I. A Note on the Notion of "Selbstvollzug" in Karl Rahner

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THE many do not unite by themselves' (*non enim plura secundum se uniuntur*) is a dictum which Karl Rahner quotes rather frequently from Thomas Aquinas. Applied to the manifold unified in the unity of a natural structure (as distinguished from an artifact), the dictum is interpreted dynamically. Such a plurality, v.g. the plurality of the faculties in the soul, is grounded in an emanation from a primordial unity. The structural unity "fulfills" and maintains itself through such a genetic, principally metaphysical and not necessarily temporal, emergence of its own plurality out of its own unifying ground. If there is a single German term of Rahner which expresses this dynamic unfolding which occurs analogically in all beings, the term is "Selbstvollzug". If only for lack of a better word, we will translate it *self-actuation*. Self-actuation is a basic notion in Rahner. We wish in this note to give some indication just how basic it is to his thought.

SELF-ACTUATION AND CAUSALITY

The notion of self-actuation is linked by Rahner with the concept of *resultatio* in St. Thomas. Rahner discusses *resultatio* in connection with Thomas' conception of the origin of the faculties from the soul. He argues that the problem is not concerned with the relation of a finished and complete entity as cause with an effect which is evoked by but remains extrinsic to its cause. It deals rather with the intrinsic metaphysical constitution of an essence in itself as one in the multiplicity of its faculties. This structural unity cannot there-

fore be conceived either simply as the relationship of an effect with its cause or the subsequent assemblage of the faculties already constituted in themselves. The first is rejected by Thomas; the second is contrary to the Thomist principle of the priority of an essence's unity over the plurality of its determinations: *non enim plura secundum se uniuntur.* If the plurality of faculties is not to be explained away monistically, that is, if neither the plurality nor the unity should be denied, then there is only one way of conceiving this real plurality in a real unity. The unified manifold must be conceived as springing forth from a single origin in which the multiplicity, anterior to itself, already exists in primordial unity. Thomas calls this springing-forth *origo, fluere, resultatio, emanatio.* This "springing-forth" stands, in a manner which can hardly be defined more precisely, between (1) an efficient causality in which the effect is indeed distinct from its origin but is not necessarily a permanent determination of the origin itself, (2) a simple essential determination which is identical with the essence as origin and therefore cannot ground a plurality of faculties, (3) a being's accidental determination, fortuitously evoked by an exterior agent, which determines a being in a formal manner and is distinct from it but does not constitute an essential unity with it as in the case of the soul with its faculties and these with each other. We are here concerned, accordingly, with the natural unfolding of a being's essence out of an innermost center into the multiplicity of faculties by which the being achieves itself, actuates itself, is itself. That is what Thomas calls "natural" *resultatio.*[1]

But the concept of *resultatio* is not limited by Rahner to the necessary emanation of the faculties from the soul. It is generalized to mean "that something can be the determination of a being only if this determination is produced (erwirkt) by the substantial, Being-bestowing ground of the being itself which is determined",[2] which is really expressing in other terms the same principle "non enim plura secundum se uniun-

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[1] For the argument cf. *Geist in Welt,* 2nd. edition (München: Kosel Verlag, 1957), pp. 258-259.

[2] *Ibid.,* p. 342.

tur." It is for this reason that Rahner says that transient action and efficient causality in general necessarily involve a *resultatio* of the effect from the "patient", where *resultatio* is here used in a wider sense since the emanation in question is not necessary as that of the faculties from the soul.[3] If this effect is a real determination of the patient, then, to be so received by the patient, it must spring forth from the patient itself (übernommene Einwirkung). On the other hand, the action in the patient as flowing from the agent is itself a perfection of the agent. Therefore, as a determination of the agent, it must spring forth from the substantial ground of the agent itself (ausfliessende Einwirkung).

The genuine metaphysical insight in the matter, then, is to grasp "transient action as a deficient mode of self-actuation of a being in a resultatio.[4] Efficient causality is thus conceived as simply another mode of the self-unfolding of a being, and this is what Rahner means when he reduces efficient causality to a mode of formal or "intrinsic" causality. Evidently, the concept of mutual causality is essential to this intrinsic causality. And if we further add that the *medium* of this causality in the material universe, in which the effect as from the agent (actio) and the effect as in the patient (passio) commune, is the (prime) matter of the patient, the following quotation should be clear:

Now the efficient causality of an exterior agent is for Thomas merely the threefold mode of an *intrinsic* causality. That is, firstly, efficient causality presents itself as a particular manner of formal causality: the activity of the agent itself as self-actuation (*actio perfectio agentis*). Secondly, it is at the same time a specific mode of material causality: the determinable matter of the patient as the where-in of the self-actuation of the agent. And, finally, it has again the character of a formal causality: the active self-actuation of the patient as the realization of just this matter...[5]

A footnote adds: "We mean a formal causality not in the strictest sense, but that which Thomas otherwise calls *resultatio*, which can be subsumed under formal causality, be-

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[3] *Ibid.,* pp. 259, 336, and n. 16 on p. 336.

[4] *Ibid.,* p. 260.

[5] *Ibid.,* p. 357.

cause it is not as such an effecting from and toward the out-
side (causalitas efficiens).[6]

Finally, this causality as self-actuation must be con-
ceived analogically. For it is predicated of the transient ac-
tion of a purely material being as well as of the free creative
act of God. This is submitted as Thomist doctrine and Rah-
ner uses it to show that his reduction of efficient causality to
intrinsic causality is Thomist. For *emanatio* is in every
instance for Thomas the innermost act which belongs to a
thing, that is, its self-actuation. But the only self-actuation a
purely material being is capable of, because of its total sur-
render to matter, is a self-actuation which is a diffusion of its
essence in the matter of the "other", that is, transient action.
On the other hand, Thomas conceives the highest form of tran-
sient efficient causality, the free creative activity of God, as an
immanent act, hence God's free and supremely immanent self-
actuation. Thus, even the highest form of efficient causality
is conceived by Thomas as a mode of self-actuation, therefore,
as a mode of formal causality.[7]

The analogical character of self-actuation in Rahner is
further revealed in its use to conceive the Trinitarian proces-
sion which is not a causality at all. We may therefore say that
more fundamental than causality is the notion of self-actuation
itself of which causality is a mode. Indeed, self-actuation is
the intrinsic dynamism of Being itself.

SELF-ACTUATION AND BEING

Being and Knowing are ultimately one. Being is Know-
ing, and Knowing is the being-present-to-itself ($=$ Bei-sich-
sein $=$ essentia sibi praesens)[8] of the Being of a being, its
reflectedness-unto-itself, its subjectivity. Being and Knowing
are thus in a primordial unity. The one ground from which, as
its proper credential, Being and Knowing spring forth is Be-
ing, which therefore grounds the intrinsic possibility of an an-

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[6] *Loc. cit.*, n. 56.

[7] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 357-358.

[8] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 248.

tecedent essential intrinsic relationship of both with one an-
other.

> . . . Being is itself the original *unifying* unity of Being and Knowing
> in their *united-ness* in Being-known. In this [Being-known], [Being and
> Knowing] are not fortuitously, purely factually and extrinsically brought
> together, but are actualized in their original relationship with one ano·
> ther. The transcendental intelligibility of Being cannot be conceived
> otherwise: non enim plura secundum se uniuntur.[9]

Being, then, is Being-present-to-itself. What Rahner calls
Being-present-to-itself is what Thomas calls "the returning
of the subject into itself" reditio subiecti in seipsum).[10] If
not every being is capable of returning into itself and therefore
of knowing in the proper sense of the word, it is still true
that beings are said to "have" Being to the degree that they
are capable of this reflection. The analogy of self-actuation
is the analogy of Being itself. All beings strive analogously
to "possess" themselves, and the more immanent is this self-
possession, the "more" of Being does it imply.

> . . . Every act and deed, from that of the purely material to the inner
> life of the triune God, are only variations of this one metaphysical
> theme, this one meaning of Being: self-possession, subjectivity. "Self-
> possession", however, is mediated in itself through a double phase:
> a flowing-out, a drawing-out of its essence from its own ground, an
> *emanatio,* and a drawing-back-into-itself of this essence which has
> been drawn out of its own ground, as it were, revealed.[11]

This drawing-out-of-and-drawing-back-into-the-self is al-
ready contained in the term "self-actuation" as expressing the
principle "non enim plura secundum se uniuntur". For self-
actuation is the unfolding of the self from its ground resulting
in some kind of plurality, an emanation; *self*-actuation implies
that this plurality is somehow retained by, in, and for the self.
This double movement is the basic theme of *Geist in Welt*.

The human mind (Geist) returns into itself (reditio in
seipsum) only by reaching out to the world (conversio ad
phantasma). Again, according to the notion of self-actuation,

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[9] *Ibid.,* p. 82.

[10] Cf. *Horer des Wortes,* 2nd. edition (München: Kosel-Verlag.
1963), p. 61; cf. also *Geist in Welt,*[2] p. 82.

[11] *Horer des Wortes,*[2] p. 67.

Rahner does not conceive this structure in a static manner as the relationship between two faculties already constituted in themselves, intellect and sense. It is a dynamic structure in which the sense-faculty is a necessary moment in the process of self-actuation of the human mind itself as intellect. Sense-faculty and sense-knowing are stages in the mind's process of returning into itself. Because this self is spirit, openness to Being, they are necessary moments of the mind's thrust toward Being and therefore toward God.

Hörer des Wortes adds, and let us simply state it, that this cognitional turning to the self, and therefore to God, involves as its ground, condition of possibility, and as an intrinsic moment to it, a necessary volitional self-affirmation, and hence a necessary volitional affirmation of absolute Being. That is man's *"nature"*. But how he affirms this self *concretely*, therefore how he stands before God concretely, that is man's *freedom*. How he disposes of his "'nature", whether he accepts or denies what he is, is an act of his freedom which ultimately is not a choice of this or that object but the free disposition of his whole person. This necessity of turning to the self in order to turn to God is the basic meaning of Rahner's "anthropocentric" thinking, and the idea of freedom as ground of the constitution of the self is the basic meaning of his existentialism.

We thus note that the actio-passio structure in the deficient mode of self-actuation in transient activity reappears on the more immanent, hence more perfect, personalist level in the relationship, nature-person. Man is essentially "historic" (geschichtlich) and to achieve himself, he must accept freely (actio) what he is by nature (passio). Consequently, we find the same conception operative in Rahner's interpretation of the most radical "passio" which is also the most radical seal of man's historicality, death. Death is not merely a passively received, biological event. It is the total act of the person from within, the total Taking-possession-of-the-self by the person.[12]

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[12] Cf. *Zur Theologie des Todes*, coll. *Quaestiones Disputatae*, n. 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1958).

SELF-ACTUATION AND SYMBOLIC REALITY

Self-actuation is a being's analogically variable immanent process of self-possession in the double movement of emanation and retrieve. A later formulation expresses this dynamism in terms of "symbolic" reality. Within a context of sacramental theology the "intrinsically real symbol" is limited to "the spatio-temporal, historical phenomenon, the visible and tangible form in which an essence in appearing announces itself and in announcing itself makes itself present by fashioning this manifestation really distinct from itself".[13] In this "natural symbol" the symbol or sign as "appearance" is an inner moment of that which appears and actuates itself, although really distinct from it. The nexus between the natural symbol and what is symbolized is neither that of a transient causality nor that of a subsequent announcement of something which already is independently of the symbol and extrinsic to it. The nexus is that of an intrinsic and mutual causality: symbolic causality. That which appears posits itself by appearing. It is itself by positing an expression of itself. Applied to the causality of the sacraments, this means that grace is present (caused) when it is expressed in the sacrament as sign of grace. The original sacrament (Ursakrament) is the Church which in her visible form is herself an intrinsic symbol of the eschatologically triumphant grace of God. The sacraments are her self-actuations, her "actualizations" in regard to individual men.[14]

What in this context is limited to the spatio-temporal phenomena is expanded to include all beings.[15] The method used is theological for it uses the theological datum of the Trinity in its argument. Every being is manifold in itself. The doctrine of the Trinity shows that this is an ultimate ontological datum.

. . . It would be a theological heresy and therefore also an ontological nonsense to suppose that God would really still be "simpler" and there-

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[13] *Kirche und Sakramente*, coll. *Quaestiones Disputatae*, n. 10 (Freiburg: Herder, 1961), p. 34.

[14] Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 34-37.

[15] Cf. "Zur Theologie des Symbols" in *Schriften zur Theologie*, vol. IV (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1960), pp. 275-311.

fore still more perfect if there were no real distinction (Unterschieden-
heit) of Persons in God.   There is therefore a kind of distinction
(Unterschiedenheit) which in itself is a "perfectio *pura*" and which
must be taken into consideration in the very initial point of departure
of a theological understanding of Being...[16]

Using the now familiar principle "non enim plura secundum
se uniuntur", Rahner argues to a "resemblance" between the
distinct moments since they spring forth from a single ground,
and thus proceeds to establish his two fundamental proposi-
tions of an ontology of symbolic reality: 1) Every being is
necessarily and of itself symbolic, because it must "express"
itself in order to find its own essence;   2) The authentic sym-
bol (real symbol) is the self-actuation in the "other" which is
necessary for the constitution of the essence of a being.   To
give an example among others which Rahner gives, the soul is
itself, that is, the soul achieves its essence, by expressing and
bodying forth the "body" really distinct from the soul.   How
basic this conception of symbolic reality is for Rahner, he him-
self shows by outlining its importance in the different treatises
of dogmatic theology.   But it is immediately evident that such
a conception of reality finds wide and fruitful application in
Christian theology which is essentially Trinitarian, Incarna-
tional and Sacramental.

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The above is a mere sketchy (therefore not complete), but
we hope, faithful exposition (therefore not a critique) of the
notion and use of "self-actuation" in Karl Rahner's thought.   It
is, however, sufficient for the purpose of this note, which was
to give an idea of the basic importance of this notion in his
theology.

Let us conclude with a couple of general reflections.

(1) Self-actuation is a basic notion in Karl Rahner and
much of his thinking operates within the framework of this
notion.   It is so basic that for Rahner "to conceive" anything
is to conceive it as self-actuation: "For something is, after all,
only then conceived when it is understood back in its ground,
as it were placed in it and seen as springing forth from it as

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16 *Ibid.,* p. 282.

its necessary outcome."[17] We do not think that this is accidental. For if the Aristotelian concept of a science as a knowledge through causes is valid, then Rahner's "scientific" speculation must somehow be based on Rahner's own conception of causality. Now, as we have seen, Rahner believes that efficient causality can be reduced to a mode of formal causality or intrinsic causality by which is meant that manner of self-actuation which Thomas Aquinas calls "resultatio", "emanatio", "actus", etc. Final causality too, in its fundamental ontological sense is at least in one instance interpreted "intrinsically" (with Rahner's own qualifications).[18] In terms of an ontology of symbolic reality, which is all reality, every being is symbolic, first of all in and for itself, and secondly for others, inasmuch as every being is itself only by uttering an "other" which is its expression or symbol. Intrinsic causality may thus be equally called symbolic causality. They are, in any case, modes of self-actuation.

(2) Self-actuation then is more fundamental than causality. It is the very dynamism of Being. At the basis of self-actuation is Rahner's conception of Being itself. Self-actuation is the dynamism towards the perfection (in instances, *because* of the perfection) of the Being of a being, the process through which a being achieves itself, through which it is *in act*. That, however, is the condition of possibility of the cognitional and volitional *Self-possession*: a being knows and is known inasmuch as it is in act (*in tantum est ens cognoscens et cognitum, in quantum est ens actu*). Being-present-to-itself is only another term for the actuality of a being, its Being, its self-actuation.[19]

This reveals the foundation of Rahner's *onto-logical* method: Being and Knowing are ultimately identical. The consequence for metaphysics is this: an "ontic" statement may be equally and even more authentically expressed in "onto-logical" terms. Rahner gives an example: "When it is said of a spiritual substance that it is 'simple', then we have an *ontic* statement...

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[17] *Horer des Wortes,*[2] p. 120.

[18] Cf. Paul Overhage/Karl Rahner, *Das Problem der Hominisation.* coll. *Quaestiones Disputatae.* nn. 12/13 (Freiburg: Herder, 1961), p. 79.

[19] For the argument cf. *Schriften zur Theologie,* Vol. IV, p. 284.

When we say, it is capable of a *reditio completa* [complete reflection], then we are making an epistemologico-metaphysical, onto-*logical* or existential-philosophical statement."[20]

Further, we have already mentioned the "anthropocentric" character of Rahner's thought. We are at the heart of the matter. Let us quote Rahner's own words.

For man the ontologically first and fundamental "instance" of Being and its basic determinations lies in the knowing subject himself and his acts (Vollzügen). What "Being", "effecting", "causality", etc. (above all, therefore, also all the transcendental properties of a being) mean, is originally experienced in the knowing subject himself in his own act (Vollzug) and self-possession. This act should not be divorced as an "intentional", "mental", "merely" notional act from the "real" act by which a being is (Seinsvollzug). Rather, what the latter authentically and originally is, is precisely realized and experienced in the former. The spiritual event as such *is* the ontic, real and actual event. That there are besides "physical" beings and their acts (Vollzüge) which do not have the character of Being-present-to-the-self (Beisichsein) does not make such beings model cases for the meaning of "to-be-real". They must instead be assessed as deficient modes of that being (and its Being) which reflects unto itself and therein precisely brings to light its essence as that of a *being* . . .[21]

That is to say, in order to know what Being is, man must know himself, what he is. And Being cannot reveal itself to man without revealing man to himself. We may therefore say that the validity of Rahner's ontological conception of reality rests on the validity of his conception of what it means humanly to know.

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[20] "Probleme der Christologie von heute" in *Schriften zur Theologie,* vol. I, 3rd. edition (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1958), p. 189.

[21] *Das Problem der Hominisation,* pp. 70-71.