



“ Similitudo Amoris ”

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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It is somewhat disconcerting that modern Thomists, when discussing their own doctrine with reference to generalized existentialism (that of Kierkegaard was largely confined to the moral order), pay so little attention to the teaching of Aristotle and St. Thomas on the nature of the good. Fleeting generalities on the good as convertible with being are not enough. Insufficient emphasis is placed on the fact that “bonum est in rebus,” that appetite is essential to the definition of the good;¹ that the good, as a cause, “is prior to being, as is the end to the form”² and that the transcendental good is not coextensive with “the good that divides being.”³

Very much to the point is the Aristotelian doctrine on nature’s action for an end, which means that all natures are pressed to act, or to be acted upon, under the attraction of the good. The denial of this, as St. Thomas shows,⁴ at once leads to an absolute necessity “ex causis prioribus in esse,” obliterates the distinction between “ens per se” and “ens per accidens” in favour of the latter, and thus turns to complete irrationality.

Now, if every nature (as defined in *Physics*, II, chap. 1, 192 b 20 and chap. 8, 199 b 28) acts for an end, there must be natural appetite in each and all, even in the passive principle.⁵ This implies a similitude, a likeness, in the appetite, to the good desired. It is in virtue of this likeness that the good, toward which things tend as to that “for the sake of which” they are, act and are acted upon, is already present in them by its weight. This likeness, this “similitudo ratio amoris,” defined by the appetite as ordered to the good,⁶ has a greater compass than the similitude by reason of which the known is in the knower, since appetite is more common than the power of knowledge. It is by reason of the latter that the soul is said to be intentionally all things: the sensitive powers extending to all that is sensible, and the intellect to all things.⁷ In such a way the perfection of the entire universe can exist in one of its parts, viz. in the intellectual creatures.⁸

1. *Q. D. de Veritate*, q.21, a.1.

2. *Ia Pars*, q.5, a.2, ad 2.

3. *De Veritate*, q.21, a.2.

4. *In II Phys.*, lect. 12ff.

5. *Phys.*, I, ch.9, 192 a 16; II, ch.1, 193 a 9.

6. *Ia IIae* q.27, a.6.

7. *De Anima* III, c.8, 431 b 20.

8. *De Veritate*, q.2, a.2, c.

Leibniz, in his *Monadology* and in his *Principles of Nature and of Grace*¹ ascribed such an objective representation of the entire universe — the likeness of the whole in each of its parts — severally to the monads or “simple substances” which he believed were the final components of existing beings. In each monad with its infinite series of changes unrolling from its own inner dynamism, “the present is big with the future, the future might be read in the past, the distant is expressed in the near,” while continually the sum total of their individually mirrored aspects of the universe reflects the whole from every point of view.²

Lest our critique be purely negative we must, in rejecting Leibniz’s view, be careful to distinguish cognitive similitude and *similitudo ratio amoris*. If we based our judgment on the former, it would be quite wrong to say that the whole universe is present within each one of its parts; but if we have in mind the latter kind of likeness, then it is true that the good of the entire universe is present, somehow, namely *per modum ponderis*, within each and all of its parts — whether corruptible or incorruptible, rational or irrational, even within what is only *potentia ens* — in each according to its kind and mode. In point of fact, every part of the universe, even the humblest and farthest removed from the One Who is goodness *per essentiam*, tends naturally and more intensely towards the good of its genus, of its kind, and last, *ordine naturae*, towards what is exclusively its own.

If there were not in all things such a likeness of the appetitive order, it would be false to say that “*unaquaeque pars diligit totum plus quam se [. . .] et multo magis habet naturalem inclinationem unumquodque in id quod est bonum universale simpliciter.*”³

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1. LEIBNIZ, *The Monadology and other Philosophical Writings*, trans. ROBERT LATTA (2nd impression: Oxford University Press, 1925). See *Monadology*, nn. 1-13; *Principles of Nature and of Grace*, nn. 1-9.

2. *Principles of Nature and of Grace*, n. 13.

3. *1a Pars*, q.60, a.5, ad 1, 3.