

THE EFFECT OF BAD METAPHYSICS OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY  
ON THE DIVORCE BETWEEN FAITH AND SCIENCE

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Philosophy is "directly concerned with asking the question of life's meaning and sketching an answer to it."<sup>1</sup> Fr. Benedict Ashley, O.P. defines that metaphysics is identified with philosophy in that it is the kind of thought that deals with ultimate questions on the rational level. Before the 1700's, philosophy had a leading place in universities and every subject was thought of as a branch of philosophy. "Philosophy dealt with any kind of knowledge that comes from human experience and is achieved by human reason."<sup>2</sup>

Around the 1700's, a split between science and philosophy developed. During this time a gap between religion and science began to grow and people doubted that reason was possible. There were also religious conflicts. New philosophical thoughts emerged which fail to answer the fundamental questions about human, personal, and social existence. Some philosophical thinking, as Blessed John Paul II so clearly explains in his encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio*, "ignore the radical question of the truth about personal experience, about being and about God. Hence we see among the men and women of our time, and not just in some philosophers, attitudes of widespread distrust of the human being's great capacity for knowledge."<sup>3</sup> As a result, if modern philosophy no longer directs man and woman to a truth which transcends, then one will no longer come to know the fullness of truth about oneself. Thus, if the human capacity to know the truth is limited and conditional and since God places in our hearts a desire to know the truth, then the human heart will not come to know and love God. This current weak state of modern philosophy, in particular, is evident in three approaches: Cartesianism, Skepticism, and Idealism. These approaches manifest the above mentioned characteristics of a bad metaphysics, i.e. one that fails to give answers to ultimate questions on the rational level. Furthermore, they divorce faith and science in that they claim that science operates on one level and theology operates on another level. In addition, the explosion of detailed science led to a mechanistic thinking which replaced the more important thinking - the consideration of the foundations of natural science. Blessed John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* proposes the remedy for this current situation of modern philosophy by proposing three requirements that the word of God imposes upon philosophy.

The mathematician Rene Descartes in Cartesianism attempted to reconcile spiritualism with materialism and avoid the skepticism raised by the religious wars of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. He modified Platonist epistemology by "turning to the subject," i.e. one must turn away from the world of the objects to the interior truth of the thinker, the clear and distinct ideas like those of mathematics, to arrive at certitude. Furthermore, he "proposed a new version of the Platonist epistemology based on innate ideas (Cartesianism) according to which certitude comes not from sense knowledge but from "clear and distinct ideas" like those of mathematics."<sup>4</sup> The problem with this is that since certainty depends on "our own introspective knowledge of our thoughts as self-conscious and free subjects,"<sup>5</sup> then this can lead to doubt, cutting oneself short of seeking a truth recognized as final, and thus, since God is the absolute truth, one will not arrive at knowing God. Lastly, this may lead us to impose our own feeble and confused thought on the reality that God has made and thus have a confused notion of God himself.

Next, the empiricist David Hume in Skepticism "claimed [that] the notions of cause and effect simply reflect our expectation that things will go on as usual, but they are not based on any sense data, since our senses only show us that one thing happens after another, not that one is the cause of the other."<sup>6</sup> This theory does not separate the essential from the irrelevant and so fails to give the essence of things. In all simplicity, if our essence is God, then skepticism leaves us empty. Plus, since skepticism no longer asks the question of the meaning of life, no longer seeks answers to the fundamental questions, it reduces "reason to merely accessory functions, with no real passion for the search for truth,"<sup>7</sup> and since truth is part of human nature, then one will not advance in one's own self-realization, stopping the drive of reason to attain goals which render one's life more worthy. And if one's own self-realization is found in God alone, then skepticism robs us of our dignity of being made in the image and likeness of God.

Lastly, Immanuel Kant, an idealist philosopher of the late eighteenth century, "proposed a form of idealism that held that although we cannot know the material world in itself, we can form general scientific natural laws about it as hypotheses that fit our sense experiences."<sup>8</sup> These hypotheses build a construction, however, which will never tell anything about reality. Therefore, this approach, similar to spiritualism, leaves one with the need to arrive at the truth of reality. Also, Blessed John Paul II explains that "the word of God refers constantly to things which transcend human experience and even human thought; but this "mystery" could not be revealed, nor could theology render it in some way intelligible, were human knowledge limited strictly to the world of sense experience. Metaphysics thus plays an essential role of mediation in theological research. A theology without a metaphysical horizon could not move beyond an analysis of religious

experience, nor would it allow the intellectus fidei to give a coherent account of the universal and transcendent value of revealed truth."<sup>9</sup>

To remedy for these approaches of modern philosophy, Blessed Pope John Paul II teaches that "the word of God reveals the final destiny of men and women and provides a unifying explanation of all that they do in the world. This is why it invites philosophy to engage in the search for the natural foundation of this meaning, which corresponds to the religious impulse innate in every person."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the word of God demands three indispensable requirements in philosophy which remedy for the divorce between faith and science. First, "philosophy needs to recover its *sapiential dimension* as a search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of life. This first requirement is in fact most helpful in stimulating philosophy to conform to its proper nature. In doing so, it will be not only the decisive critical factor which determines the foundations and limits of the different fields of scientific learning, but will also take its place as the ultimate framework of the unity of human knowledge and action, leading them to converge towards a final goal and meaning."<sup>11</sup> This requirement would fill the void for the meaning of life lacking in Hume's skepticism.

The second requirement for philosophy is "that philosophy verify the human capacity to *know the truth*, to come to a knowledge which can reach objective truth by means of that *adaequatio rei et intellectus* to which the Scholastic Doctors referred."<sup>12</sup> This would lead one to the absolute truth that Descartes' Cartesianism lacks.

Lastly, the third requirement is "the need for a philosophy of *genuinely metaphysical* range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth. This requirement is implicit in sapiential and analytical knowledge alike; and in particular it is a requirement for knowing the moral good, which has its ultimate foundation in the Supreme Good, God himself."<sup>13</sup> This requirement would satisfy for the longing to arrive at the truth of reality missing in Kant's idealism.

To conclude as Blessed John Paul II does in all his writings he entrusts to our Blessed Mother, let us entrust our search for wisdom to Mary, the Seat of Wisdom, so that faith and reason leads us everyday more to a more profound understanding and knowledge of our Savior and His Word.

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<sup>1</sup> Bl. John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*. n.3. September 14, 1998. Vatican City.

<sup>2</sup> Ashley O.P., Fr. Benedict. "Notes: Lecture 1: Why Theologians Need Worldly Knowledge." 2000. International Catholic University.

<sup>3</sup> Bl. John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*. n.5. September 14, 1998. Vatican City.

<sup>4</sup> Ashley O.P., Fr. Benedict. "Notes: Lecture 3: The Intellectual Ambiguities of Contemporary Culture." 2000. International Catholic University.

<sup>5</sup> Ashley O.P., Fr. Benedict. "Notes: Lecture 3: The Intellectual Ambiguities of Contemporary Culture." 2000. International Catholic University.

<sup>6</sup> Ashley O.P., Fr. Benedict. "Notes: Lecture 3: The Intellectual Ambiguities of Contemporary Culture." 2000. International Catholic University.

<sup>7</sup> Bl. John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*. n.81. September 14, 1998. Vatican City.

<sup>8</sup> Ashley O.P., Fr. Benedict. "Notes: Lecture 3: The Intellectual Ambiguities of Contemporary Culture." 2000. International Catholic University.

<sup>9</sup> Bl. John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*. n.83. September 14, 1998. Vatican City.

<sup>10</sup> Bl. John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*. n.81. September 14, 1998. Vatican City.

<sup>11</sup> Bl. John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*. n.81. September 14, 1998. Vatican City.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, n.82.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, n.83.

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