

# The Maritain Notebook

NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN MARITAIN ASSOCIATION / VOLUME 21, ISSUE 1 / SPRING 2013



## The President's Letter

I shall take my cue from James Agee (and *The Wisdom of Sirach*) and begin by praising famous men.

For the AMA, Fr. Benedict Ashley, OP (5/3/15-2/23/13) will always be “the one who got away.” Active to the end, his *Healing For Freedom* appeared shortly after his death this last February. Had he lived to 99 (rather than almost 98!) he would have received the Lifetime Achievement award we were preparing to give him. I am sure that, “smilingly,” he would tell us “not to worry,” since he is now happily enjoying his eternal reward! John W. Carlson (9/17/43-12/20/12) also died suddenly and unexpectedly. He, too, had just published his *Words of Wisdom* (Notre Dame, 2012), as well as, a bit earlier, *Understanding Our Being* (CUAP, 2008). For those who had contributed to the final project he was working on with Tony Simon—to get out a reader of Yves R. Simon’s best—do not fear! They passed on to me the task of seeing this project to its completion and I will be in touch with all of its contributors later this summer to see that this gets done: a task of “filial piety” that I feel privileged to undertake.

2013 has been, and will continue to be, a year for AMA books. After some unexpected delays, Nikolaj Zunic’s *Distinctions of Being* is now available from

the CUAP. By the time you are reading this, the contributors to Montague Brown’s *Love and Friendship* should be receiving their complementary copies and it, too, should be available from the CUAP. I am hard at work on Jim Hanink’s volume of our 2009 conference, *Aquinas & Maritain On Evil*, and expect to have it completed and ready to print when Joe Butera takes over as our General Editor this July. He is already shepherding Peter Koritansky’s volume on our 2010 conference through the publication process, and it should be out near this summer’s end. John Conley’s work on the 2011 conference should also be out before our next conference; and the essays for James Jacob’s book on our last conference are now being peer-reviewed: his volume, too, should be readied (at least to be advertised) by our 2014 conference. By then, our publishing will have “caught up,” and anyone submitting an essay delivered at that, or a subsequent, conference will thus be able to have it peer-reviewed and published within two years of its being delivered. Get the word out to aspiring young Thomists: the AMA is “the place to be,” where their voice will be heard and their writing will be read!

Our 2014 conference should be another fine gathering. I hope that, after a longer period than usual, you will all be

eager to meet and will “swell our ranks” in Providence at the end of this coming February! (See the Call for Papers here. A fuller flyer will go out later in the Fall, as a reminder.) We are hard at work providing you with an exciting group of plenary speakers. The recipient last year of our Scholarly Excellence award, Monsignor John Wippel, will be one of them. Brenna Moore (who some may already know through her recent book on Raïssa, *Sacred Dread*) and Jane Doering will both be focusing our attention on Raïssa, and Michael Kelly (again possibly familiar to some from his work *Bergson and Phenomenology*) will be addressing us on Bergson. And there will be others, faces both “old and new,” young and old, who will no doubt help to make our 2014 conference a total success. Joe Butera has been doing “yeoman’s work” at Providence College to ensure this and I am more than confident it will be a splendid conference.

Twice the Association has looked to youthful California for its leadership. The first was when it chose Ray Dennehy as its second President. He enlisted Deal Hudson in the task of widening both the membership and the interests of the Association, tasking it with continuing Maritain’s lifelong project of crafting a “living Thomism,” one fully prepared to be a “player” in, and a “leaven” to, the contemporary intellectual world. My tenure is likely again to see a shift of sorts.

... Continued on page 3

### In This Issue ...

- The President's Letter ..... p. 1
- Review: *Dynamic Transcendentals* ..... p. 2
- News and More ..... p. 3

### *The Maritain Notebook*

Published in the Fall and Spring. Please contact the editor regarding books for review, guest columns, or to pass on news and announcements.

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# Book Review

THE MARITAIN NOTEBOOK / NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN MARITAIN ASSOCIATION / SPRING 2013



## Dynamic Transcendentals

Alice Ramos, *Dynamic Transcendentals: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty from a Thomistic Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 2012).

Reviewed by Daniel B. Gallagher



Scholastic manuals often treated the transcendentals primarily as a way of grasping the unity of being rather than as a way of demonstrating its manifoldness. More recent scholarship has shown that the transcendentals are more than a metaphysical exercise. Overemphasizing their interchangeability downplays what makes them distinctive. Furthermore, *quod ad nos* distinctions are no less important than real distinctions, especially when it comes to the transcendentals. Indeed, the transcendentals are “great luminaries in the texture of being” and hence an “infallible guide to our progress,” Kenneth Schmitz writes (*Person and Psyche*, p. 8). Schmitz connects the transcendentals to the dynamic nature of the human person in his quest for fulfillment via inclinations acting as “final cause.”

Alice Ramos similarly advances the case that the transcendentals are critical for understanding human desire and happiness. She elaborates a dynamic conception of the transcendentals based on a participatory metaphysics emerging from the work of Joseph de Finance, Jonathan Rist, Servais Pinckaers, and others.

### The perfection of the universe requires that there be some creatures who return to God not only in nature but in operation.

The transcendentals, she argues, help us to understand the return of creatures to their origin precisely insofar as they help us to understand the relation of creation to the divine intellect. The transcendentals, in turn, contribute to a better understanding of the place of evil, suffering, and human vulnerability in the world and in God’s plan for the world.

The chapters of the book are arranged into three groups. The first aims to relieve the tension between intelligence and finiteness by examining the intimate connection between exemplary and final causality. In so doing, Ramos illustrates Aquinas’s indebtedness to Plato and Neoplatonism. In fact, her professed esteem for Jonathan Lear’s reading of Aristotle opens the question of whether, in surpassing

Aristotle’s metaphysics, Aquinas was as much unpacking the Platonism within Aristotle as he was expanding on Aristotle with his own thought. The question is not central to Ramos’s analysis, but it is of keen interest to Thomistic scholars and is left hanging in her discussion. The second part delves more deeply into the presence of order and beauty in the universe and addresses the question of how God draws good from evil. The third part describes the proper object of natural reason as the true good and frames it as the beautiful in the moral realm. The book concludes with reflections on authentic art and how it allows a person to discover her true end.

The three parts are held together by a driving concern to make sense of the simultaneous presence of good and evil in the world and, more importantly, to reconcile the finite with the infinite without the former obscuring the latter or the latter absorbing the former. As man perceives order in the world, an order not of his making, so he perceives the need to order himself, an order over which he does have control. Ramos emphasizes the correlation of these two realms, the external and the internal, as a way of reconciling the finite and the infinite and as the path toward the ultimate fulfillment of rational creatures. By ordering his potencies, man both perfects his nature and orders himself to God as his end. Ramos turns to the concrete virtue of *studiositas* to flesh out this ordering and to show how *curiositas* and *acedia* disrupt this order and divert us from our end.

Ramos’s treatment of evil, order, and providence is rooted in the premise that God created a community of beings rather than a set of diverse and disconnected beings. He permits evil precisely in order to allow creatures to act in a way proper to their natures, and to allow human beings to accept freely the call to seek the goods that will make them truly happy. The experience of vulnerability and shame strengthen this call in that they invite us to self-surrender and trust. Indeed, beauty itself is intrinsic to this call, as evidenced by the proximity of the words *kalon* (the beautiful) and *kallein* (to call).

Particularly refreshing is Ramos’s constant recourse to divine providence in addressing genuinely philosophical questions. She adheres to Aquinas’s axiom that the perfection of the universe requires that there be some creatures who return to God not only in nature but in operation. This critical and often overlooked point in Aquinas is fundamental to the correlation of internal and external ordering: “we might say then that for the order of the universe to be preserved and executed, intellectual creatures

are necessary” (86). Equally refreshing is Ramos’s insistence that a complete picture of the good life requires that we not only reflect on man’s rationality but on the proper function of reason. There is a relationship between what is truly good and what is morally beautiful. We discover the very reason for reason when reason flourishes. Ramos examines those things that impede us from realizing the truly good, showing how Aquinas’s teaching on disposition and character is of inestimable worth for understanding the relationship between the internal and external order.

### By introducing a concept such as Aquinas’s *honestas*, Ramos clears a fresh path for thinking about the similarities and differences between corporeal and spiritual beauty, and thus the similarities and differences between aesthetic and moral judgments.

At the same time, Ramos’s schema leaves less room for the categories of continence and incontinence than many Aristotelians are comfortable with. She suggests that “perhaps it could be said that an immoral person ... whose natural reason [is] not totally corrupted by vicious habit can still recognize the beauty of a good act, but can also recognize in the virtuous man his true self or the measure of his true self” (178). The agent she is describing seems more “incontinent” than “immoral”, and, if so, the ability or inability to recognize the beauty of a good act is not what is primarily at stake, but the ability to recognize moral excellence. In other words, Aristotle’s point is that we can recognize moral excellence before we undertake an analysis of what makes an act good. Perhaps this is what Ramos means by a good act’s “beauty,” but the reader is left wondering what her analysis adds to Aristotle’s original categorization of character types.

Nevertheless, Ramos is definitely on to something of tremendous importance. No matter how beauty and goodness are interrelated in Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas, contemporary philosophers are keener than

**Continued on page 3**

# News & More

THE MARITAIN NOTEBOOK / NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN MARITAIN ASSOCIATION / SPRING 2013



## News and Events

### Passing

Robert H. Bork, Yale Law Professor, Supreme Court nominee, and long-time AMA member passed at the age of 85.

John Glanville one of the three editors of *The Material Logic of John of St. Thomas*, passed in late 2010 at 89.

+ *Requiescat in pace.* +

### Congratulations

On the 31st anniversary of the declaration of martial law in Poland, “Perpetual Member” Michael Novak, author, theologian, Ave Maria University professor, and former U.S. ambassador, was decorated by President Bronisław Komorowski with the Commodore’s Cross with a Star of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.

### Publications and AMA Website

Our members are so prolific, we received too many notices of AMA member publications to print! Keep sending them: we will be dedicating a portion of our **new AMA website** to them. The website is not functional yet; we’ll let you know when it is!

### Advice for Thomists

We’re looking for **Advice for Thomists** columnists. Contact the editor with your suggestions!

### Book Reviews

Please contact the editor if you’d like to review one of the books to the right.

## ... *Dynamic Transcendentals*

ever on drawing analogies between the aesthetic and moral realms. Momentum is gaining for the idea that at the heart of these analogies is a difference. Moral judgments can be discussed apart from the concrete actions they concern, thus showing how they fall under particular principles and how we are to judge particular acts. For aesthetic judgments, things stand differently. General principles are not available beforehand and direct experience is a *sine qua non* of aesthetic judgment.

Think, for example, of Aquinas’s integrity, proportion, and clarity. These are not principles of beauty but rather features, characteristics, or marks of beauty. They are necessary to a beautiful object but they are neither readily separable nor discussable apart from the object in which they are found. Moral acts, on the other hand, can be described and classified based on principles by which we can judge specific acts to be good or evil.

The difference between aesthetic and moral judgments in no way undermines the analogy between beauty and virtue. It enhances it. That is

precisely why Ramos’s book makes a vital contribution to the dialogue between Thomistic and contemporary philosophy. As soon as one opens the door to the above-described analogy, one cannot help but draw on the notions of hierarchical ordering, exemplar causality, and final causality to make sense of the sameness and difference of beauty and goodness. Ramos demonstrates that the tradition supplies us with the tools to carry the dialogue a step further. By introducing a concept such as Aquinas’s *honestas*, Ramos clears a fresh path for thinking about the similarities and differences between corporeal and spiritual beauty, and thus the similarities and differences between aesthetic and moral judgments.

Professor Ramos demonstrates not only a thorough familiarity with the Aristotelian and Thomistic texts, but an exceptional ability to reason together with Aristotle and Thomas. At the same time, she is not afraid to extend their thought into new territories and to make it bear on the concerns of modern man. She quickly dispels any doubt concerning Thomism’s perennial vitality. +

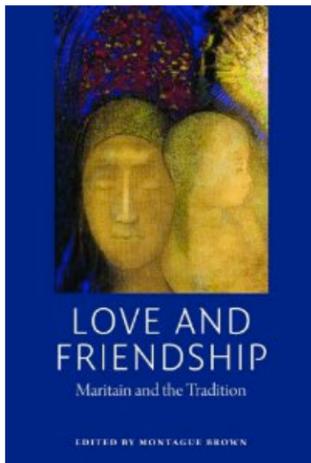
## ... *President’s Letter*

I am likely the last President whose memory reaches to our first (indeed, I published a piece by Donald Gallagher in my own AMA volume). But let me also be the first boldly to declare that it is entirely inaccurate to think of the AMA as a “particular society,” where one can offer a paper at a “break out group” of a larger convention. We are considerably more than a sub-group of the ACPA. We are an Association in our own right. We are the place, the Association, where a young Thomist can expect to find an audience able both to appreciate and to be helpfully critical of his or her work, whether it be on Thomas, Maritain, or a Thomistic “interface” with the world of contemporary philosophy, theology, and culture; we are an Association with some 2 dozen volumes to our name and a publishing record getting even stronger now that there is a peer-review process for any

article that we will publish; and we are a vital place, of fellowship and of faith, a place of friendly conversation and wit, a place distant from the portentous pretense that marks so many an academic gathering. It is time that we stepped up to our responsibilities and gathered in to our conferences all those who should be there! Get the word out: we have arrived!

Mentioning Ray Dennehy reminds me to close this letter by extending our congratulations at his having just received the University Faculty for Life’s Smith award. There could be no more fitting capstone to his academic career. Year in and year out, at the beginning with few around him, and ever with consummate skill and dignity, he has defended the most vulnerable among us, and has given a voice to the voiceless unborn. Congratulations, Ray! *Ad multos annos!* +

## New Books For Review



Montague Brown, *Love and Friendship: Maritain and the Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2013).

### Also Available:

- James G. Hanink, *Aquinas and Maritain on Evil: Mystery and Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2013).
- Nikolaj Zunic, *Distinctions of Being: Philosophical Approaches to Reality* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2013).

### Coming Soon:

- Peter Karl Koritansky, *Human Nature, Contemplation, and the Political Order* (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2013).

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