

Dissertation Abstract

“Letting Be: Ferdinand Ulrich on Freedom as the Fruitfulness of Being”

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“Each matters only in that which it conceives” (Wallace Stevens). Ferdinand Ulrich’s meta-anthropology gives us to see that personal freedom is lived by freeing another into communion with oneself, by suffering the other’s affirming presence to oneself, and by participating with the other in a shared act of fruit-bearing. Freedom has, he says, a “We-structure,” so that communion is the gratuitous ground, pervasive element, and gratuitous end of personhood. **Chapter I** introduces the fundamental principles of Ulrich’s metaphysics with a focus on the pattern and character of finite agency. Here we ponder Ulrich’s understanding of the ontological difference as an order of love, in view of which creaturely subsistence presents itself as bearing-forth being as the fruit of action. In this light, secondary causality means the substance’s receptive cooperation with its own being-caused, through which it performs thanksgiving in answer to the intimate, liberating Yes that God abidingly speaks *in* the creature with the “word of being.” **Chapter II** addresses the distinctive mission entrusted to human self-enactment. The gratuity of *esse non subsistens* as love given-away *pro nihilo* radiates nowhere more purely in the created order than in the radical originality of embodied spirit. God displays his generous power by empowering man’s co-responsibility from below for the Creator’s very sending of being, a stewardship man realizes as praise by affirming, rejoicing in, and cultivating the wholeness of other beings, doing so paradigmatically in his speech. Man lives the freedom he has received as gift according to the very form in which it has been communicated to him: a place-exchanging presence that receives its dependent for its own sake, and thereby sets the recipient free to participate in, and contribute to, his own act of giving. We illustrate this in **Chapter III** by presenting Ulrich’s reflections on the meaning of human ownership and artifice in conversation with modern accounts of freedom. In the end, we see that man is at his freest – and most gloriously glorifies the divine Wholly-Other’s causal Non-Otherness – by representatively acting in another person’s acting, or by eliciting another person’s originality through love’s sub-creative indwelling. The work culminates in Ulrich’s contemplation of the “dialogical difference” between man and woman in marriage, and the parenthood into which issues, as the perfection of the generative communion toward which creaturely freedom, and in it being’s very giving, is ordered from the beginning. The **Conclusion** gestures at Ulrich’s insights into how the mysteries of grace fulfill and reciprocally illuminate the mysteries of nature that come fully to expression in human freedom.