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*LIVING AND VALUE***

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FRAMING AND UNVEILING IN THE EMERGENCE OF THE THREE ORDERS OF VALUE

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Frederick Ferré has given us a rich and powerful metaphysical framework that locates the orders of value within the three domains of being, knowing, and living. In the unfolding of his categorial array, he has judiciously combined phenomenological descriptions of value-embedded living realities, with a neo-Whiteheadian general ontology that reinforces Whitehead's categories of creativity, prehension as grasping, and a pluralized notion of subjective satisfactions in an open-ended evolutionary universe. Yet he also removes both the Primordial and Consequent natures of neo-classical theism to make room for a horizontal convergence of occasions within an ecological world-view in which there is no ultimate initial aim or ultimate gathering ground of superjects. This is reinforced by an encompassing notion of worldhood that centers on the evolving instantiations of beauty in a hope-filled progression that overcomes the destructive powers of ugliness, in its twin species of evil and Philistinism. By jettisoning Whitehead's Primordial mind of god, Ferré is able to rethink the nature, growth, and location of so-called eternal entities in a way that reminds one of Peirce's concept of developmental thirdness; namely that generals are emergent from the activities of evolutionary impactions rather than functioning as antecedent conditions for any such instantiation or concrescence. And, by leaving behind the romantic notion of the Consequent nature of god, Ferré provides a universe in which occasions, nexus, regnant occasions, and societies of occasions, are partially on their own.

My initial take on Ferré's kalogenic personalistic organicism is that it represents a brilliant combination of a top-down neo-Kantianism with a bottom-up Plotinianism. Needless to say, neither designation will be acceptable to our author, so I beg a little of your indulgence as I try to work out my hermeneutics of the subtext; admittedly, a strategy used by what Ferré, quite rightly, would call the "bad" kind of postmodernism. Yet I hope to use the bad, or ugly, in a good, if not quite always beautiful, way.

First, what do I mean by “neo-Kantianism?” In my use of the term, I mean to refer to any perspective that transforms the a-temporal synthetic apriori of Kant into what C.I. Lewis called the “pragmatic apriori;” namely a form of the apriori that is still antecedent to empirical impactions and yet fully evolutionary and changing in and for those beings funded with a complex mental life. For Ferré, universals are located in mental prehensions and in “apprehensional premises.”¹ Such universals exist on a gradient moving from what Peirce called “perceptual judgment,” which combines a bare percept with a usually unconscious judgment, to a full conscious imposition of generality onto a past series of selected superjects. In a positive grasping certain superjects are allowed entry into the finite mind, while all others are negatively grasped (a strange conjunct). Without a Primordial divine mind, these universals must emerge from finite minds as they struggle with physical prehensions (one cannot phenomenologically separate the physical, the mental, and the hybrid forms of prehension in any presented case). Ferré’s neo-Kantian and anthropomorphic subtext implies that the highest generals or universals are finite products of human forms of framing, or of grasping. These universals are thus emergent from pragmatic contexts of shaping and biological need; contexts that make it possible for the will-driven mental being to create a world that is more like an “as-if” structure than a full immersion in the fullness and emptiness of nature.

A neo-Kantian perspective is strong on firstness (pre-shaped qualitative immediacy) and thirdness (generality), but is weak on secondness (contemporary causal impaction by orders still waiting for meaning).² For naturalism to fully embed itself in what it honors,

¹Frederick Ferré, *Living and Value* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 189.

²Ferré responded to my argument, which stated that his form of process naturalism was weak on secondness, by directing me (and the reader) to the section in *Knowing and Value* (pp. 295-303) that discusses bipolar experience, i.e., the mental and physical poles in correlation. There he states, “A properly bipolar approach to experience, however, will recognize that high-focus, abstract, conceptual-pole experience, for all its fascination, clarity, and practical usefulness, floats on a sea of physical-pole experience. It is in that sea, whose waves sometimes break into conscious awareness, but usually not, that we find the deep causal pressures that make us so certain (when we are not philosophizing with Hume and his many followers) that we are alive in a lawful but creative world that holds, nourishes, punishes, and connects us” (299). This passage, along with others, makes me less nervous about the role of secondness in Ferré’s perspective. Yet I am still not persuaded that this kind of causality is the “brute” pre-

namely nature in all of its knowability and unknowability, it must also give itself over to what has been called “surds”—a word that should evoke a sense of the ugly, and should be replaced with a phrase like “the unveiling and unveiled.”

A clear implication of the underlying neo-Kantianism in Ferré’s personalistic organicism is found in his rejection of non-relationality. Ferré affirms that, while there is no divine connector in nature, there is a web of internal relations that, in consort with deprivileged external relations, creates a continuum of all continua in the world. In Volume One he states, “Coherence does not demand identity among the elements of things, but it does require the rejection of sheer unrelation.”³ He is certainly correct in the notion that there is no one trait held in common by all of the orders of the world (although he violates this principle elsewhere when he insists on the universality of the foundational categories of actuality and definiteness). The idea seems to be that if the mentally prehending finite mind can generate (grasp) a coherent sequence of prehensions, allegedly internally related to those of other such finite agents, then it follows that the world per se must itself be an ultimate continuum. Yet given the stress on grasping and framing, is there any right here to make the metaphysical move from what I see as a neo-Kantian structure of knowing? I may claim to know that I am connected to some ecological web, and can further claim to know that this connection is through a shared network of framed graspings, but can I escape from my own graspings into the secondness of what is grasped? Who or what really pushes back?

But why is this a “top-down” form of neo-Kantianism? The notion of the top moving downward denotes, or at least connotes, the priority of the enframing mind as it pulls, pushes, shapes, and grasps whatever is below it into a framework that will reflect its downward (perhaps even condescending) tendency. Thus, to be real, which means to move from “mere” possibility to actualized definiteness, is to be allowed into the purview of the pragmatic a priori that “allow” being. Ferré states his preference for Aristotle on the possibility/actuality tension and ontologically privileges actuality over its more slothful cousin mere possibility. But are possibilities “mere” or are they powers

intelligible kind discussed by Peirce, especially since an organicist perspective tends to emphasize that efficient causality is a species of both final and formal causalities.

³Frederick Ferré, *Being and Value* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 343.

and potencies in their own right, regardless of what mentality does or doesn't do with them? For a top-down neo-Kantian, only an actualizing mind can make possibilities truly real. Hence, actualizing and determining pragmatic a priories get top billing on the metaphysical marquee while possibilities only get to play an episodic series of cameo parts. To ever hope for a metaphysical Oscar, a possibility, whether latent or active, must be anointed by the actualizing director or talent scout.

One place where Ferré makes a striking advance against my suggested neo-Kantian strain is in his proposed model for understanding telepathy. It seems clear that telepathy exists, but that it does not provide much relevant data on the linguistic level. However, feeling tones and symbols do come through to sensitive minds and can be properly felt by them on a deeper layer than the linguistic. The concept of prehension makes the most sense when applied to the openings, we can't quite call them channels, between or among beings funded with mind. This process is much deeper than that of, say, picking up sexual signals, and involves more pervasive attunements that radiate outward from mental beings. This does not suggest communications from the dead (given the denial of subjective immortality) but rather points toward emanations from the living.

Ferré's deconstruction of Whitehead's god represents an advance over most other forms of postmodern process metaphysics in that it frees so-called eternal entities from their Babylonian captivity in an eternal mind that somehow knows how to establish and suggest ingressive relevance. Ingressive decisions are more democratic for Ferré and entail more responsibility and creativity for the ingressor. For Ferré, "My kalogenic naturalism agrees with Whitehead's 'bottom-up' approach to the world but, in contrast to Whitehead himself, is less convinced of the additional need for God or a god, a single unified cosmic entity in constant relationship with the world, to complete the cosmic picture."⁴ Let's take a closer look at the "bottom-up" side of Ferré's framework and see if it really is, as I suggest, a Plotinian bottom which moves upward to join the downward moving neo-Kantian form of finite framing.

The key here is, of course, the centrality of kalogenesis; namely the evolutionary impulse to create greater and more harmonic instances of actualized beauty in the world. We see how the privileging of

⁴Ferré, *Living and Value*, 191.

actuality over possibility (an implication of Whitehead's ontological principle of no actual occasion, no reason) combines with an affirmation of the ultimate value of beauty, embedded as the telos of all fundamental entities; that is, those entities that are actual and actualizing. For Ferré, "whatever they [fundamental entities] are, they must be actual . . . in the process of becoming actual they also give rise to beauty; that is, that actuality is inherently kalogenic . . ." ⁵ One is initially compelled to ask: is possibility ugly, or only potentially beautiful? However that question is answered, it seems that even if there is no creator or sustainer god, there is something like a beautification process luring the world into more actuality, more reality, and that, at bottom, the beautiful is the real and the real is the beautiful. We have the ontological paradox of a less actual (less beautiful) world striving to become more actual (more beautiful), and hence more real. Thus put, the world right now is only partially real, and from its bottom it wishes to push upward toward the One or the Beautiful, even if that reality is pluralized.

Lest this sound like postmodern subtext-mongering hocus-pocus, ponder on what Plotinus says in *Ennead* 6.7.32, "The productive power of all is the generator of beauty. Therefore the productive power of all is the flower of beauty, a beauty which makes beauty. For it generates beauty and makes it more beautiful by the excess of beauty which comes from it, so that it is the principle of beauty and the term of beauty." ⁶ Plotinus presents his own version of the ontological difference; namely the difference between the generator of beauty and the beauty generated. This fundamental difference within nature has also been denoted by such dyads as: nature naturing and nature natured or Being and thing in being. The ontological difference cuts in a 90-degree angle from the ontological principle of Whitehead. While the latter directly ties its ontological ultimate (actual occasions) to its reason (more final and formal than efficient), the former shows the mysterious abyss at the heart of the world in which the hidden ejective ground, in this case, beauty, is in no sense a reason for, or explanandum of the emergent. Hence the process perspective assumes too much intelligibility precisely where it is least available.

⁵Ferré, *Being and Value*, 340.

⁶As quoted from Margaret R. Miles, *Plotinus on Body and Beauty* (Malden, MA: Blackwells, 1999), 159 (using the Armstrong translation).

Both Ferré and Plotinus see beauty as the ultimate emergent in the world “down here.” However, while Plotinus combines involution (the downward movement of the One into the many) with evolution (the return journey of the many back to the one), Ferré only gives us a truncated version of the second movement of the bottom back upwards. The world, in Ferré’s eyes, is indeed moving away from less beauty toward more beauty with the aid of a highly muted form of a kalogenic lure.⁷ One can ask: and where is this lure located? Is the luring purely internal to the grasping process or does it have an elusive point of origin on the other side of the ‘sum’ of all grasped and all grasping?

My suggestion is that Ferré is a person deeply responsive to and creative of beauty in the world of actualizings. But does his perspective grasp what is the unsaid lying at the heart of this recognition of beauty and its actualizing pulsations and sheer energy? Can he have this rich evolving kalogenic world without a hidden involutory lure that need not resemble any god that the classical or neo-classical traditions have articulated, but which does prevail as an ontological potency in its own right? I sense not, but to bring this home it is necessary to look at what happens when top-down neo-Kantianism encounters bottom-up Plotinianism (not, of course, that these moments are separable in Ferré’s framework).

Given that knowing is a value rooted in being, and given that knowing is rooted in subjectivity, then it follows that there is an intimate tie between subjectivity and being. Ferré states,

without some trace of subjective satisfaction (at however low an order), there is no value in being. If it were not for satisfactory subjectivity, the universe would contain no value. This is true both for intrinsic and for instrumental value, since instrumental values are defined simply in terms of their usefulness in contributing eventually to bringing about some state of intrinsic value.⁸

This link is an important one. On the one hand, value is directly embedded in the prehensive decisions of subjectivities in search of kalogenic satisfaction, while on the other hand, value is held to be part

⁷ Cf. Ferré, *Being and Value*, 364.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 357.

of the way of being itself. Whatever is, embodies and is a cluster of values, all attuned to the ultimate value, beauty. For a less Kantian more Aristotelian naturalism, or for a more intoxicated neo-Platonism like that of Plotinus, value simple is regardless of what finite agents do about it. For both Aristotle and Plotinus, formal and final causality ripple through the generative source of the world and subjective agency need not exist at all for intrinsic value to exist. To use an ugly Heideggerianism, one could say of both thinkers: beauty beauties, or value values, and subjectivity exhibits more of a forgetfulness of beauty and value than functions as an agent of their highest flowering. Might not there be too much “panexperientialism” in Ferré’s metaphysical epistemology? Does he not, certainly against his intent, ultimately privilege our alleged ways of knowing over the orders and dimensions of nature?

I revisit my vexation that Ferré privileges actuality over possibility because it shows just how his notion of actualization into definiteness secretly privileges the knowing relation over the gifts of sheer being or sheer beauty. Ferré states,

With Whitehead (and Aristotle), I affirm the ontological principle that actuality is primary over possibility. To the extent that forms of definiteness are possibilities, a disembodied ‘realm’ of these forms makes no sense. Fortunately, such a realm is not needed. Every actuality is the embodiment of many general characteristics; it is the manifestation of determinable properties in a specific set of determinates.”⁹

Pity the poor form of definiteness that must await its “rescue” by an actualizing agent in search of subjective satisfaction. We are in agreement that there is no disembodied realm of possibility, but why on earth is it necessary to impose an ontological priority (masked behind the ontological principle) precisely where there is the most covering up of the true nature of possibilities? The privileging of actuality, given its necessary connection to subjective satisfaction, is one the most strenuous forms of neo-Kantianism I know, precisely because it takes Aristotle’s naturalism where it ought not to go. After all, who gets to vote on the reality status of any trait of the world? Only actualizing

⁹Ferré, *Knowing and Value*, 287.

subjectivities have this privilege. Even if one allows for extra- and pre-human orders of subjective satisfaction, one still privileges the human grasper as the tamer and shaper of the “really” real. Fortunately we do not have to carry this burden.

Like Ferré, I am a firm believer in hope. Yet neither of us likes the aggressive forms of eschatology or apocalypticism that have sustained and emboldened the three Western monotheisms. Given how central such fantasies are to the monotheisms, wouldn't it make more sense to start metaphysical work from outside of the regnant Western models? Plotinus, Ferré's hidden partner, was not, after all, a Christian, and this, among other things, freed him to experience the inner pulsations of nature in a more intimate way than, say, the quasi-Protestant Kant. Whitehead, as another quasi-Protestant, functioned, in my view, as a sophisticated apologetic philosophical theologian for the stumbling Christian framework. To bring home the results of an empirical observation I ask: where do many post-Christian graduate students and seminarians go to retain some link to their ancestral past? In my experience, they find that process metaphysics is a relatively painless route to take in that it does not demand anything that radical, even if it claims otherwise. One can be properly postmodern and function as a panentheist, all the while protecting the selving process from the depths and fissures of the ontological difference. The contrasting ontological principle functions more like a Crusader's shield keeping nature away than like an open garment that lets nature natured and the pulsations of nature naturing permeate the selving process. The ontological difference, insofar as it is entered into in seriousness, joy, and wonder, overturns protective measures and mechanisms of grasping.

But my grumbling aside, there are some points in which Ferré's profoundly modified process perspective makes some moves in the right direction. We share a commitment to: (1) an evolutionary perspective, (2) a sensitivity to beauty, (3) a drive to understand nature in its utter vastness, (4) a willingness to take the saner aspects of postmodernism seriously, (5) a deep suspicion of Whitehead's notion of the bipolar deity, (6) a rejection of the patriarchal model of creation out of nothingness, and (7) an awareness that knowing, valuing, and nature are intertwined from the bottom-up and the top-down. While I find the term “being” to be less metaphysically encompassing than the term

“nature,” insofar as one can talk about “nonbeing” but not about “non-nature,” the former term can still function in a very loose way.

However, our points of disagreement are profound. While Ferré is a master at the use of argumentation, my own approach, while never rejecting the importance of argument, moves phenomenologically, specifically in the modus of an ordinal phenomenology. This is undergirded by my sense that arguments often shave off key phenomenological intuitions precisely where they might get in the way of the ice-skater’s logical turns and leaps. Obviously, Ferré knows the limitations of the skater-qua-philosopher analogy and states them in the text, but I remain (postmodernly) suspicious.

We have seen how I have found some strong neo-Kantianism in Ferré’s framing of the way of nature natured, that is, the orders of the world, obtain. For example, his worry about an infinite regress tells me something. It certainly is important to reject a pansemioticist model of the form developed by the middle Royce or the mature Bradley, but it is not necessary to go to the opposite direction and posit a kind of atomism that simply creates a bottom when one is not there. Any order that can be identified by human sign users can be indefinitely ramified. We stop our query when our needs or the needs of our interpretive communities are momentarily met. Ferré does reject Leibnizian atomism, precisely because it has no sense of external relations and a non-relational sense of internal relations. For the Monadology, all internal relations are truly internal and must be unveiled within each monad as it uncovers its divinely pre-given traits, thereby ‘establishing’ its identity. Leibniz’s monads do not ingress or superject. For an organicist, they are dead.

But what if the world of nature natured (misnamed the “creation”) has no open atomic structure in the process sense? What if, as Dewey, Neville and I argue, mind is not only rare in nature, but is as much characterized by sheer drift and waste as it is by creativity? Why assume that mentality has an evolutionary future at all? What if the knowing relation imposes more often a form of closure than an opening to the unveiling of what gives itself to thinking in its non-tamable dance of approach and withdrawal? As I too begin to feel the aches and pains of my middle-aged embodiment, an experience wonderfully described by Ferré on his walks with his dog Weibi, my ecstatic naturalist perspective turns more and more toward an appreciation of the non-

truncated Plotinus and toward a mystical theosophy that is often shriven by a momentary insight into the elusive processes of involution.

It has become a cliché to contrast Heidegger's image of homesickness with Whitehead's image of adventure. For Heidegger, "Philosophy, metaphysics, is a homesickness, an urge to be at home everywhere, a demand, not blind and without direction, but one which awakens us to such questions as those we have just asked and to their unity: what is world, finitude, individuation?"¹⁰ For Whitehead, "Rationalism is an adventure in the clarification of thought, progressive and never final. But it is an adventure in which even partial success has importance."¹¹

While I resonate with both images, my growing neo-Platonic sensibilities pull me more in the direction of the image and attunement of homesickness. Perhaps the point of adventuresome work in metaphysics and the life of reason is to provide another attunement that locates the evolutionary and beauty-filled sense of the organic web within the hidden and elusive sacred folds of involution; namely those points of contact where the movement from above is freed from neo-Kantian grasping and encountered in the indefinite bottom where eternal light truly meets creativity.

Beauty may or may not be the metaphysical ultimate, but at the very least it is as much an emergent from the depths as it is a product of the self-shaping orders that appear fitfully within a vastness that has neither center nor circumference—granted, another cliché, but one that has deep value for the craft of metaphysics. Perhaps our two forms of naturalism can begin their more sustained dialogue at those places where we all encounter the mysterious eruption and creation of beauty. One can have a sense of the eternal origin of involution without locating that origin in anything, especially a propped-up mind of god. And doesn't Plotinus give us a clue when, in Ferré's words, "Once we are aware of this 'downward way,' from One to Intelligence, from Intelligence to Soul and, finally, from soul to the material world of our bodily existence, there is a chance, Plotinus taught, that our souls may successfully struggle upward again, given the right instruction."¹²

¹⁰Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

¹¹Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: Corrected Edition*, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), 9.

¹²Ferré, *Being and Value*, 83.