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This article<sup>1</sup> is concerned with the practice of philosophy in religious institutions such as seminaries or the study-houses of religious orders. But it is clear that the possibility of such a limitation - the practice of philosophy in some particular setting - is itself problematic. Philosophizing would seem to claim that it is independent or can become independent of the setting of its practice in all relevant respects. Speaking as a theologian (as I intend to do throughout this article) and claiming therefore complete freedom to appeal to revelation in Scripture and the Church, I must maintain that there is one setting, one *Sitz im Leben*, of which philosophizing can never become independent: the concrete economy of sin and salvation which embraces humanity and the whole of creation with it. But to admit this is not yet to commit oneself to the view that the theological *Sitz im Leben* of philosophizing is philosophically *relevant*, i.e. that philosophical discourse is dependent for its shape and content on the theological existence of philosophers. If it is possible for any intellectual activity to release itself from the constraints of the concrete conditions of its exercise - we can think in spite of a feverish cold though not when we are delirious - then there would seem to be no obvious reason why philosophizing, the intellectual activity *par excellence*, should not precisely define itself as just that discourse which actively releases itself from the particularity of all and any concrete conditions of its exercise, including theological ones, by simple (though perhaps costing) pretermission or by reflexive objectivization.

It will be apparent that whatever truth there may be in such a conception of philosophical activity, it depends for its immediate plausibility on a Platonic model: the ascent by dialectic from the sphere of the material and the conditioned. If intellectual activity, as 'spiritual' or 'ideal', is only conditioned *extrinsically*, by 'body' or 'matter', then 'release or 'liberation' is always intrinsically possible as issuing from the very nature of intellectual exercise. It is curious to note that the model continues to exert its dominance even in Marxism, which

<sup>1</sup>A paper given to the Priests' Philosophical Group in December 1964. Some bibliographical references may be appropriate. R. Aubert, 'Le Concile du Vatican et la connaissance naturelle de Dieu', *LumVie* (1954), 21-52; H.U. von Balthasar, *Karl Barth* (Köln 1962<sup>2</sup>); H. Bouillard, *Karl Barth* (Paris 1958), esp. vol. III; G. Ebeling, 'Der hermeneutische Ort der Gotteslehre bei Petrus Lombardus und Thomas von Aquin', *ZTheolKir*, 61 (1964), 283-327; K. Jaspers, *Der philosophische Glaube angesichts der Offenbarung* (München 1962); O. Pöggeler, *Der Denkweg Martin Heideggers* (Pfullingen 1963); K. Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes* (München 1963<sup>2</sup>).

has a special role for the 'intellectual', who as such has declassified himself and can thus, by practising the critique of his own class-conditioned ideology, liberate himself from it and identify himself with the true dynamic of history. But suppose that intellectual activity may be conditioned *intrinsically*, say by its finitude, with all that this may imply; or suppose that the Platonic model is misleading in its intellectualistic identification of transcendence, so that not liberation from but engagement with the concrete conditions of philosophical exercise is what provides philosophical activity with its fundamental orientation? These appear to be genuine alternatives, in the sense that they are at least open to discussion. The artificially contrived Cartesian stoves for philosophical contemplation erected in seminaries (and in universities) may need to be dismantled; or again the recognition that philosophy is a way of life may enforce an assessment of criteria by which to judge of the appropriateness of the *Sitz im Leben* of philosophy, not that setting which it has evolved for itself in the course of European history but that which, in the light of revelation, it *ought* to have if it is to exercise itself profitably.

It will I hope help to locate the problem under consideration here if we examine the admittedly quaint conditions of philosophizing in a Catholic religious institution. The most patent, and apparently the most flagrant, scandal of this situation is that the activity which above all activities claims, as 'rational', total human autonomy, the power and the right to survey all other activities (whether as Being, Existence, Idea or Meaning makes no difference for the moment), is here subjected to authority in the form of directives issued by a body whose claim to allegiance is not founded on reason and which selects and prescribes for study and seemingly even intellectual acceptance just one among the many historically particular systems of philosophy. This is surely an intolerable violation of the mind; this is surely to vitiate seminary philosophy before it has even begun, to make a nonsense of the whole concept.

Before any answer is attempted to this critique, it would be as well to disarm one's hypothetical opponent by admitting that it is very largely true, in practice if not perhaps in ultimate principle. I cannot think of a single clerical philosopher of real distinction since the Middle Ages (and whether it is appropriate to speak of any medieval thinker as a 'philosopher' is of course problematic). What philosophical activity of any interest at all emerges from seminaries and religious institutions is always a response to an original departure from non-seminary philosophical tradition by a non-seminarian philosopher. But at least this very admission suggests the kind of concession one would require from one's opponent – or better, debating-partner. For extra-seminarian philosophical originality is also to be construed in terms of a philosophical

tradition. Whatever radical autonomy may be claimed for philosophical reason, it is still exercised within an historical tradition which may be all the more dominant for being unacknowledged. What remains true is that while the tradition of seminary philosophy is explicitly and artificially tied to an historically localized philosophical view, on the ground that this view somehow escapes, in essentials, historical conditioning and has a kind of extra-philosophical absoluteness, the tradition of non-seminarian philosophy is subject in its freedom to evolve only to historical conditions themselves – a planned and a free economy respectively. Non-seminary philosophy immanently tends to become ‘contemporary’, ‘actual’, because it is (or becomes ‘academic’ if it is not) itself one of the factors which constitutes contemporaneity: seminary philosophy must always tag on uneasily behind, never quite able to catch up, uncertain whether it ought to adopt a posture of lofty sophistication or one of progressivistic radicalism – all this because it lacks the very conditions of originality, a kind of permanent wall-flower at the dance of life.

It is difficult to see how there can be any justification for this state of affairs. Yet it is not impossible to show that it reflects, sometimes in a very distorted way, a genuine, ontological opposition between Church and world, not to be reconciled merely by progressivist denials of the necessitating force of the opposition (I do not of course deny that a good deal might be done in constructive particular), but ultimately only in an eschatological transfiguration of the world.

As Catholic Christians we must say in faith that our existence, and indeed the existence of all creation and history, is dependent, positively or negatively (for or against), on the ‘eternally actual deed of salvation in Christ’ (cf. Schillebeeckx):

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven or on earth. . . All things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. (Col 1 : 15-17).

If we are to take the ontological sense of this hymnic passage, we must first examine it as literature. Christ is proclaimed the transcendent Wisdom of God, in terminology derived from the sapiential literature of the Old Testament<sup>2</sup>. ‘In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Col 2 : 3), and so he is set over against the false *sophia* and *gnosis* of the Colossian heresy, its ‘*philosophia* and empty deceit according to human tradition’ (2 : 8). A similar critique of errant human wisdom is made in 1 Corinthians. ‘Has not God made foolish the wisdom

<sup>2</sup>E.g. Prov 8 : 22-31 ; Eccles 24 ; Wis 7 : 22-8 : 1. Cf. Jo 1 : 1-18 ; Heb 1 : 1-3. See J. Dupont *Gnosis* (Louvain-Paris 1960<sup>2</sup>).

of the world?' God's transcendent wisdom has allowed for the strayings of human wisdom by revealing his wisdom in Christ the Wisdom of God (1: 20-25; 2: 6-16). In Romans 1: 18s. the culpability of this errant human wisdom is emphasized in a statement which has long been taken in the Church as the biblical charter of natural theology:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has manifested it to them. Ever since the creation of the world (*apoktiseôs kosmou*) his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been perceived by the mind's insight in the things that have been made.

And yet, St Paul has said, the truth has been suppressed; men claiming to be wise have exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images. Thus St Paul echoes the OT polemic against images, especially as found in Wis 13s., where the possibility of a knowledge of the true God from created things is enlarged upon (an 'analogical' knowledge, *analogôs*, 13: 5, the biblical charter of *analogia entis*!). A slightly more optimistic view of the achievement of human wisdom is taken in St Paul's Areopagus speech (Ac 17: 22-31), but even there, after recommending the rejection of idols, he speaks of the times of ignorance, *agnoia*, prior to the proclamation of the living God, hitherto worshipped as 'unknown'.

It is of the utmost importance to remember that the constitution *de Fide Catholica* of Vatican I is claiming to expound texts like these when it declared that God could be known with certainty by the natural light of human reason from the created world (Denz. 1785). Thus Bishop Gasser, in his *relatio* on behalf of the *Deputatio fidei*, makes use of the text from Tertullian: 'Nos (sc. contra Marcionem) definimus Deum primo natura cognoscendum, dehinc doctrina recognoscendum, natura ex operibus, doctrina ex praedicationibus' (*adv. Marcionem* 1, 18; note that Tertullian is insisting on the unity of God, Creator and Redeemer, against Marcion's Gnostic separation of the two) and declares that Tertullian is certainly in agreement with Scripture on this point, referring to Wis 1, Rom 1, Ac 14 and 17, and also with the Fathers (Coll. Lac. VII, 129; cf. Franzelin, *De Deo Uno*). The Vatican Council is not somehow endorsing a philosophical proposition in which reason asserts its own powers; or at any rate its sanction consists in an interpretation of Scripture and Tradition in respect of those of their utterances which contain revealed teaching about the powers of reason. Human reason itself, its scope and limits, is contained within the scope of divine revelation, which offers us, here and elsewhere, matter for a theological anthropology; and this should not be surprising, since man as a whole is embraced within a revelation of God which reaches its summit in the God-Man.

However paradoxical it may seem, the teaching which we as Catholic Christians must accept in faith, is that human reason, in the highest

philosophical flight of which it is capable, the knowledge of God, is guaranteed by revelation. It is revelation which allows us in faith to circumscribe the scope of reason. Reason is not transparent to itself; it does not even become transparent to itself under the light of revelation; for what it can learn from revelation about itself remains an extrinsic determination of its proper powers. Revealed truth about reason remains the object of faith, and does not become by faith the connatural vision available to reason itself. Not even reason illuminated by faith can perceive by reflection upon itself those truths about itself to which it assents in faith. The *kind* of certainty which reason may achieve about matters other than itself is intrinsically limited by its incapacity to achieve that same kind of certainty about itself. Reason reflecting upon itself in faith is confronted with its own mystery within the mystery of God. It may be that I only *believe* that I can know God certainly by reason.

It may however be argued that although *in fact* the scope of reason is part of what God has chosen to reveal to us, *in principle* reason can acquire a reflexive certitude about its own powers. Thus the revelation of reason would be exactly analogous to God's revelation of his own existence: a revelation not *absolute necessaria* but only to be referred to God's goodness in view of the present condition of the human race (Denz. 1786). Again, reason can assure itself in the manner indicated by Aristotle for justifying the principle of contradiction (*Met. Γ* (iv), 4) by pointing out the absurdity of the use of reason against reason: communication presupposes rationality. It may further be argued that to make reason dependent on revelation is precisely to fall into the fideism condemned by Vatican I.

All these three arguments, two defensive and one counter-offensive, seem to me to rely on what I might call the unilateral priority of nature to existence. It is no part of my present intention (and this I must make absolutely plain) to deny that there is a certain priority of nature to existence; all I am trying to suggest is that there is *also* a certain priority of existence to nature: that in fact nature and existence are a reciprocating pair, and that this theological commonplace has acquired a new importance with the growth of philosophies of 'existence' and 'meaning'.

Thus the fideist error consists in asserting that reason is dependent upon revelation in the order of *nature*, that is, in inverting the *objective* order *primo natura, dehinc doctrina*. There is no objection whatever to holding that in the order of *existence* the scope of reason is known first by revelation and only then in its 'nature', i.e. in the objective order of priorities. This is in fact precisely what the first argument has relied on, to show that rationality is only historically (or existentially) dependent upon revelation. The power of reason reflexively to be able in principle to certify its own scope may be admitted if reason is confined to reason

as nature (though even here the intrinsic finitude of human reason necessarily restricts the *kind* of certification possible); but for reason as existence and history this is not so. That is to say, *if* we are concerned with the priority of nature to existence, firstly as regards the objective scope of reason and secondly in its power to certify itself reflexively, *then* it must be asserted that reason is 'in principle', i.e. in 'nature', capable of God by its own power and (finitely) self-certifying; but if we are concerned with concrete existential reason in enacted history, then not only is the possible scope of reason undefined but its reflexivity is incomplete. What the Aristotelian procedure for justifying the reduplicative or reiterative certainty of rationality does not sufficiently allow for is a rational activity which is wholly 'dialectical', that is to say, one which does not stand in a relation of dependence on 'substance' or 'nature', but stands over against nature as existence and history – a rational activity which achieves philosophical pregnancy not only in 'existentialist' procedures from Hegel onwards but also in the linguistic analysis of meaning: both are 'styles of reason' not certifying itself in a 'closed' but creating itself in an 'open' context.

Since Vatican I until recent years Catholic theology has taken an increasingly unfavourable attitude to the alternative priority of existence to nature proposed here: a good instance is the addition of *demonstrari* in the anti-Modernist oath to the formula of Vatican I, an addition which was proposed at the Council and rejected by the *Deputatio fidei*. For a theological tradition increasingly on the defensive and dominated by the priority of nature to existence this was inevitable. Now that theology itself has become more 'existential', it is at least open to question whether it is not necessary to take the alternative priority of existence to nature more seriously. What it demands of a philosophical practitioner in a religious institution is a certain flexibility of mind, a readiness to turn intellectual somersaults from one reciprocal to the other. It does not seem to me that Catholic theology can ever simply abandon an orientation to 'substance' and 'nature'; and so long as the seminarian philosopher accepts his subordination to theology, he is bound to accept this external discipline while at the same time exposing himself to and sharing in a history of existence and its philosophical articulation. The really fundamental error would be to suppose, even unreflectingly, that the position in which he finds himself then – the 'meta-' or 'trans-position' in which he simultaneously grasps the reciprocal priority of 'nature' and 'existence' – that this position was autonomously self-determining, that it was not itself determined or determinable, that it somehow escaped from the comprehension of the living God.

Such a self-interpretation of the trans-position would manifestly be illusory. This paper itself is meant to be a piece of theology, submitting itself to revelation in the Church; it claims that the trans-position is to be

determined theologically, and that it discloses itself philosophically as a *Grenzsituation*, a situation in the limit. If the text from Colossians is taken seriously, then it is clear that all creation and re-creation find their fullness in the embodied Wisdom of God, hence all and any human wisdom too. But it should also be possible to show in a more precise way, in terms of a theological epistemology, that the trans-position is the existential theological a priori of philosophical exercise. For if it is possible to define the utterances of revelation in such a way that the scope of human reason becomes an object of explicit faith, then the scope of human reason can also become an object of implicit faith; and that it should *not* become an object of either explicit or implicit human faith is suppression of the truth. This statement requires careful unpacking, to which we now proceed.

In the first place, it is not of course being suggested that faith is a prior condition of the exercise of reason. It would obviously be absurd to pretend that reason only became active after the assent of faith, since faith itself demands even that minimum of reason which consists in the capacity to hear and to hear discriminatingly, to take part in a communication. But the scope of this capacity to hear and the horizon of the power to communicate are not capable of unambiguous internal definition, though they can exhibit themselves in particular instances seen to exemplify universal validity. *The* logic of a language is either capable only of being shown (cf. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*), or it is not even capable of that, since only one logic of an indefinite number of alternatives is capable of being displayed (cf. his *Investigations*). What one might even *mean* by 'certain knowledge of the existence of God through reason' can only be grasped in particular exercises of human reason, e.g. the Five Ways. The definition of the possibility of 'certain knowledge' is formally theological, inviting an assent of faith which constitutes the immanent existential a priori of reason corresponding to its transcendental formulation in the theological definition. The explicit or implicit assent of faith to the proposition explicitly or implicitly charges reason with its own rationality, a rationality which is inserted in a 'natural' order of man, creatures and God – we may add being and substance. Faith gives reason to itself, though not, as was said before, in reflexive self-intuition<sup>3</sup>.

But in what could such an implicit faith of reason in itself consist? It might consist in a con-sent of reason to its own finitude, an acknowledgment of itself as intrinsically determinate 'nature', an acceptance of its own limited but authentic certitude. This would differ from mere

<sup>3</sup>Catholic Christianity implies an ontology. It is for this general reason that I find unacceptable two recent Catholic reinterpretations of transubstantiation, by Fr Charles Davis, in *Sophia* 3 (1964, Australia), 12-24, and by Fr Herbert McCabe O.P., in *The Clergy Review* 49 (1964), 749-59. Existential communication in speech and gesture is dependent upon and interpretative of communion in being, not just of human life lived.



scepticism or agnosticism in being fundamentally open to enlightenment : not the taking-up of a position pretending to detachment from and superiority to reason on the ground that it could never achieve certitude, but engagement in reason and its activities in nature in and through a recognition that logic is an activity of the Logos and that communication is an expression of communion in being. This moment of free play between reason as nature and reason as existence, *ratio ut natura* and *ratio ratiocinans*, is the existential crisis of the trans-position, the moment at which reason both as nature and as existence is accepted in a consent of faith, or reason as existence is chosen *against* reason as nature. Seminary philosophy has sometimes seemed to choose reason as nature *against* reason as existence and condemned itself to the sterility of an historical absolutism ; secular philosophy more often than not has chosen reason as existence against reason as nature (even when it has claimed to be vindicating the rights of reason against superstition) and has thereby entered into and helped to constitute secular history.

Thirdly, this consent, acknowledgment, recognition of reason having faith in itself is reason in act and exercise, reason as existence. The very consent of reason to its own insertion in an order of nature is the realization of reason as existence. Thus the exercise of reason, in its metaphysically first act, is constitutive of history and exposed to the historical process ; it is also subject to the Lord of history under the aspect of *gratia sanans* (together with in the concrete *gratia elevans*) so far as it does in fact consent to itself, or, by a failure to consent expressed in a choice of itself as existence against nature, under the aspect of condemnation to error. For reason thus to recognize itself as nature is to recognize itself as *created* nature, not simply as *physis* but as part of an order of creation dependent upon a creator<sup>4</sup>.

It may help to particularize the foregoing remarks by distinguishing four types of 'natural theology' constituted by the activity of reason (hence reason as existence). Two types are due to explicitly Christian practitioners. Of these the first is found unsystematically in the Bible and, say, Gerard Manley Hopkins. It consists above all in the vision of created nature as a gracious revelation of the living God, God's *self-revelation* through nature. In the Old Testament its formula is found above all in the identification of El/Elohim, the general Semitic category of the divine, with Yahweh, the unique personal founder of the covenant-relationship with Israel : 'The Lord, he is God ; Yahweh, he is the (*hā*) Elohim'. (1 Kgs. 18 : 39). Nature in this type of natural theology is

<sup>4</sup>I am not of course suggesting that the philosophical distinction of nature and existence coincides with the theological distinction of nature and 'economy' (grace and sin). But the philosophical distinction which I am employing as a theologian is open to particularization in theological terms, if for no other reason than that it is in itself vague and ambiguous and only acquires any kind of sharpness in a theological context. The distinction would seem to have relevance for the theology of marriage and of death.



considered as belonging to *sacra doctrina*; this is natural theology as the dogmatic theology of nature.

The second type of natural theology practised by Christians is the sort commonly found in our seminaries. It consists in an artificial abstraction of those parts of *sacra doctrina* which deal with nature, treated now not as occurring on the way down from the living, self-communicating God, but as providing the starting-point of the way up. This type of natural theology has its own genuine value: it is the fulfilment in act of the Vatican I definition of the scope of reason. But it is fulfilled in act only in the total existence of Christians who have temporarily bracketed off their Christianity. It can never allow itself seriously and existentially to doubt the validity of its own procedures – seriously to doubt the existence of God.

Two other types of natural theology are practised by those not explicitly Christians. The first is of the kind recognized by St Paul in his Areopagus speech: it is the natural theology of the 'pagan of good will'. This natural theology, if not often systematic, effortlessly arrives at the affirmation of a divinity in and behind nature and society, the Semitic El or its equivalents – *le Dieu cosmique*. It must be seen theologically as a *praeparatio evangelica*, an existence of reason which looks to its purification and explicitation in *sacra doctrina*. 'What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you'. (Ac 17: 23).

The last type of natural theology is only theology in a Pickwickian sense. This is clearly recognized for instance by Professor Flew in his introduction to *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, when he discusses the appropriateness of the general title for essays most of which are concerned to deny the existence of God. Seminary natural theology (type II) sometimes pretends that it is of the same type as this fourth type of natural theology. I must be allowed to describe this pretence as nonsensical, using this word not only as a term of abuse, but also to indicate the muddle which arises from confusing two different existential modes of reason (if not three, since type III is sometimes involved as well). Yet it is in this area, explored by the fourth type of natural theology, that the real *Gottesfrage* of our times is to be found, so that we are faced with the peculiar situation that seminary philosophy is existentially and inevitably cut off from the serious questioning of our contemporaries – unless of course we are prepared to go through a Kierkegaardian and not merely scholastic or even Cartesian doubt in our seminaries. This would be presumption rather than heroic faith.

This reference to the practical problems of the study of philosophy in religious institutions will serve conveniently to introduce the conclusion of this paper. If its theoretical findings are at all acceptable, it seems clear that we would be mistaken in any attempt to assert in our seminaries an autonomous philosophy in genuine symbiosis with philosophy

pursued elsewhere. We shall always have much to learn from secular philosophy but nothing to contribute except a theological witness. This is by no means an unimportant role but it is not a philosophical one. As regards our students, the one thing we can fairly expect from all of them is Catholic faith, whatever reserves we may have to make about their philosophical intelligence; not many seminary students are born philosophers. Would it not be as well to accept this state of affairs honestly, and introduce them to philosophy as part of the whole process of making the Gospel explicit, a Gospel which is revelation in reality as well as word, which declares the truth about nature, human as well as cosmic, truth moral as well as speculative, a Gospel which is the manifestation of the mystery of Being, rather than to try to impress upon them the structures of a reason abstracted from existence? At least our reasoning existence would then be as serious as that of our secular contemporaries.

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