

David C. Schindler's *Love and the Postmodern Predicament: Rediscovering the Real in Beauty, Goodness, and Truth*

a summary by David Alexander

Introduction

In the Introduction, Schindler opens by quoting Aristotle: "All men by nature desire to know." According to Schindler, how does Aristotle's concept of knowledge contrast with modern culture's concept of knowledge? In particular, what is Aristotle's view of contact with reality versus the modern's buffering of reality? What do you make of Schindler's assertion that "modern culture is largely a conspiracy to protect us from the real"? [I am reminded of Matthew Arnold's dictum that "the touch of truth is the touch of life"]. Quoting Schindler:

Modern culture is largely a conspiracy to protect us from the real... 'Diversity' is like a guided-tour package for the realm beyond our 'comfort zone.' In short, the energies of the modern world are largely devoted to keeping reality at bay....If all men by nature desire to know, however, then this project is radically anti-human.¹

What does Schindler mean by the "ultimacy of contemplation"? In what way does technology set the terms for our encounters? How are our experiences largely "pre-planned" affairs? Assuming that "all men by nature desire to know," how does modern culture's buffering of our experience undermine our humanity?

The "transcendental properties of being"

Notice that Schindler's stated purpose is to make of an apologia for philosophy which he interprets as "an all-encompassing love of the real, a love that is only deepened by Christian faith."² Why does Schindler make a distinction in his treatment of the transcendentals of beauty, goodness and truth from traditional Thomism?³ Does he successfully avoid voluntarism and a pragmatic conception of truth, and should these be avoided?

Similarly, what distinction does Schindler make between classical tradition and the approach he takes, and how does he reconcile his difference with the classical tradition with his clarion call in the final paragraph to Christians especially to be guardians of the classical tradition?

How does Schindler describe our current society and culture in the final paragraph and do you agree with him?

Part I: Reality and the Transcendentals

Chapter 1: Philosophy, the Transcendentals, and Reality

¹D. C. Schindler, *Love and the Postmodern Predicament: Rediscovering the Real in Beauty, Goodness, and Truth* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 20180, pp. 2-3.

²Schindler, p. 3.

³Schindler, see pp. 3-4.

Section 1: The Impossible Grass, and Our Bourgeois Metaphysics

Quoting Schindler: "the camera has become our most intimate conscience, which is to say that it has insinuated itself not only between us and the world, but between us and ourselves."⁴

Modern skepticism is characterized by a general reluctance to admit anything as definitively true. It has become the 'default' frame of mind of contemporary people. It is characterized by a strange contradiction that goes right to the heart of being human: it is dogmatic in spite of itself, since it rules out any opposing view *a priori*. It betrays a "misology", a contempt for reason that Plato believed to be the worst thing that can befall a human being.

It is the vague modern who is not at all certain what is right who is most certain that Dante was wrong.⁵

Modern aversion to philosophy and metaphysics pits moderns against their own human nature because man as "an animal with logos" cannot be such an animal without 'holding a metaphysical system,' however unconsciously or unwillingly. It is never a question of whether one has a metaphysics, but only whether one's metaphysics is adequate. [T.S. Eliot makes a similar claim when he writes about criticism: "...we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing, and that we should be none the worse for articulating what passes in our minds when we read a book and feel an emotion about it, for criticizing our own minds in their work of criticism"]

Schindler asserts that the very nature of words has been transformed in the modern era because they no longer serve to make manifest what is but have become mere instruments for the expression of subjective judgments.

It is nevertheless disturbing how common these sorts of proposals are becoming in high-level physics: we are all just characters in a cosmic video game, and so forth. It seems as if we have learned to take for granted that 'theoretical' physics needs to have no correspondence whatsoever with our normal experience of the world and have, perhaps for that very reason, come to give it a certain untouchable licenses to pronounce on the nature of things. *The actuality of the real seems to have lost all spontaneous authority, so that any model, no matter how preposterous, is equally plausible, as long as it can demonstrate mathematical consistency.* In this, we hear an echo of late medieval nominalism, which detached possibility from any intrinsic relation to actuality, and therefore accepted only the most formal limitation: anything is possible that is not logically self-contradictory.⁶

This seems to me also an echo of ancient Epicurean materialism and the notion that, given the endless clashing of atoms, everything that can occur will occur.

The absence of any social quality in truth leads to a peculiar dialectic in our relationship to our convictions. On the one hand, we affirm them with an odd detachment, a 'self-irony,'

⁴Schindler, p. 10.

⁵Schindler, p. 10.

⁶Schindler, p. 13. Italics mine.

such as Vattimo advocates, and which may not even be conscious. We don't really believe *anything*. On the other hand, whatever attachment we do have becomes absolute, because it is unreflected and *immediate*, i.e., not mediated by reason. In this respect, the conviction has the essential form of fanaticism, an emotional attachment that is immune to all reasoning. There is thus no incompatibility between half-hearted irony and fanatical conviction; these can reinforce each other, produce each other in an escalating way, turn immediately into each other, and even in some sense exist at once in the same mind. The tolerance that is expressly embraced as an ideal by the modern West therefore fosters at the same time an ethos of irrational violence. This ethos strangely increases at the very time that any apparent 'conflict' is neutralized; no one is denying you the right to hold it as true that leaves are green, and even to declare this publicly- under certain conditions: as long as, when you say, 'true,' you do not mean that anyone else would have any obligation to accept it against his arbitrary will.⁷

Do you think this analysis of modern fanaticism and violence and the dynamic of its relation to irony and tolerance has explanatory value for current events?

Section 2: The Beauty, Goodness, and Truth of Being

Transcendentals transcend, or go beyond, any particular restriction or determinate limitation. They are unbounded, describing not only the being of all creation, but also the being of God, which is infinitely different from created being. To speak of transcendentals is to indicate that the property exhibited by the individual thing is a reflection of something held in common by the entire universe. There is a connection between intensity and extensity, between inner depth and universal significance. What is most unique about an individual is revelatory of the meaning of reality more generally. Every time we engage with a particular thing in a meaningful way, the meaning of the entire cosmos, and indeed of God himself, is at stake. Transcendentals characterize our basic relation to things. What is at issue in the transcendentals, in short, is the most basic meaning of things and so man's fundamental relationship with the world, with himself and others, and with God.

The modern age is not philosophical, despite being more cerebral and abstract and preoccupied with brain power. There is a "loss of respect for the true inwardness of things...what we have generally lost is an intrinsic interest in things, as opposed to an instrumentalizing interest in the meaning of things, what things are in themselves, as distinct from their possible implications or consequences. Socrates was praised as the quintessential philosopher for elevating the question "what is...?" above all others. This requires a certain capacity to set aside contingent interest and focus the mind on the essence of a matter, to enter "the true inwardness of things." The end is to open the soul to the heart of things, not to procure us an instrumental end beyond the object.

Is Schindler right that we are not a philosophical people, that we focus on things only with an instrumental interest and have no use for securing a place for gratuity in which philosophical attention to being can flourish? How does our public discourse and our own personal conversations square with his diagnosis? Does the "what is...?" question often arise in them?

The more technology dominates our culture, the less philosophical we are capable of being,

⁷Schindler, pp. 16-17.

which is to say the more remote we become from the real.⁸

Question: do you agree with Schindler's analysis of the relationship of philosophy to technology as being a kind of inverse proportion? Do our cultural liturgies and habits and practices in the uses of technology shape us in a way that is inevitably anti-philosophical? If so, what are we to make of this? Can we pray, and praise, and think philosophically and metaphysically while simultaneously submitting to the mold of our technologies?

The "what is...?" question is untimely, or essentially timeless. If the timeless is not most basic, it is altogether absent and a bourgeois, self-interested metaphysics reigns over us.

Do you hear Schindler's bracing warning at the close of the chapter (and have you not already concluded this)?

Nothing poses a greater threat to a culture that seeks to protect itself from the claims of the real than beauty, goodness and truth, and so these must be neutralized, rendered "subjective" or merely functional at every turn. It may indeed come to the point that resisting such neutralization requires a willingness to sacrifice, if not one's life in the literal sense, at least one's career, one's "relevance," or one's standing in the world.⁹

What practices are implied? What counter liturgies and spiritual disciplines come to mind in reading Schindler's diagnosis, if any? Is this the wrong question to ask?

Addendum

1. I lump Schindler, Robert Spaemann, and Michael Hanby together as being involved in the same philosophical work or movement, and I see them as having affinities with and possibly some roots in Gabriel Marcel. For example, Gabriel Marcel in his *Man Against Mass Society* writes as follows: "...we are living in a world that seems to be founded on the refusal to reflect" (p. 98). His diagnosis is related to his discussion of the need for our recovery of the transcendentals. "We have to learn to grasp once more the distinction between the true and false, the good and the evil, the just and the unjust - slowly and painfully, just as a paralytic who has recovered the use of his limbs learns slowly and painfully once more how to walk." (p. 26)

2. "Nominalism, which is the dogma that has separated from experience, and which, therefore, cannot be controlled by experience, has become the publicly dominant form in the West." -Eric Voegelin

Mars Hill Audio's latest edition, Volume 147, includes an interview with D.C. Schindler about this book and about Schindler's understanding of the transcendentals and why they matter now. He has also been frequently interviewed and hosted on the journal for other book discussions and points of discussion.

Chapter 2: Beauty: The Manifestation of Reality

⁸Schindler, p. 28.

⁹Schindler, p. 29.

Section 1: Our Impoverished Experience

Despite the elusiveness of a definition of beauty, and however different the accounts of beauty seem to be, there is a surprising degree of agreement that beauty is an often quite paradoxical unity of extremes that would otherwise stand in irreconcilable opposition.

British empiricism, which has arguably come to dominate contemporary American culture, stands apart from the general consensus in that beauty does not appear in any significant sense as a unity of opposites in it. "The tradition tends to reduce beauty to its subjective dimension."¹⁰ This is tied up with a loss of a sense of "the reality of reality" in modernity.

"For the most part, we do not feel the weight of the givenness of the nature of things."¹¹ The "lightness of being" that affects all of us is related to our impoverished philosophical grasp of beauty. "I would like to suggest that there is a profound connection between the impoverished state of our conception of beauty and our despair over the density of the world in its natural givenness, so that recovery of beauty in its rich, ontological significance can help us restore our rootedness in the 'real world.'"¹²

Do you agree with Schindler's diagnosis that we have an impoverished view of beauty?

What are some ways this impoverished view of beauty is expressed?

Do you agree with his analysis that this impoverishment lies at the root of our loss of the sense of the reality of reality in modernity?

Section 2: The Doors of Perception

What pleases us in beauty is not the reality of the thing that shows itself to us, but the *appearance* of the reality.¹³

Is that a bad thing? Does it doom beauty to triviality? Rejecting beauty on these terms also means a rejection of appearances as irremediably superficial. But we need appearance for perception. Beauty offers a paradigm of appearance, and so of perception. It captures the essence of both appearance and perception. If we do not attend to beauty, are we attending to our perception?

"The way we interpret beauty, and the disposition we adopt toward it, has a profound bearing on how we interpret appearance and perception generally."¹⁴ Because our access to reality comes through the doors of our senses, the way we interpret beauty has a profound bearing on our relationship to reality. Hence we can see a connection between the impoverishment of our notion of beauty and the loss of a sense of reality.

[As I think about this, our general downward slope of formal attire even in professional jobs seems

¹⁰Schindler, p. 32.

¹¹Schindler, pp. 32-33.

¹²Schindler, p. 33.

¹³Schindler, p. 34.

¹⁴Schindler, pp. 35-36.

related to our loss of a philosophical grasp of beauty. Also, the graffiti of the recent protests and vandalism strikes me as an expression of this impoverished grasp of beauty. Chanting mobs lack the peace and quiet to apprehend beauty and truth and goodness... It seems to me that Schindler's insights about beauty have a lot of relevance to the mob activism of recent days but I am not sure that I can adequately articulate it yet.]

For British empiricists like John Locke and David Hume, beauty has no objective reality. It exists purely in the eye of the beholder as a subjective imposition.

...the fact that people today seem less inclined to fight about judgments of taste, and show little interest in persuading others about what is beautiful, or learning to make good judgments, educating and forming their tastes, is something that should cause us great alarm. Our alarm ought to grow exponentially if it is in fact true that the way we experience and interpret beauty reveals an understanding of, or disposition towards, reality in general. In this case, to lose a sense of beauty's connection to reality is... to lose a sense of the reality of reality tout court.¹⁵

Perception...is the reception of appearance, which means it is the reception of a thing precisely in its showing of itself.¹⁶

Interpreting beauty as nothing more than a mental feeling has implications for the meaning of appearance. Specifically, it implies an extrication of appearance from its source, a denial that appearance is the "self-showing" of an actual existing thing. The connection to the original is altogether severed. Beauty is no longer a revelation of a reality. Through this, appearance becomes disconnected from reality and in some sense a reality in its own right. This disconnect brings on despair, ennui, sterility and emptiness.

["Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up on wings of eagles. They shall run and not be weary, walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31. If we wait for the folds of our subjectivity to part so that through perception of the real that is gifted us in the given, we may commune with the One on whom all reality rests, then we will not be sterile and empty for we are made for this.]

Second 3: Beauty as a Place of Encounter

Beauty has a comprehensive quality. It appeals to the whole of us, to all of our parts at once as an integral whole. Beauty therefore "gathers us up" and can help to heal our fragmentation. Our senses are enlisted in the pursuit of perceiving beauty and this unites the highest and lowest parts of our nature in a single point.

Like goodness, beauty appeals to appetite, but what distinguishes it from goodness is that, like truth, it is ordered to the intellect. The classical view is that the intelligence is that by which we 'enter into' the reality of things.

¹⁵Schindler, p. 37.

¹⁶Schindler, p. 37.

Beauty appeals to the appetite, but unlike the good, it does not aim at gratification in the sense of a direct enjoyment of the reality of a thing. There is a kind of non-possessiveness in the enjoyment of beauty, a disinterested or not self-interested pleasure.

The desire for truth is ordered to a grasp of the essence of a thing, which...concerns the inner reality beyond mere appearance. But our desire for beauty is an intellectual desire that rests in the appearance itself.¹⁷

[In the case of pornography, though, beauty is ordered toward a faux possession, or rather, beauty is betrayed by a platforming that aims at the lower appetite and aims to bypass the intellect. Like British empiricism, it seems to me that it disconnects from reality rather than deepening one's connection with reality. It seems clearly ordered to an interior, subjective world and a kind of high-jacking of the senses. Rather than the senses being a doorway to our perception of the world, they are used to feed a solipsism, an inward curve, and a fragmentation of our reception of the world. Pornography is not ordered to the appreciation of beauty in itself but to a usage of beauty for dirty self-interest. It uses beauty, which should be paradigmatic for a deepening of our perception, to distort our perception... Pornography does not "coincide with a sense that the things of this world have their own depth, their own significance" and does not engender courtesy, but collapses the reality of the other into the will. Any thoughts on the case of pornography in relation to our desire for beauty?]

Schindler suggests the reason we experience a profound sense of fulfillment in beauty is that we were made to perceive the appearance of things, and that all men by nature desire to perceive. Beauty represents a certain perfection in itself because 1) things reach a certain completion in showing themselves in appearance, displaying their inherent worth and meaning, and 2) subjectively the non-possessive openness to things that our contemplative release, or 'letting be,' implies is not contrary to resolution or closure, but coincident with it.

The connection between art and nature is an ancient theme. In modern times, the classic "mimetic" theory of art has become an object of derision because it is thought to imply a slavish copying of nature in which art is beautiful only if it is crudely 'realistic.' Rejecting slavish copying does not require us to reject any relation to nature at all. There is an interplay between freedom and nature. Crass realism in aesthetics fails to recognize the goodness of the distinction between appearance and reality. It seeks to close the difference by making the copy as perfect a representation of the original as possible. "Anti-mimetic" aesthetics, on the other hand, radicalizes the difference to the point that it disappears. Appearance ceases to be appearance, since it is no longer of some reality. These two extremes coexist as part of a general denigration of beauty.

A beautiful image, artfully crafted, is one in which human freedom has mediated... between reality and its appearance. But beautiful freedom does precisely that: it mediates; it does not collapse or separate, but creatively brings out something genuine in reality....Insofar as beauty tells us something about appearance tout court, it follows that learning to love beauty opens up a depth dimension in our experience of reality more generally.¹⁸

In learning to love beauty, we develop our capacity to receive sense experience as a communication of

¹⁷Schindler, p. 41.

¹⁸Schindler, p. 46.

reality, not just the reporting of information, but the event of a presence.

A genuine sense of beauty will coincide with a sense that the things of the world have their own depth, their own significance, to which we are offered access through appearance and perceptions in the manner of an encounter between real beings of substance. A sense of beauty demands that we extend courtesy to things.¹⁹

The presence of beauty is not at all exclusive of truth and goodness of a threat to the seriousness they represent. Rather, it is what helps create propitious conditions for their flourishing and proper expression.

Loose Ends and Stray Associations

--A weak philosophical apprehension of beauty ... paves the way for a graceless conflict like our politics... Western philosophy is also beset by a Cartesian dualism that would seem to feed into the British empiricism's reduction of beauty to the subjective dimension.

--"If anybody asks where did I go, tell 'em I went where the wild goose goes I wouldn't have me an area code Don't have a number, don't need a row..." from the song "I'm Leaving Now."

--"All delight is based on proportion. Now, we may see in the abstracted similitude form, power, and operation.... Apprehension and delectation are followed by judgment. Not only does judgment determine whether an object is white or black; for such decision pertains to the external sense, or whether an object is helpful or harmful, since such decision pertains to the internal sense, but it also determines and gives rational explanation of why an object is pleasurable. Thus judging, in other words, inquires into the very principle of the pleasure the sense derives from the object. This occurs when we ask what precisely makes a thing beautiful, pleasant, and wholesome. We find that harmonious proportion is the reason. This principle of harmonious proportion is the same in large and small things, for it is not affected by size, nor does it evolve or change with the changing of things, nor is it altered by their successive stages. It has no reference to place, time, and movement; thus, it is immutable and uncontained, unending and entirely spiritual."

-From "Chapter II - On Contemplating God in His Traces in the Perceptible World" in *The Journey of the Mind to God* by Bonaventure

-- The impoverishment of our view of beauty undermines the classical end of literature to delight and to instruct.

Schindler, drawing on popular novelist Jonathan Franzen, contrasts "liking," defined as a kind of approbation or affection that does not imply any sort of attachment, or any real commitment of the self, with loving, which is described drolly by Iris Murdoch as the "extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real." Franzen describes love as a genuine drama in which some real, specific thing or person draws us outside of ourselves and makes a claim on us. Love is an

¹⁹Schindler, p. 47.

identification with the other and a kind of surrender of the self.

[This drama of the real in love can be replaced by a drama of evasion which brings to mind Jung's definition of neurosis as illegitimate suffering as a substitute for legitimate suffering. The mention of drama is interesting and brings to mind ... Christ and Apollo.]

This chapter focuses on the transcendental of goodness, which has immediate kinship to beauty.

In classical metaphysics, goodness is a property of being. Beauty opens the world to us and our desires are summoned from within reality. For the modern mind, goodness in contrast is essentially subjective. [As in the view of beauty as merely a matter of individual taste, so also with goodness there is a disconnect in the way it is conceived from the goodness of creation, cut by a solipsistic knife].

Schindler posits that what we mean by will in the normal sense is what Franzen called "liking". The will may be elicited in some sense by the things we perceive, but its ultimate business is with the self alone. The will in the modern sense does not in reality and of its essence reach beyond itself.

Matthew 10:39 "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Matthew 16:25 "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."

[Marie in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriett Beecher Stowe is fresh in my mind as a kind of villain who subordinates all others' interests to her own. The local doctor which she relies on for the care of her dying daughter is not good enough for her own care for a seemingly illusory condition. When she is confronted by Ophelia with the expressed wish and intent of her deceased daughter Eva and her deceased husband, both of which expressed a desire that Uncle Tom be set free from bondage, she acts like she is being treated inconsiderately for being reminded of these things in her condition. She sends a delicate young woman to be stripped and whipped by a brutal man for talking back to her and scoffs when confronted with the cruelty of it.]

"One needs to think differently if one wants really to live differently."

Thinking differently here means changing our view of freedom.²⁰ In the modern Lockean view, freedom is interpreted as a sort of power, and in the pre-modern view, freedom is interpreted as the gift of self.

Chapter 3: Goodness: Freedom as the Gift of Self

Section 1: Locke and "Will Power"

Locke proposes that the experience of the will most clearly illustrates what power means, because we discover power expressed in active form, in the ability to affect a change. Locke broke radically with tradition in his understanding of the will.

²⁰Schindler, p. 51.

Locke amended his early editions of *The Essay concerning Human Understanding*, his most theoretical book, in order to say that the mind determines the will. Yet if we think of the will specifically as an active power, which manifests itself by being the "unoriginate" first cause of some external change, it does not make sense to say that I will some thing, some object outside of myself. To say that the self determines itself is to say that the will originates exclusively in the self. The self in this construct not only begins its act of will from itself alone, but the movement also ends exclusively in the self as the will's proper object. There is no intrinsic relation to things outside, no genuine connection between the self and the reality of the larger world.

[This egocentric model of the will is certainly complementary with a gnostic view of the world. Even an eros attachment to the creation is undermined by the solipsism of the Self. A devalued world is spray painted without compunction. The creation and its Creator are not given their due praise. It would seem that another case of what Eric Voegelin called gnostic mass movements of modernity is intensifying in our midst, and that what is needed in the face of it are celebrants who render to God the praise He deserves, and the cultivation of a stronger sense of beauty and, well, truth and goodness.]

Section 2: Anchoring the Will in Reality

Aquinas held that the will is *causa sui*, or cause of itself, which sounds like Locke superficially at first. The act of will for Aquinas can be seen as a sort of "co-operation" between the will, the self more holistically, and a determining power that lies infinitely beyond the self. All of these factors are involved in every choice, so a more comprehensive view is always needed. According to Aquinas, the motion of the will does not originate in oneself, but originates in the actual good in any given situation that attracts one to it. This simple point implies already an internal connection between the self and the outside world.

Aquinas's definition of the will is "intellectual appetite," which means it is essentially a desire for what is good in truth. To think of the will this way is to understand it most basically as receptive rather than as a spontaneous power. "The will is our power to be attracted by the good, and to move ourselves inside of this attraction."

[This is a very important distinction. In the modern conception, desires are not subject to critical husbandry. There is very little sense of the individual's responsibility to cultivate his affections. The whole language supporting the ethos of such an understanding is severely eroded. The will is to pursue internal desires as self-expression and self-creation, not critically beholden to the structure of the universe and its Maker, not responsive in any self-transcending way to the given. This Lockean, subjective disconnect from the world seems to explain this anti-critical view of the will.]

For Locke, the end of the will is the agent's own action. For Aquinas, by contrast, the act of the will comes to completion in the real thing itself. [Each implies a posture toward the object, only one of which implies a complete reception. Locke's implies an attenuated, instrumentalizing, impatient posture toward the objects or persons to be used].

In Aquinas's understanding of the will, the soul "gives itself away" in every act of the will. We are genuinely involving ourselves with another. In our choices, we determine ourselves in the specific sense of committing ourselves to something, making ourselves in a certain way new by binding

ourselves to a reality that lies beyond us.

Section 3: Freedom Versus Autonomy

If the will is nothing more than the power to choose - power as spontaneous, non-receptive, effective causality - then it exists in its most perfect condition when it is completely separated from anything outside itself. The outcome of this view is the egocentric isolation of the unencumbered self (Raskolnikov on an isolated peak), a conception of the self as radically disconnected, as essentially detached and free floating. Freedom in this conception gets identified with independence as non-commitment. To make this concept of freedom a culture-forming ideal is to cultivate and reinforce the habits of isolation and irresponsibility.

In contrast, the classical view of freedom is one in which freedom is always a kind of involvement in reality. The will is not a "power to like" but instead in its very essence is love. "To think of the will as the non-committal power of the modern ego-centric self is... to make self-protection and the pursuit of self-interest the normal meaning of existence."

To live in the "world of liking" is not to hold onto ourselves but to give ourselves away cheaply and indiscriminately.

Section 4: Loose Ends

*It is important to teach my kids the difference between noncommittal liking and self-sacrificial love and to help them to see the ontological priority of the later. Also, its important to teach them to distinguish between the different views of freedom.

*Reflection on liking versus love --- Commitment is a kind of formal or conscious affirmation of an attachment. I suppose one could commit to someone without first being attached to them, but that sounds like an act of the will rather than a response to a reality. You might commit to be faithful to a wife in an arranged marriage before meeting her. In such a case, it seems at least at first the commitment is to the honor of one's parents' view, or to one's society's view, or of marriage and what is right, rather than to the bride.

*Don't tell the Self, but there are a lot of other unruly persons in the world.

*Socialism in the form of an invasive, centralized state that depends increasingly on draconian laws to sustain its overreach against threats to it, resembles egocentric will worship, and death of the seed through failure to self-transcend, the seed does not die in Jesus's sense in order that it may be reborn and produce fruit, the failure to self-donate in response to the Good.

"The will is our power to be attracted by the good, and to move ourselves inside of this attraction."²¹

*C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce* helps the reader to understand through imaginative and

²¹Schindler, p. 57.

intellectual illustrations the danger of the soul's losing all appetite for the good, and not being able to stand Heaven. Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote that "hell is the inability to love". In this, they seem very similar to each other in their views, and to Schindler. All of them understand the will in such a way that the obligation for a husbandry of one's affections is clarified and inexorably enjoined on every human being.

**A seeming contradiction: "Reacting against the sensationalist model of the mind associated with Locke and Condillac, [Maine] de Biran argued that the self or will is essentially 'active' and that voluntary experience differs intrinsically from external cause or 'passive' experience. Intentional action, experience of ourselves as causes, is just as fundamental as externally caused or passive experience. Neither can be reduced to the other. These 'two facts' of experience require different modes of explanation. Biran's epistemology thus gives beliefs or reasons, as the sources of intentions, a status co-equal with that of causes on Hume's sense of observable regularities of behavior." (from the introduction to the Penguin edition of *The History of the Civilization in Europe* by Francois Guizot written by Larry Siedentop.)

Chapter 4: Truth: Knowledge as Personal Presence

Section 1: Habits of Isolation

In contrast to the premodern sense of the self as naturally and inextricably embedded in concentric circles of relations, in which to isolate the individual would be to radically distort him or her, the modern world tends to take for granted the self as an isolated center of consciousness, cut off from the world. This new sense of the self as an isolated subjectivity in many ways makes it easier to "make connections."

[Much of what falls under the rubric of equality makes for more "connections." The self, liberated even from one's own body, in what seems a legacy of Cartesian dualism, is "freed" not only from one's own biological orientation of sexuality but from one's own biological sex. That is a purely free-floating subjectivity if ever I saw one].

The deeper root of the problems we associate with modern man's fragmentation is a habit of mind, a "lonely-mindedness." "Habits of isolation" ripple out from our way of knowing. If Kimbriel is right, what we need to do is not find some way to get out of our head and into the world, but rather to ask ourselves what sort of assumptions we have about the head. If we believe the mind is a kind of isolation cell, it implies the very thing that defines us as human beings is a problem that needs to be overcome, which is a quite tragic conception of man.

[This reminds me of a refrain in the children's cartoon "Dora the Explorer" where Dora gets everyone to yell at the thieving fox, "Swiper, don't swipe!" The very form of the command affirms the ontological identity of the fox as a thief even as it enjoins him not to be himself, a quite tragic position for the fox to be in.]

The default view of our culture is that knowledge is information. **This conception of knowledge undermines our connection to the world in a profound way. At the root of its distortion is a**

failure to recognize truth as a transcendental, a property of being itself, instead seeing it as a quality of knowledge alone. If truth is a quality of being, then our true knowing is to make genuine contact with things, to take into ourselves the reality in which we have always already been involved in beauty and goodness. It entails an aspiration, beyond episodic contact, to a more constant fidelity, a habitual devotion to the real involving the whole of our lives.

How does our conception of knowledge and the mind contribute to a lonely-mindedness?

Section 2: Too Much Information

Schindler posits that the distinguishing mark of information is its "transferability." Implied is the breaking down of intelligible contents into as simplified a form as possible to be able to be carried into new arrangements and contents. Everything that is intelligible has meaning, but not all meaning is able to be translated without remainder into "information." It is the experience itself, rather than some aspect of it or fact about it, that we designate as meaningful.

Information is essentially detachable. There is a fundamental separation between a reality and the variety of information that can be recorded about it. **The "human depth" is what does not survive the translation into "information."**

Processing liberates things, so to speak, from the restrictions of their original constitution. To eat broccoli grown in our own garden, we have to attend to it as a living organism, and only turn it into food with the prior context still vivid, in contrast to store bought, chopped and frozen broccoli. The further a thing is from its roots, the less of a connection there is with what a thing really is, as a rule of thumb.

In a world of mere information, identities become fragile and tenuous. [Sound bite attacks on persons become more potent as well]. **We simultaneously increase our sense of power over things, since they have been reduced to manipulatable data, and we radically undermine our confidence and our trust in the meaning of the world.**

There are two forms of separation that occur in information. First, there is a distance between the real thing and the data that is extracted as a separable bit from it. Second, there is a separation between the source of the information and the recipient. Information-gatherers stand at a distance from the meaningful reality they are attempting to know precisely to the extent that this knowledge is conceived in the form of information.

If all meaning takes the form of information, bits of information that have no intrinsic relation to the source of that information, then our thinking and knowing does not bring us any more into contact with things than our sense perception does. This is what brings about the "lonely mind," a radical isolation from everything, an objective, structural separation from reality even in moments of intimacy.

If the modern predicament is a trapping of the self inside a bubble of the self's own making, the postmodern predicament is a dissolution of the bubble- and the self along with it.²²

²²Schindler, p. 73.

Modern identity is becoming more brittle. Everything has been detached from its originating roots, from its nature, and so things lose any real reference point, which would provide a kind of anchor of identity.²³

The brittleness of modern identity. We increase our sense of power over things but at the expense of our souls. We sell our soul for power. What should we be doing instead?

Section 3: The Form of Truth

Aquinas defined truth as a proper joining together of the mind and reality. He explains that there is an ontological truth that precedes our knowing, and that truth is the unity things have with God's mind.

In contrast to data or information, the principal "vehicle" of intelligibility in classical philosophy is form. Form is simultaneously an epistemological and an ontological principle. Whenever we identify a thing, we are naming its form. The form is the whole self. For the classical mind, the object of our knowledge is the form, which is the integrating reference point for everything else. Organization is possible only in reference to a unity that transcends the parts. Organization is a function of the form, not vice versa. The form is irreducible to anything else.

Modernity lost patience with form, not finding a use for it. But what is "added" by form is the presence of the whole as such. If knowledge is intimate contact with reality, then form matters. "Once form is dismissed, the 'what is...?' question begins to lose ground; it gets supplanted by secondary questions concerning function and causal history." Michael Polanyi describes the grasping of a whole as an "indwelling" of the parts in such a way that the whole which transcends their sum becomes evident.

[All the Darwinians lack any principled, articulated sense of the substantial identity of the organism as an *unum per se*, a whole which, despite depending upon the material interactions of its parts, transcends them as their subject. An example of this is the reduction of a robin to a Dawkinsian description, taken from Michael Hanby's *No God, No Science?*: "To say that genes use robins to perpetuate themselves is not to explain or even re-describe the fact of the robins' life, but to do away with it. Our understanding is not furthered by redefining the robin either as an artifact of our genes or as an 'autocatalytic dissipative system which is bounded and informed.'"]

Form constitutes the very being of things. A thing's form is what makes it be the thing that it is; it is the internal essence, the real being of the thing, or its soul, the living principle of organisms. [This is the part that Descartes left out in his mind-body dualism, if I understand right.] Form is the intimate reality of a thing.

We do not simply record information about things that remain forever separate from us, but we genuinely join with them in our intellect. In the pre modern world, knowledge is intimate encounter and personal presence. This view does not treat the mind as an obstacle to our connection with the world. We are not locked in subjectivity. Our concepts are not what we know, but that by which we know.

²³Schindler, p. 74.

Schindler is convinced that recovering the classical sense of intimate personal presence as a paradigm of knowledge would contribute in a fundamental way to the renewal of our humanity and our sense of reality in the face of cultural forces which threaten to eclipse it. He does not propose the complete elimination of information but its relativization, knocking it down a notch or two, to an understanding of it as a relatively adequate substitute for knowledge. This shift would have tremendous implications for the way we organize our culture.

Chapter 5: Beauty and Love

Section 1: The Reduction of Love

Many interpret love as a mere feeling, without necessarily intending to. They idealize love as a subjective experience. One problem with this is that in spite of the distinctiveness of the 'lived experience', there is then no substantial reason it cannot be turned into a physiological "illusion". (In other words, the very core of our being, the experience of what we call love, is made "transferable"). A drug or other stimulant that induces the feeling of love would be producing love. There would be no way to distinguish them. "Love, as pure subjective experience, remains wholly disconnected from any reality; the more value one gives to love, understood in this way, the more one sequesters oneself from others and from the everyday life of the real world." (Love in this sense becomes a cancer on the human soul). There is a deeply anti-social dimension to this view of love, as if love is all the more real the more discontinuous it is with social conventions and human nature in its normal manifestations.

Love rarely appears as a central theme in the philosophy that has shaped the modern world. The philosophers all agree on separating love from reality. How did this come about? **There seems to be a departure from classical thought in its more ancient form that occurs in the medieval period when love is relegated to the order of goodness rather than interpreting love principally as related to beauty.**

Love for Aquinas extends through the whole cosmos and transcends it as a divine reality, as the very name of the Holy Spirit. It represents the form of the virtues and is the crowning of all other human excellences. However, Schindler suggests there is tension in Aquinas' view of love which, if resolved in a one-sided way, opens the door to the eventual modern impoverishment. A reduction of love to the order of goodness rather than beauty threatens this impoverishment. "Reducing love in an exclusive way to the order of the appetite threatens to relativize love entirely to the subject, so that love shrinks... to fit the subject's measure."²⁴ This reduction takes the shape both of interpreting love as mere pursuit of gratification on the one hand and altruism detached from any ulterior motives in a purely arbitrary act of the will on the other hand. Continuing to maintain that love is a passion relativizes it to the subject more and more until love comes to be seen as a feeling or emotion. The end result is love as desire for immediate gratification, love as altruism or sheer spontaneous and unmotivated act (which cannot exist for human beings because humans are contingent), and love as mere feeling or emotion.

Section 2: Under the Sign of Beauty

Aquinas extends the meaning of love beyond the passions analogously by associating it most essentially with goodness. Love in his sense is an ordination to the good, not just an object of sensible

²⁴Schindler, p. 91.

appetite, but also an object of intellectual appetite. Nevertheless, it remains a matter of appetite. This description of love subordinates love to reason, because there is no movement of appetitive power without prior apprehension. The subordination of love to reason does not fit obviously with the Christian tradition which crowns love as supreme above all things, even knowledge. (Schindler suggests Aquinas privileges Aristotle's pre-Christian understanding of man over the Church Fathers Dionysius, Augustine, and Damascene.)

If we love for the sake of enjoyment or pleasure, this would make pleasure a cause of love, which would imply that pleasure takes a certain precedence over love, or, in other words, that love is a means to the end of pleasure.

If pleasure comes first in the order of intentionality, love represents an order that precedes that of intentionality itself; it sets the fundamental context within which one would come to seek any particular good.²⁵

If we defined love just as relation to good, it would seem to follow that it is simply appetite, since goodness is finality, that toward which all things move. If love is the principle of appetite, to that extent it transcends appetite. Love is the moment of adaptation, not the movement itself.

Aquinas interprets love as pertaining not only to the appetitive power but also to the order of apprehension. When we love a thing, by desiring it, we apprehend it as belonging to our well-being. Aquinas, indeed, points to the simultaneity of the two orders of appetite and apprehension.

The three primary effects of love - unity, mutual indwelling, and ecstasy - are all "supra-subjective," involving a movement of the subject beyond himself, or a reciprocal, rather than a unilateral, relationship.

[Thomas Merton has a wonderful reflection on this in *No Man Is An Island*, in an essay where he reflects on St. Paul's talking about being in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in the churches. Fullness of love is only satisfied with that reciprocity, for to love someone well includes an apprehension that their truest good is in loving too, and not being merely a passive recipient].

In beauty, the intellect and the will are involved in the mode of receiving reality as it "freely" offers itself to us.

Love would seem to signify our relationship, not first to goodness, or for that matter to truth, but implicitly to both at one, "which is to say that love is a relation most specifically to beauty; **beauty is the proper cause of love.**"

In appearance, the object comes as it were outside of itself, and joins with the *ecstasis* of the perceiver of the beauty. Love can be conceived essentially as a unity between a lover and a beloved. **As a union, love has its proper place between lover and beloved, rather than residing merely in the sensible appetite in the one and also in the other.**

The order of beauty precedes not only the order of goodness but also the order of truth. It is fitting to

²⁵Schindler, p. 96.

begin with beauty because beauty is in a basic respect a matter of appearance. If we associate beauty with love, we recognize that this reception of reality's self-disclosure is a kind of "attuning," a "proportioning" of the soul to the real. "The soul is 'readied' by beauty for an encounter with reality in itself, through the effecting of a positive disposition."²⁶ Beauty opens up the order of both goodness and truth as unfolding this promise, and ensures that both goodness and truth will be understood as instances of a true reciprocity between subject and object at every point.

Section 3: Restoring Love

Love moves us including our bodies. As a union with reality, it transcends us, but only as including the whole of us.

The primacy of beauty highlights the intrinsic relation between the act of the intellect and the act of the will. Beauty involves a delight simultaneously with an apprehension, thus including a cognitive grasp coinciding with a positive disposition towards. One implication is the noetic nature of sin. Another is that, since beauty is essentially a matter of order, love likewise indicates a kind of order. [This frees from the obviously sickly narrowness of a postmodern focus on mere authenticity]. Love designates the union within which discrete acts of goodwill occur and thus provides a certain order, logic and ethos to the desire. Third, once we recognize that beauty, and so love, is a matter of order, it follows that the meaning of love extends into the objective sphere of the nature of the body.

Without the transcendental of beauty, it is hard to accord a positive value for distance and generous respect in love, since love becomes merely a matter of the appetitive order. **Josef Pieper understood the essence of love as consisting in the affirmative judgment, which as affirmation, belongs to the appetitive order, and as judgment, belongs to the cognitive.**

In love, desire arises within the most basic context of an affirmation of the other and therefore always inside of an ethos of gratitude.²⁷

Love has an essentially revelatory, and not merely moral, dimension.

As a response to the transcendental property of beauty, love is not principally a feeling, even if it includes in a particular way a "passional" dimension.

Within the horizon opened by love, we come to appreciate more fully the contemplative dimension of the intellect, which we might say is an approach to truth seen from the perspective of beauty. "Contemplation is a knowing that resembles the beholding of beauty; it is the shape of reason in, and indeed in some sense, as love."

Separated from the love rooted in beauty, truth and goodness increasingly become aspirations to immediate union with reality, impatient with regard to any mediations, or what are called "trappings." [This seems to have a lot of explanatory value with regard for example to contemporary LGBTQ takes on gender as a totalitarian imposition on authentic selves, imposed at birth. From the culturally conditioned nature of expressions of human sexuality, they leap to a utopian purism that rejects with

²⁶Schindler, p. 106.

²⁷Schindler.

impatience the cultural mediation of sexuality. In contrast, we can celebrate the difference by appreciating cultural forms that mediate it and serve to help bridge it.]

Love is a unity that provides the context for the acts of intellect and will in their proper order, a unity that entails the grateful acknowledgment of God's truth and goodness.

Chapter 6: Love and Being

Section 1: Expanding Unity

It is precisely the connection with beauty that reveals love to be a matter of being, insofar as **the perception of beauty involves a disposing of the whole person prior to the deliberate exercise of any of the soul's distinct powers.** Just as beauty transcends goodness and truth, even as it integrates them, so too does love transcend the intellect and will in their distinctive operations. Love breaks in from above in our experience, but at the very same time it "wells up" from below, entering into consciousness from inside of our nature.

We first experience beauty as a "recollection," a memory of what we have always already loved. The experience opens us up to something greater, because the beautiful points somehow beyond itself. "Augustine presents the beauty of things as their response to the question that the soul's search for God poses in the very attention it gives them."

Paul Claudel famously described feminine beauty as a 'promise that cannot be kept.' What he seems to mean is that beauty dilates the heart, as it were, beyond the limits of the particular experiences of which are conscious, and so sets the heart on something greater than what lies on the immediate surface of the experience.²⁸

The overwhelming experience of eros is simply the intensification of what characterizes love in general, and that description is not merely metaphorical but expresses the truth about the nature of beauty and the nature of love.

Love is a union that involves reciprocal indwelling and ecstasis. It is distinct from the union of parts in a single substance. It transcends substance so as to bring multiple beings together without violating the unity that belongs to each substance in itself. Although eros culminates in marriage, even the most trivial instance of affection is a kind of unity, a joining in a "single existence" between two otherwise independent substances.

Unity can never simply be produced. If parts are assembled together, only an accidental unity is achieved, not the essential unity of form. Similarly, genuine unity between living beings is never simply the result of a particular action, or even inter-action between two agents. **Unity can come about only by being presupposed as already given.** Unity's transcendent character makes it "non-constructable."

Willing the good of another is an act of love only if it is accomplished along with an apprehension of

28Schindler.

belonging to the other. The significance of time for unity helps us to see that there is more to love than the simple "event" of complacency. Love can involve the whole human being only if it includes the intellect and the will. There is a "built in" affirmation of the reality of the other... at the very root of the will's own activity."

If love is the unity that opens up the proper context for our knowing and willing, and if beauty is the proper cause of love, then we have to see, in sum, the indispensable role of beauty in genuine human existence. *Schindler makes a distinction between beauty in the profound rather than in the bourgeois sense of the 'aesthetic' (the 'pretty' and the 'pleasant').*

See p. 126 for Schindler's idealized notion of what being surrounded by beauty means.

Beauty establishes the natural love and affection that provides a horizon for genuine knowing and willing, for the intimacy of truth and the true involvement of ourselves that is free action....Beauty, by calling forth love, brings out the being of things, and so sets the stage for a true encounter between man and the world, man and man, man and God.²⁹

Section 2: Creation as *Fait Accompli*: The "Already-ness of Love"

Love enters into our experience as "always already having been there." This expresses something essential about its character. Love arrives by preceding. **The prius, or first-ness, of love is a basic part of love's nature. It is precisely because the relations that constitute the family are "pre-given" that we take them to represent love in a particularly profound way.** [Contrast this with Pierre Manent's observation that the impulse of moderns is to only award authenticity to relations based on their being based on conscious consent]. Love does not impose but generates, by presupposing, creatively acknowledging and giving attention to what is already there.

Love preempts, precedes and super-abounds pre-given conditions. Part of love's gift is its open reception of the conditions of the other. *In this respect, we can see what is missing in Anders Nygren's notion of agape, which is absolutely unmotivated, and so becomes, as many critics have pointed out, wholly indifferent to the other it is meant to serve.* **"Love...is motivated, but ultimately by beauty, which as we have seen is the perception of an essentially 'pre-given' unity - the unity that is love. In other words, love is wholly motivated...by love itself."**³⁰

Love is the first gift because it is the affirmation of unity with the other within which every subsequent gift is made.

There is strictly nothing that precedes creation; the potency for creation lies simply in God. This does not mean that creation is an act imposed "arbitrarily" on the world, because to speak of imposition is to posit a world prior to creation, a world that is somehow forced to be. [Or does it imply a world prior to creation against which creation is measured and deemed an imposition? I am a little confused on his point here... This point reminds me of current trans ideology in which it is claimed that gender is arbitrarily imposed on an infant at birth. The position seems to imply beyond the blaming of parents and society a blaming of God for "imposing" one's sex on a person.]

²⁹Schindler.

³⁰Schindler, p. 129.

Love presupposes what it gives. God does not only give being but simultaneously gives the capacity to receive being. The human soul is created by God, and yet what God creates in this case exists by (its God-given) nature. [This reminds me of a possible interpretation of Galatians 4:5 as meaning God adopts us in the Roman sense as fully mature sons, when the toga *praetexta* of youth is exchanged for the toga *virilis* of manhood, similar to the bar mitzva in marking transition to full responsibility and manhood. There is a sublimity in the way that God creates and sustains us as world's in ourselves and at the same time unites us in love to each other].

According to the Septuagint translation, when God created the world, he saw that it was *beautiful*.

Nominalism is an emphasis on the contingency of the world as hanging precariously on the end of God's will. The world is a gift that has always already been given. Love means "already-ness."

Love is not an act of will but instead represents the always-prior context within which any particular act of will takes place. It is primarily a kind of union. To exist at all is to be in union with God. It is the absolute permanence of the bond of love that allows perfect independence of creatures. **Creation is not a distinct event within a pre-given horizon. Instead, creation is a relation, which characterizes created beings as a whole.**

It is precisely because God indwells me in the order of creation that we can say that all things love God more than themselves, and do so naturally. In rational creatures, this love of God that naturally exceeds self-love is spontaneous, preceding any deliberate choice. The love of God is an already given reality. It is the union with God that is creation.

God comes out of himself in the act of creation. The world represents an excess, more than simply God in himself.

Section 3: "To Be" in Fruitful Communion

Being is the likeness of God's goodness. The event or movement that love essentially is is an image of the fundamental love that is being or *esse* itself. The *co-aptatio* of love is the *formatio* of the potency. In the movement of love, the beloved object gives itself to the lover precisely by giving the lover the potency to pursue the beloved. It presupposes what it gives. It gives itself but only as the result of the lover's own preceding act.

Beauty is the communication of form in a distinctive way. It is not essential form in and of itself, but is form in appearance.

This *formatio* is a union between subject and object which allows them to act on each other. They adapt to each other so that they "fit" together in the "fittingness" that describes beauty.

Love is a movement that does not take place in time. Its movement is vertical, not horizontal.

Love is like being or *esse* because it does not express the kind of act which is an operation passing over into something external to be produced in time, but rather the act that is primary.

Whenever love happens, it precedes us because to precede is its essential nature. It is in this respect a recapitulation of the very love, of the unity with God, of the *esse* that makes us be in the first place.

The action undertaken out of love will always be, at some level, an inter-action, a genuine involvement of each in the being of the other.

Dionysius described the sense of existing as ourselves in our giving and receiving as the symphony, the ultimate beauty, of creation.

The phrase *esse commune* indicates a participation and sharing in the one act of being, a participation which is diversely exercised.

Living is the being of living things, but the acts by which things live always involve a profound intimacy with things beyond the organism.

Marriage is the creating of a new reality, a single existence made up of two distinct persons, and fruitful of more. Marriage is a paradigm which casts light on our existence in the world more generally.

Chapter 7: Being and God

Section 1: Guardians of Metaphysics

A philosopher is not a self-satisfied possessor of knowledge, but a seeker of it, as the quintessential, archetypal Socrates epitomizes. There is a childlikeness to this perpetual openness. True intellectual simplicity manifests itself in the love of wisdom and in this sense, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven without being a philosopher. Schindler sets out to defend von Balthasar's assertion that more than anyone else, Christians are called to be the "guardians of metaphysics in our time."

Section 2: Being Poor in Doctrine

The American religion of "moralistic therapeutic deism" is dogmatically, or doctrinally, poor. The only absolute doctrine in it is that doctrine does not ultimately matter. It is the specifically religious expression of misology, which is a faithless contempt for reason. The connection between this misological (or anti-Logos), generic faith and the role it ascribes to its god, or higher power, is crucial. This "god" is met with in the seat of feeling, which is not essentially a matter of concepts. Subjective feeling is untranslatable into universal terms; *it does not concern me specifically as a matter of truth.*

If we deny the possibility of a rational proof for the existence of God, and hold that reason should not bother with such questions, if we insist that the God-question is only a matter of private, personal faith which concerns no one else but me, the consequence is more radical than we may at first realize: everything gets emptied of its ontological density. Charles Peguy observed that the spirit of modernity is not believing what one believes. **Postmodernity after this seems to be the abandonment of the pretense of believing. It the Creator of the world is not in some basic sense an other, to whom I must conform, any real otherness that the world may have grows thin. Human projects cease to be controlled by ontological resistance.**

Against the thinning of reality, Christians need to take a stance as guardians of metaphysics.

Section 3: God is Being

Toward the end Schindler enjoins, he leads us into a first metaphysical meditation on what it means to say, "God is being," reflecting also on the act of that meditation. "God is being" represents a general statement in contrast to "God is incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus is known through historical encounter, whether direct or mediated through witnesses. Being in contrast is universal and what is most familiar to all of us.

God, as Creator, is absolute source or principle. Being is not a class because classes are defined by their difference from other classes. Rather than trying to fit the statement "God is being" into the typical form of our intelligence, we need to raise our intelligence towards it. What does being add to our understanding of God? Universal intelligibility. We can say that this statement implies what is intelligible to the human mind, without reducing God to that intelligibility.

In apprehending the statement, we have to shift from a logical to a more directly ontological register. God is the absolute cause of all that exists. Effects are identical with their cause in their cause. Despite the infinite difference between God and creation, at the ontological foundation of the difference between them is a simple unity. This unity means there is a universal likeness to God that is accessible in all things (including blackberry bushes, as E.B. Browning noted). God gives himself in giving the world being.

The traditional notion in metaphysics that encapsulates this simultaneity of unity and difference is analogy. When we speak of God analogously, we are naming God from creatures but mainly referring to what lies beyond. The notion of being itself, and not just creatures that have being, carries the mind up to God, rather than eclipsing him. The result is not a stagnant endpoint. Rather, we see the road open before us.

A pitfall to our intellect is when we simply separate created being, which we can know in principle, from divine being which we cannot know, dropping the analogical bridge of the symbolic order (possibly what Plato and Voegelin would call collapsing the metaxy). Such a disastrous intellectual move inclines us to placing our relation to God outside of reason, instead of engaged with reason, which inexorably leads to the lowering of the relation below our reason. After William James (privatizing of faith) and Sigmund Freud (the triumph of the therapeutic over faith), we have to learn to steer between these Scylla and Charybdis like Jason and the Argonauts).

By analogous knowing, we begin to track the First Cause, which is God, through the effects, the world He created. In other words, we know God through being. The forms that constitute the intelligibility of creatures are all representations of the divine essence.

To love God is to desire to know Him, and this desire is not expressed by a lack of interest in knowing anything else, a kind of scrupulous ignorance, but rather to know all things as perfectly and quintessentially as one can, which is what metaphysics is.

To set aside the mediation of being in order to relate to God immediately implies you are separating

God from what He gives. This in effect renders Him no longer a giver and vacates the ground of our thanksgiving, gnosticizing our apprehension of the cosmos. God gives himself definitively but not exhaustively in creation. There is something profoundly new and directly personal in God's self-revelation in history. However, if we affirm the centrality of Scripture in a way that positively excludes the philosophical reflections on God's nature as it is revealed in His gift of being, we undermine even the affirmation of that centrality. If we have barred God from giving Himself in His creation, His presence in Christ will be in a mode other than that of self-gift. Only if God is being, only if the God of Jesus Christ has also revealed Himself in creation, does the extraordinary event of the incarnation bear not only just on my feelings or on my moral intentions but also in the meaning of reality as a whole. "If we deny the importance of philosophy in faith, we cannot but lose our faith in philosophy more generally, which means we lose an intrinsic interest in the intrinsic meaning of things."³¹

There is a "what is...?" question imbedded in our faith so that our minds as well as our feelings may be, must be, oriented to God. God is not only a person but a nature, which means when we say "God" it means some real objective thing. To dispense with the truth of God, as "moralistic therapeutic deism" does, cuts us off from really knowing, and so loving, God.

Section 4: Seeking God in Thought

Concepts are the form that the mind takes in its participation in, and communion with, being; and being is God's gift of Himself to His creatures. It follows that God is present to us in our concepts; we are encountering the real God in a distinctive way through them, inasmuch as they are true to being. Thinking about God, metaphysics, undertaken in the manner proper to it, is the "piety of thought." We must remove our sandals.

The more we learn of God in Scripture, the more we wish to know Him in all things, therefore, philosophically. Our faith opens up the entire world to our mind, restoring us to the wonder appropriate to the mystery of being. "Only the one who remains simple learns, and the very nature of the truth that one learns inspires deeper simplicity. To reject philosophy, deliberately and explicitly, is no longer to be childlike in the gospel sense; rather, this rejection is more like the intellectual version of a loss of innocence."³² It becomes a knowing avoidance of knowledge. But, unless you become lovers of wisdom, you will not be lovers of God. It is that stark.

Section 5: Loose Ends

What our exhausted postmodernity shares with Islam is just that disjunction between reason and will. We Christians do not believe that it is to 'fetter' God if we say that he acts according to reason. That is the Muslim interpretation of it, an interpretation that reduces God to pure will. We believe that the wisdom of God is in fact the coeternal Son of the Father. To say that God works according to reason is like saying that his omnipotence is made manifest in power. But, as soon as a Christian's reason dares to venture beyond quantity and technology, the imams of cultural degeneracy are quick to sentence the

³¹Schindler.

³²Schindler.

reasoner to ridicule, calumny, loss of livelihood, and sometimes prison.³³

Western civilization's genius is in its synthesis of reason and faith. These foundations are under assault today from Islamists and radical secularists. Unless Western society recovers its confidence in this synthesis and its capacity to magnify human freedom and achievement, our future is limited. This sharp commentary on the rise and current decline of Western Civilization touches on historical moments - including the building of the early universities in the Middle Ages and the American Revolution - and figures - including Augustine, Aquinas, Edmund Burke, and Adam Smith - that exemplify the faith-reason synthesis at the heart of Western Civilization, as well as the modern villains that threaten to destroy it.³⁴

[The way in which Genesis differs from other ancient, middle eastern accounts of the formation of the cosmos, such as the *Enuma Elish* and *Atrahasis*, is remarkable. In the *Enuma Elish*, creation is the result of a violent conflict between the gods whereas in Genesis, God's creative word brings light from darkness. In Genesis, good is intrinsic to the rational order of the heavens and the earth. Creation is rational not just because it follows predictable patterns, but because it is good.

The anarcho-nihilism in our streets seems to exhibit magical thinking. As Douglas Wilson said, "The fundamental pagan assumption for Rioting, is that Order arises from Chaos." Igor Shafarevich in *The Socialist Phenomenon* makes a similar observation about the magical, myth making nature of Marxism and socialist doctrines more broadly: "Karl Jaspers is closer to the truth, no doubt, when he sees Marxism not as science but as 'myth making' based on certain notions borrowed from magic, as for instance the belief that the destruction of the existing world will lead to the birth of new man."³⁵

...the view of socialism as the ideology of an absolute state makes incomprehensible one of the main properties of socialist doctrines - their infectiousness, their capacity to influence the masses. It would be absurd to suppose that people face torture and the gallows or go to the barricades for the sake of becoming a soulless cog in the all-powerful state-machine. Moreover, the large proportion of socialist doctrines belongs to the anarchical-nihilistic tendency, which is quite hostile to the idea of state control. Such is the spirit that informs the medieval heresies, the movements of the Reformation period, Meslier, Deschamps, Fourier, Bakunin, and numerous modern socialist movements."³⁶

The belief in witchcraft as well as Marxism by the co-founder of BLM Patrice Cullors and the spiritualistic meaning of "Say her name!" at least as it is meant by many leaders of BLM is an interesting, overt coalescence of the two.

The belief that order arises out of chaos and violence, which, come to think of it, seems shared by many Darwinians, is one which clashes directly with the God of the Bible and also with a philosophical worldview, **one that is not characterized by misology or**

33Anthony Esolen, *Sex and the Unreal City: The Demolition of the Western Mind*.

34Summary of Samuel Gregg's *Reason, Faith and the Struggle for Western Civilization*

35Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon*, p. 240.

36Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon*, p. 244.

contempt for reason. The God of Christians exalts reason. Indeed, the wisdom of God is in fact the coeternal Son of the Father in Christian faith. A magical, myth-making view exalts misology, the irrational and violence in a foolish belief that order arises out of disorder. Reason became flesh and walked among us.]