The Transcendentals, the Human Person, and the Perfection of the Universe
Alice Ramos
St. John’s University, NY

In *The Transcendentals and Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* Jan Aertsen points to the correlation between *anima* and being, between the transcendent openness of *anima* to all being, which makes the human being capable not only of knowing being but also capable of knowing God. For Aertsen, therefore, the anthropological motif of Thomas’s doctrine of the transcendentals converges with the theological motif. Aertsen also points to the connection between the transcendentals and morality, the former providing the metaphysical basis for the latter.

My interest here lies not only in these connections suggested by Aertsen but also and more specifically in the role played by the human person in the perfection of the universe, in the return of all things to their source. Given the intellectual creature’s place in the universe, the human person is responsible both for actualizing his own nature and for bringing everything else in the universe to perfection. In accomplishing this task the person also brings about what may be called an intensification of the transcendentals, such that those aspects of being which are said to be convertible with being and which are present to a greater or lesser degree in all beings acquire a higher level of actuality. We can thus say for example that although the human person is created true, he or she will through their proper operations maximize the degree of their truth and will bring everything else to the actualization of their truth and also of their goodness and beauty.

To intensify the degree of participation in the transcendentals requires then a dynamic conception of the transcendentals rather than a static one, which is the standard consideration of the transcendentals as aspects inseparable from being.

Such a conception is made possible through an understanding of the human person as image of an exemplary cause, as *imago dei*, a being intimately related to the wise and loving God who created him and destined him to freely return to Him. Aquinas’s account of the human person as *imago dei* is not static and a-historical but is rather a dynamic and active conception of human nature. In having originated from a true and good God, the human person is naturally inclined to the true and the good; in his pursuit of truth and goodness he is, whether he knows it or not, actually pursuing God. Human perfection cannot therefore be separated from union with God or religious fulfillment. God as the exemplary cause of the *imago* is the measure of the human person in being and in activity and in his return to the source.

In this dynamic consideration of the human person and of the transcendentals, I am indebted not only to Aertsen’s work on the transcendentals but also to the work of Joseph De Finance, Oliva Blanchette, Servais Pinckaers, and others. In his magnificent book *Etre et Agir dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas* De Finance emphasizes the radical dynamism of being in terms of the tendency of a created being to its own perfection, its tendency to action, and its return to its origin or beginning, a return which is the conversion or turning back of the effect to the cause. This tendency to the perfection of a creature’s nature and its reversion to the cause also constitute the perfection of its participation in the transcendentals, such that the creature would be more true, more good, and more beautiful, as well as more one or united, because of its union
with the source from whence all being and the transcendentals originate. In this paper I will especially draw from the work of De Finance concentrating on the actualization of the intelligibility or truth of beings.