.

**Joe**: Right. That is where my question was before… is that what beauty in itself is, or is it an effect of beauty?

**Val**: If you had one created being, and no other created being at all; you know, God made one rock.

**Joe**: Yes, yes.

**Mary**: It would cry out.

**Val**: Yes. It would, simply by its own metaphysical nature, have a proper intelligibility, a knowability, in and of itself, independent…

**Joe**: Okay, yes, yes.

**Val**: And what I am saying, is that it would be good, and true, and one, and something, whether anybody was there…

**Joe**: …beautiful.

**Mary**: Right, it would emit…

**Val**: Yes, that is a really good word. Obviously God would see all of those attributes as a unity. Then there would be no one to talk about transcendentals, because there wouldn’t be those perspectival takes on its being.

**Joe**: Right, right.

**Matt**: Could you say that again?

**Val**: It would be one, true, good, and so on and so forth, in and of itself, in its own nature. However, without other creatures, we would lose this fracturing of the one being into the transcendentals, right?

**Matt**: Right. Absolutely true.

**Val**: But they would still obtain, all of those facets of being would nonetheless obtain. None would be lost.

**Matt**: How is the rock true? First of all, how is the rock true even relationally, if there is a second being there?

**Val**: What do you mean?

**Matt**: How can a rock be true?

**Sean**: Insofar as it is knowable.

**Joe**: Yes.

**Val**: Because it *is*.

**Matt**: Okay, so how about on its own, if it were the only being?

**Paul**: It rests in itself.

**Mary**: It is a created being.

**Matt**: Sure. Is this a blurring of the lines between the transcendentals? Especially considering a sole being in itself? I have a hard time seeing the distinction between the transcendentals in a rock, without any relation. Do you understand?

**Val**: Well, its oneness, trueness, goodness would be there. The things that we call, the things that we name... are *inherent*; they are co-extensive with its being.

**Matt**: Right.

**Joe**: …which is the same way that you were describing beauty, so I understand you better now.

**Val**: What I am saying is that the splendor of its intelligibility, or manifestation, related to its act of being – it is buzzing with this knowability, and inherent *potential* for relational uptake.

**Mary**: Yes.

**Joe**: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

**Val**: Again, inherently. Not as a craft, and not as something “out” of it, or separate from it.

**Joe**: Right. Right.

**Sean**: Yes, the good is experienced as such, insofar as it fulfills an appetite; we experience it as fulfilling – that’s why we experience it, as such, as good. Beauty from a distance, we would encounter it and see it and it would evoke wonder, wonder and awe, and reverence. But of course it would invoke desire, to be closer to it. Then true would be… you cannot distinctly separate the transcendentals…

**Val**: No.

**Sean:** …but as he says at one point, you are just seeing God from different angles.

**Paul**: I think Joe’s question brought out again that, as you [Val] were saying, this sort of glory, sort of epiphany (obviously most in God) – there is a way in which it goes through all of being. We think of understanding/being understood, perceiving/being perceived, this apprehension of beauty, what have you – as if it were some artificial expression that is independent of our being, and it is not. It is way more integral, just to being.

**Joe**: Right.

**Paul**: We say, there is a level of difference. We give glory to God by our praise and by our actions and what not; Alvarez has not come down yet tonight, but animals give glory to God just by being. We are not giving glory to God primarily just by being. But we are giving glory to God by being, and we are also communicating, potentially at any rate. I would not say communicating primarily or absolutely; I am glad that Joe put more of a point on that, because it is not about trying to define everything in terms of relationality; it is that there is a kind of effulgence, or glory, or splendor, or whatever, just in being, that is expressive, even if it is in the if-the-tree-falls-in-the-forest-and-there-is-no-one-there-to-hear-it-does-it-make-a-noise kind of way. It is coming; it doesn’t have to be apprehended, it does not have to be relational, to be there.

**Mary**: It is like a disbursement. I am thinking electricity, where God is the electric. We have a choice; there is that natural flow, so that when we invite the Holy Spirit to be stirred up and flow through us, it is almost like the circuit is just opened up. And that fullness should really point back to the glory of God.

**Val**: I do think you are right, because I think that this quality relates to light, and what light is… although we will not even go there tonight. There is something, attendant upon being, which is illuminative. We do not have to think in terms which are explicitly religious. At the most basic level, with just the metaphysical mechanics of a thing, it has got its own light, whereby its own being is illuminated; maybe that is another way of putting it.

**Paul**: Before Joe’s question, I had a moment of thinking that I had just lost my mind. As of Joe’s question, I have been here pulling up the Scriptures, because of what it made me think of. It is Mark 4:21: ***Is a lamp brought in to be placed under a bushel basket or under a bed, and not to be placed on a lampstand?*** ***Nothing is hidden except to be made visible***. ***Nothing is secret except to come to the light.*** What is the point of the lamp that is hidden? We think of this in terms of being ashamed of the Gospel or something, but simply *being*, being in a disposition of deliberate recessiveness, is anti-being in a certain sense. And there is something about being itself saying, “Hi, I am here.”

**Sean**: Unless sin and death…

**Paul**: Exactly.

**Paul**: What does Adam do in the garden after…

**Sean**: …he hides…

**Paul**: …he hides.

**Joe**: [herein exhibiting his mastery of Latin, and keen attention to detail] That makes a lot of sense, to me. Just looking at this paragraph, we read again: I cannot help but look at just the first sentence, and see how bad the translation in. Eco says, “’Good’ and ‘beautiful’ have the same reference but differ in meaning.” What the Latin says is: “Beauty is the same thing as the good, differing only in understanding.” Then everything he says after that about good and beauty has to do with our understanding of them, so he really is not talking about them as they are in themselves. And I think that was what you [Val] are saying; you were distinguishing between beauty in our understanding, in which case it differs, and then beauty in itself, in which case it does not.

**Val**: Yes.

**Joe**: Your example with the rock is, I think, very, very good – in that its knowability, its beauty, its being are all there, and they are all the same in the thing itself…

**Val**: Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

**Joe**: And then your explanation of beauty was saying what it is, and how it differs from those other transcendentals in our understanding. And that is where I was, I think, misunderstanding you, what you were saying there.

**Stefan**: Thank you for saying that, actually. I was looking at this, and just not able to figure out what the difference is between good, and true, and beautiful. He says they differ in meaning, and you say they differ in our understanding, but not in what they are.

**Joe**: Right. Yes.

**Stefan**: They are not, in their essence (I do not know if that is the right word) different.

**Roger**: [herein exhibiting an almost preternatural depth and breadth of intelligence] He [Eco] is using terminology here from Frege’s thing about sense and reference. In other words, Frege says, “The morning star is the evening star, did you know that?” Because people did not know that. Actually, the morning star *is* the evening star; they are both Venus, okay? But they differ in sense. In modern terminology, they have the same reference, actually.

**Joe**: Okay, so they refer to the same thing

**Roger**: Yes, they refer to the same thing, but they mean something different. The morning star means “that thing that comes out in the morning,” and the evening star means “that thing that comes out in the evening.” But they have the same reference. That is the terminology.

**Joe**: I see. I got you. So that is not so bad.

**Roger**: No, it is basically, it’s another way – kind of a cute one – of saying the same thing. So when you say, “the morning star is the evening star,” it is not a tautology, like “A is A,” because those are two different meanings, two different senses, even though we now know they have the same reference, and in fact that is what we are saying in that sentence.

**Sean**: That “sense and reference terminology”, or way of seeing things, which is very important and illuminative, cannot be permitted to lead to the possibility of separating the sense from the reference, so the reference in this case is spatially determined…

**Val**: Yes. Yes.

**Roger**: Yes. Right. Right. It is a material example to begin with; anything like this is different because (take that example) you could understand the senses of morning star and evening star and think about them forever, and never understand that they have the same reference. It is only an empirical matter that you realize…whereas, in the case of beautiful and good, or whatever the transcendentals are, if you really think about them and grasp them, you begin to *see* that they are the same. No example from the planets or something like that is going to do it, because ontologically it is a different situation.

**Sean**: Yes.

**Roger**: They have the same reference, because they actually do, in a sense, mean superficially different things. But if you really think them through, like we are trying to do here, you see that they converge. They converge, but it is not an empirical discovery.

**Sean**: Yes. It is important, nowadays, in our world, there is considered to be an endless amount of senses. Anyone can establish his own sense: This is *my* sense; don’t impose on me *your* sense of the thing. Yes, it is important to try to emphasize this whole notion of interpretation, how to interpret. Oh man, this whole topic is so immense; it is like I am a receiver who is looking at the end zone before catching the ball. [A colloquial interjection as a lead-in to a sports metaphor? Who is this imposter, the real Sean having snuck away early?]

[The room erupts.]

**Sean**: Yes, that notion of interpretation… oh man. It is such a huge topic…

**Val**: I *never* meant to do this. I thought I would just throw this out there, and it would be a really quick little thing.

**Mary**: No.

**Val**:I don’t know if anybody has any burning issues to add. The first meeting, the second half turned very existential, in the sense of an exploration of deep existential issues. I do not want to cut off that opportunity before we cut off the meeting, so please: the floor is open.

**Sean**: Phenomenology, of course; one of its central concerns is to return to the things themselves, after all of these metaphysical theories that can abstract so far, or be removed, and distant, and *ridiculous* at times, and naïve. One phenomenological analysis, let us say, of a star or the sun, we can all say, “Oh, it is beautiful, it is a source of light, it is admirable.” But if someone were to start saying, “This is detestable, or absurd”, or try to put a negative interpretation on it, we would have to inquire: why is someone saying it?; what is underlying it; the motivation, the psychological disturbance?… It’s like, “This guy doesn’t know what he’s talking about! Why is he saying that?” Because it doesn’t correspond with the object; it doesn’t deserve such an interpretation, we would say. But is there an interpretation that is objective, that corresponds to it – that a thing deserves? Does being deserve to be called good, or beautiful? Why? And how?

**Val**: Yes, actually, bringing that back to the Eco; I love this, and I starred it in the text I sent out, “The issue of the transcendentals was in fact the issue of the fullness of being, of the indissoluble union of being and value.” I thought that that was so elegantly put.

**Matt**: Well, the premise is that it is created, right? So that if you take that away…

**Sean**: …if God is there. If God *isn’t* there, then there *is* no signification independent of our signs; it is just, every man for himself.

**Paul**: Roger, it is funny, because we were talking about this at the Balthasar study circle, I remember bringing it up when you mentioned Ionesco.

**Roger**: Hmm.

**Paul**: Ionesco’s dramatic world is so incredibly bleak, horrific… and he is a strong believer, but he is doing exactly what Sean just said. Where God is, one would think, then everything follows – but then where God is not, is just *nonsense*.

**Val**: Could you give a two-line explanation of who Ionesco is? I don’t think everybody here knows who he is.

**Paul**: Eugene Ionesco, Romanian playwright in French, along with Samuel Beckett, and others in what was called the Theater of the Absurd. You can make a case from his writing, that it is the most nihilistic… seeming. Throughout his life, he himself points out that, whatever doubts or behavioral failures or whatever, he is a strongly believing, sacramental, Romanian Eastern Orthodox Christian. I recall a couple of different things from him. One: an interviewer asked him, “How can you put out this horribly bleak, this awful vision of the world? But you believe in God?” And he said, “Well, yes. God is different. This is without God.” Most of us cannot really stand where he stands. His vision is almost fideistic or Calvinistic, like there is this strong bright line divide that the world is just terrible, and that all of the glory is in God and all of the misery is everything else. I will describe these three things quickly in succession: Apparently, one thing that informed this for him: He had as a young man, an experience, like a sensible mystical experience (I am not sure that I would be entirely too confident of its origin), where he felt tremendous beauty and glory, everything suffused with light and lifted from the ground, and he came back to his feet looking around himself saying, “The world is so ugly; the world is so dark, and so awful, and so ugly.” As a young man, he went to Mount Athos, and went to Confession, and he said that he had made all of the confessions that a young man who wasn’t really close to God would make, and the elder said, “Do you believe in God the Creator, and that he knows and loves you?” And he said, “Well, yes, I do; I am a baptized Orthodox Christian.” And the elder said, “Well, okay, then everything will be alright.” And then the last thing is that his tombstone says, in French, and obviously the diction is very important in this, “Pray to the I-don’t-know-who … I hope … Jesus Christ.” I am riding with the “I hope,” personally. All this is totally evocative, and probably a little wandering, but it was what came.

**Roger**: It was a lot of fun though. That was good. Thank you.

**Paul**: It came from hearing what Sean said, about the two visions. Having those two visions riding around in the same person, so that you have this almost inexpressible darkness and hideousness, and it ends up – I told Val this, it was stunning – the last thing he wrote for the stage was a libretto for an opera about St. Maximilian Kolbe… after all those crazy things.

**Roger**: I didn’t know that.

**Val**: Amy, you have something…

**Amy**: We were talking about radiance and luminosity. It is a pretty obvious thing, but all of the mysteries of light in the Gospels are of Christ revealing himself as God.

**Joe**: Yes.

**Roger**: Transfiguration, the whole meaning of Transfiguration.

**Paul**: The Eastern churches celebrate, as part of Epiphany, the Baptism of our Lord and the miracle at the wedding feast at Cana…

**Amy**: Actually, in Byzantine art, in iconography, they emphasize the different mysteries of light, like the Transfiguration… you don’t see as many icons of the Crucifixion; you see his baptism in the Jordan, when the Father says, ***This*** ***is*** ***my*** ***beloved*** ***Son***, and a lot of similar things. And it’s interesting, because in their theology, they emphasize divinization…

**Roger**: But in accord with your first point, that’s why John Paul II introduced the Luminous Mysteries, in a way: to bring in that element. The Baptism, the Transfiguration, the Wedding Feast at Cana…

**Mary**: That was today’s Gospel, at Mass.

**Roger**: … and next Wednesday is the Transfiguration, the feast day.

**Val**: Oh my gosh, it’s August already…

**Roger**: We’ve been talking for a month.

**Sean**: Yes. The question of evil brings up so many stumbling blocks, right? So many sources of dismay, or forces that lead to despair… for instance, Maximilian Kolbe was in the middle of Auschwitz; one of the worst evils in the history of the world, that has led many people to become atheists. Yet he makes a decision, in the midst of all of this absurdity and evil and ugliness, to choose the good… something unbelievably good, heroically good, something way better than could have been expected from the natural course of things. And this moral good can only be known by penetrating way deeper than the circumstances – way deeper than the surface.

**Val**: Your last sentence there is really interesting. I had been thinking of the Transfiguration, and the Luminous Mysteries; Roger also said Transfiguration… and just when Roger said it, I remembered something in Pope Benedict, in *Jesus of Nazareth* (which is a book I am never not reading, like the *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*), he points out the import of the word used in the passage on the Transfiguration, which is *exodus*: ***He was talking to Moses and Elijah about the exodus that he was going to accomplish.*** The exodus, the way out, the crossing of the Red Sea, the Passover, *is* the manifestation, is integrally tied to the manifestation, is *itself* the manifestation.

**Sean**: Once we take God out of the picture, we are no longer moving from mere beauty to the fullness of beauty…

**Roger**: Glory.

**Sean**: Once the exodus, the movement towards God is taken out, then everything is utterly absurd.

**Joe**: The crossing of the Red Sea prefigures baptism, the Baptism of our Lord, in which the same thing is said as at the Transfiguration: ***This is my beloved Son.***

**Amy**: And the whole idea that the crossing of the Red Sea relates to being washed in the Blood of the Lamb, through which we are made radiantly white. Radiance.

**Sean:** The Redemption through the Incarnation: Beauty coming down to us.

**Joe**: Well, after all of this, I feel that I am just *beginning* to see what a transcendental is, that these things might be the same. I don’t feel like I know it, if you know what I mean. I am just getting a little bit of an inkling.

**Val**: That is why we need to soldier on, and you guys need to come back.

**Joe**: That’s why this discussion is so good. It is one thing to say something; it is another thing to know it.

**Val**: So just two notes, quickly, before we go: One is, Roger brought this beautiful picture, well there are actually two, I’m no longer sure which side is supposed to be facing out, they are both very beautiful, of Kelly, to whom this whole project is dedicated. I bring your attention to that.

**Roger**: That is still a very long time ago. I am going to bring another picture of her which is more recent, just so you get an idea, as we keep referring to her. She was acting in a play, where she is dressed very simply, and it brings out another side of her, the kind of opposite side from that original headshot [displayed previously].

**Val**: And then the other thing is, as soon as I get a full transcript, I didn’t even get the tapes until Monday, for the second half of the first meeting. Monday, I couldn’t tear myself away. I mean, I typed until I couldn’t feel my wrist anymore. Well, it is so engaging! It is amazing to really hear these comments, and sometimes you have to listen to them repeatedly to catch every nuance…

**Roger**: Val will be the only one who finally gets a full understanding.

**Val**: It is so much fun to have the voices filling up the room here *ad infinitum*. But as soon as I get a whole transcript done, I want to get a website with Weebly.com. I need to find a name for this, or a little catchphrase, that can reach people, wherever, who are isolated. I know, when I was a kid, I would have thought I had died and went to heaven if I had known there was a group like this somewhere. There was no beauty, and no intellectual life, and no spirituality back in Brooklyn. But I know there are people out there. So, should any of you have ideas for a name… I know, Joe, you said in an email that you were thinking about it.

**Joe**: Oh, I was dreaming… you know, I was thinking about how Scott Hahn has this St. Paul Institute for Biblical Theology; it’s a foundation, it’s got employees and everything… the idea would be to have something like that, a 501(c)(3), with you and Paul as the fellows…

**Roger**: CEOs.

**Joe**: Yes, yes. But anyway, that is just a dream. I was thinking then, maybe that is not even what we want it to be.

**Val**: I have big dreams too. You ready for my dream, are you? [Blushing.] My dream would be to do exactly this, but in a venue where there were a chapel available, so that we could be there, doing *this*, but in the light of the Eucharist. That is my big dream.

But I do not know, a patron besides Kelly, to lure people in, for them to actually find these postings. And I think that once there is a website, then people can contribute, in whatever way.

**Mary**: What about *Truth and Light*?

**Val**: Uh, I don’t know that that would really communicate…

**Roger**: [wryly] Well then, how about *Goodness and Beauty*?

**Val**: So, with that: Hey guys, it is always a pleasure.