
Discussion of McCool, From Unity to Pluralism

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At an earlier meeting of the Maritain Association in Toronto celebrating the 100th anniversary of *Aeterni Patris*, I remarked that it was a good occasion because we could study the beginning, the progress, and the end of the neo-Thomist revival. This was in a hall in the Mediaeval Institute. My paper was received in silence. Fr. McCool has demonstrated the truth of that perception in an amazingly thorough and insightful history of neo-Thomism.

My argument in Toronto was from history and culture. History has shown that philosophical movements are not sustained forever. They catch on, develop, hang around for a while, seem to be the answer to all the questions, and then, sometimes suddenly, they are no longer there anymore. Some, many philosophies continue to have influence and some have revivals, but the revivals also have a limited lifetime. The sign of the disappearance of neo-Thomism as a movement was the absence of new books on the shelves on Thomism, and what books there were had moved from metaphysics and epistemology to ethics and social philosophy.

Fr. McCool's thesis is an internal one, namely, that neo-Thomism self-destructed rather than that it was overcome by external enemies. The extraction of a philosophy distinct from theology from the work of Thomas and his synthesis of that philosophy attempted by the classical Thomist commentators and reduced to 24 Theses after the 1918 Code of Canon Law proved to be developments of some of Thomas's insights and principles but not true repetitions. They were rather different Thomisms and *Thomism* was a collective term for a pluralism of philosophies with common historical roots.

There were other dynamisms at work, and one of the strongest was the desire or need to be contemporary and to deal with the questions that were being raised in Western modern philosophy as they were being raised and in the context of the issues and philosophies that were alive in the philosophical community. This desire for contemporaneity was evident from the beginning of the neo-Scholastic movement at Louvain in the attempt made by Désiré Mercier to relate Thomas to contemporary psychology and epistemology. It was also evident in Henri Bouillard's assertion that a philosophy was not true if it were not

relevant. And toward the end of his career Karl Rahner affirmed the need to respond to questions of the moment and dropped the designation of his own thought as Thomist or Scholastic. Many a Catholic philosopher or theologian escaped to patristic studies in order to be free of the restraints of a Church-sponsored Thomism. In the end I think it was this need to be in the mainstream that accounts for the demise of the Thomistic revival.

I would like to indicate several areas where neo-Thomism does not seem to respond to contemporary issues.

The first is that it was not able to respond to the needs of contemporary theology. The great value of Scholastic and Thomistic philosophy in the seminary was its integration with Scholastic theology. For the clergy the truth of Scholastic philosophy was that it clarified the mysteries of faith. Two examples were the distinction between essence and existence and the substance-accident metaphysics of physical and creaturely being. The real distinction offered an explanation of the two natures-one person in Christ. In the theory accepted by Cardinal Billot and taught at the Gregorian University in Rome, the human nature of Christ does not have its own existence, but is actuated by the existence of the Second Person of the Trinity and consequently Christ is both God and man. The substance-accident distinction also was a handy explanation of the Eucharist, since the human imagination could understand the endurance of the appearance of bread and wine along with the transfer of substance to the body and blood of Christ.

But what happened was that theology was undergoing a development of its own and turning to historical, linguistic, and social studies to explain the Scriptures and the Faith. Systematic studies based on metaphysics dwindled. They were replaced by Scripture, Liturgical, and Sacramental theology. The integration between what the Scholastic philosophy seminarians were taught and the theology they later experienced was no longer there. Moreover theologians were using contemporary nonscholastic philosophies for their theology and making neo-Scholasticism even more irrelevant. Neo-Thomism was largely a philosophical, not theological, movement and it is not now receiving the support of theology.

This leads to another failure of neo-Thomism, that is, to be true autonomous philosophy in the sense of the age of reason or Enlightenment philosophy while at the same time claiming the title of Christian Philosophy. It certainly depended on faith, not only by being supported by the teaching authority of the papacy and the Vatican, but also in the theories of Gilson, Maritain, and others. Faith supplied what reason could not give and theology completed the limitations of philosophy.

This has resulted in two moves. One, though, is into the non-Catholic world of philosophy where they learn its methods and its questions and take their doctoral students in philosophy have moved to secular universities. When they have returned to Catholic universities they have brought secular philosophy with them. Philosophy departments in Catholic universities have professors who are secularists with little or no knowledge of the context St. Thomas becomes another philosopher like Kant, Hegel and Heidegger, Ayer and Wittgenstein is forgotten altogether.

The other move is to return Christianity to its roots within Christian theology. Michael Buckley, in his book *The Origins of Modern Atheism*, argues that the separation of reason from faith and the separation of philosophy apart from the history of religion and specifically the Church. I might add with the Fathers of the Church that Christ can only end in skepticism or Deconstructionism, it has been argued, is a failure of Enlightenment. This means that philosophy is a different kind of knowledge than secular philosophy. (I view that the arguments for the existence of God within the theology department.)

I would like to note briefly several other problems. One is the underdevelopment of the system. The debate in neo-Scholasticism, whether or not one version or other of Thomism, if there is a pluralism. It is a pluralism of philosophies, and Christian philosophies, in mind Kierkegaard and Marcel. Kierkegaard's failure to Hegel's systematizing and failure to recognize the unique. Marcel expressed amazement at the Troisfontaines was able to give to his philosophy.

Second is several problems in the area of philosophy. One is the scheme of hylomorphism, the philosophy of matter and form in the face of atomism and wave theory which seem to be transplants in modern medicine see Whitehead's social theory of organisms the same is true of evolutionism.

Next is the isolationism of individualism of a problem with the concept of individualism.

This has resulted in two moves. One, the most common, is to enter into the non-Catholic world of philosophy in secular universities and learn its methods and its questions and take up its arguments. Catholic doctoral students in philosophy have moved *en masse* to non-Catholic universities. When they have returned to teach in Catholic universities they have brought secular philosophy with them. At the same time philosophy departments in Catholic universities have brought in professors who are secularists with little or no knowledge of Thomism. In the context St. Thomas becomes another philosopher along with Hume and Kant, Hegel and Heidegger, Ayer and Wittgenstein, and sometimes is forgotten altogether.

The other move is to return Christian philosophy to its context within Christian theology. Michael Buckley, in his learned book on the origins of modern atheism, argues that the root of modern atheism lies in the separation of reason from faith and abstract rational argument apart from the history of religion and specifically the history of Christ. I might add with the Fathers of the Church that philosophy without Christ can only end in skepticism or in Nietzschean nihilism. Deconstructionism, it has been argued, is the inevitable result of the Enlightenment. This means that philosophy within Christianity is a different kind of knowledge than secular philosophy. (Note Lonergan's view that the arguments for the existence of God should be taught within the theology department.)

I would like to note briefly several other areas where neo-Scholasticism has problems. One is the understanding of philosophy as a system. The debate in neo-Scholasticism, as McCool has made clear, is whether or not one version or other of Thomism is the true system, and if there is a pluralism. It is a pluralism of systems. But there are philosophies, and Christian philosophies, which are not systems. I have in mind Kierkegaard and Marcel. Kierkegaard was a vigorous opponent to Hegel's systematizing and failure to recognize the individual and the unique. Marcel expressed amazement at the amount of order Troisfontaines was able to give to his phenomenology of the concrete.

Second is several problems in the area of substance in Aristotelian philosophy. One is the scheme of hylomorphism as applied to physical substance from minerals to the human person. It is difficult to maintain the philosophy of matter and form in the face of modern science with its atomism and wave theory which seem to be so successful. The success of transplants in modern medicine seems easier to explain with Whitehead's social theory of organisms than with matter and form. The same is true of evolutionism.

Next is the isolationism of individual substance. This may be more of a problem with the concept of individual and person in Aristotelian

Thomism. Scholasticism defined individual in terms of the ordinary language of division: "undivided in itself and divided from everything else." It is true that a primary category among Aristotelian accidents is relation, but it still allows the imagination to think of an isolated substance, "able to be created by God so it stands alone," rather than recognizing the interrelatedness of all created things to each other and to the Creator. The concepts of flow and wave, together with Peirce's agapism, a sort of dynamic net with knots of cohesion, seem more pertinent. Whatever difficulties Hegel's systematization may have, his notion of relation seems to be necessary.

This is also pertinent to the notion of person in the Aristotelian tradition from Boethius to Aquinas. Something like Aquinas's theory of person and relation in the Trinity seems necessary on the human level also. The interpersonalism of Macmurray and Buber and Marcel seems to call for a relational notion of person. Karol Wojtyla has been calling for a reading of anthropology along the lines of the phenomenology of Max Scheler. These moves seem to require at least an adjustment of the concepts of substance, individual, and person.

In my view this isolationist view of individual and person seriously hampers Thomistic epistemology. Aristotelian Thomism does not need other persons in communication to explain human knowledge. Physics seems to have dominated the imagination of Aristotle in his treatise on the soul. All one needs is the physical universe including the biological and sensitive world with an agent and passive intellect to explain human knowledge. Robinson Crusoe could be what he was without having been developed in human society. It is only after concepts are produced that language comes into the picture. The philosophy and science of language today seems to reverse that view. Without communication and language there is no conceptualization, or at least only the pragmatic conceptualization of the tiers of animals.

It is true that Fr. McCool describes true knowledge as had only in the judgment, but the judgment is understood only as affirmation or negation and not as the act of saying something to another. The reference to speech is there, as for instance in Aristotle, who describes truth as "saying what is," but it is not made use of in the theory. C. S. Peirce describes the judgment as the act of witnessing to others (he uses the composition of place of the court room) that if they were to consider the evidence they would come to the same conclusion. This clearly makes the judgment a triadic act, that is, knowing is explaining (interpreting) something to someone, instead of the classic dyadic relation of knowing subject and object.

Once one sees human knowledge as social and dialogic, it is an easy step to understand philosophy in the same way. Plato understood this.

Aristotle understood the historical character of philosophy, but the history stopped with himself, as it did with Hegel. But philosophy is a dialogue and not one single system or perspective. It is therefore intrinsically pluralistic, though the language of pluralism still continues the imagination of individualism that I have criticized. It is better to say that philosophy is communitarian.

There are different circles of community. Thomism operates within the circle of medieval Catholicism with its surrounding and infiltrating context of Islam and Judaism. There are different communities within Catholicism, in philosophy and theology, frequently within the traditions of a religious order. Transcendental Thomism is almost entirely Jesuit. Maritain gathers lay Catholic philosophers around him. Today's Western philosophy is divided between Anglo-American linguistic analysis and Continental post-bellum philosophy. In our global universe the circle broadens to enclose the East and the Far East. The influence of Hinduism and Buddhism is very evident among us, especially in Catholic spiritual movements.

I would like to mention briefly one other area, the philosophy of religion. Religion belongs to the philosophy of man, and has received attention much beyond what it had in the Middle Ages and Aquinas. In our age anthropology has replaced metaphysics in the philosophy of God. The Five Ways of Thomas are still in the anthologies, but more attention is given to the Ontological Argument or to forms of the Kantian pragmatic argument.

Within Catholic circles theism is seen by some to be inadequate. Whitehead has a dual notion of God, which seems to reflect the Incarnation and the Mystical Body. An English Jesuit author has argued philosophically for a trinitarian conception of God. Raimundo Panikkar's book, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, did the same thing. And beyond the Trinity there is Mystery, Rahner's late name for God. It seems that it is necessary to understand God on ascending levels from theism to trinitarianism to mystery. This of course involves going beyond the Greek or Hebrew or Islamic worldview, which pretty much circumscribes neo-Scholastic as well as deistic natural theology.

I have been talking about Thomism as a movement. There is of course Thomas and every philosopher would do well to include him in the sources of his own philosophy. And there continue to be Thomistic revivals. We are seeing a mini one now (MacIntyre), but in ethics and social anthropology rather than metaphysics and epistemology. What Thomas's place will be not so much in the future but in our own time will, I'm sure, be the subject of the rest of this conference.