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**Part VI**  
**Civilization**  
**at the Crossroads**

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# Poetic Revenge and Modern Totalitarianism

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"We are waging a war of civilization," observes Jacques Maritain in his essay "Education for the Good Life." "What we are fighting for," he states "is human dignity, justice, freedom, law, the eternal call which makes every human person worthy of respect and love, and the openness of the future to liberating and fraternal work. All these things," he continues, "are rooted in the moral and spiritual order."<sup>1</sup>

In another essay, *Education at the Crossroads*, he reiterates the same theme. "This war," he says, "is not waged for domination over man or over matter. It is waged for liberty and justice, for equal rights, for releasing the onward movement of human history toward a commonwealth of free peoples; we are repeatedly told that it is waged for Christian civilization. All these are mainly spiritual values. What are we fighting for," he asks, "if the only thing reason can do is to measure and manage matter?" Indeed, he argues:

If we have no means of determining what freedom, justice, spirit, human personality, and human dignity consist of, and why they are worthy of our dying for them, then why are we fighting and dying only for words? If we and the youth who will be educated by the future democracies hold everything that is not able to be calculable or workable to be only a matter of myth, and believe only in a technocratic world, then we can indeed conquer Nazi Germany militarily and technically, but we ourselves shall have been con-

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<sup>1</sup>Jacques Maritain, "Education for the Good Life," in *The Education of Man*, ed. Donald and Idella Gallagher (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1962), 180.

quered morally by Nazi Germany. For the preface to Fascism and Nazism is a thorough disregard for the spiritual dignity of man, and the assumption that merely material or biological standards rule human life and morality. Thereafter, since man cannot do without some loving adoration, the monstrous adoration of the totalitarian Leviathan will have its day. Technology is good, as a means for the human spirit and for human ends. But technocracy, that is to say, technology so understood and so worshiped as to exclude any superior wisdom and any other understanding than that of calculable phenomena, leaves in human life nothing but relationships of force, or at best of pleasure, and necessarily ends up in a philosophy of domination. A technocratic society is but a totalitarian. But a technocratic society may be a democratic, provided this society is quickened by an inspiration which is supra-technological, and if it recognizes, with Bergson, that 'the body, now larger, calls for bigger soul,' and that 'the mechanical' summons up 'the mystical.'<sup>2</sup>

Maritain was of the opinion that the West was losing the war for civilization because of "a general skepticism about the moral and spiritual realities without which democracy is nothing but nonsense." As he saw it, "The great predicament of the democracies is the fact that they had lost intellectual faith in the truths that constitute their very soul and their very principles."<sup>3</sup> For these fundamental spiritual, moral, and metaphysical truths they had substituted bourgeois individualism--an anthropocentric concept of man and culture cut off to all forms of transcendence. "After having put God aside in order to become self-sufficient," Maritain claims, "man loses his soul; he seeks himself in vain, turning the universe upside down in his effort to find himself again. He finds only masks, and, behind these masks, death."<sup>4</sup>

For Maritain, then, at the source of the twilight of civilization lies a self-sufficient and anthropocentric humanism--"a humanism that fell short of the mark";<sup>5</sup> and the remedy for this situation, as he sees it, is a new

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<sup>2</sup>Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, 114.

<sup>3</sup>Maritain, "Education for the Good Life," 181.

<sup>4</sup>Jacques Maritain, *The Twilight of Civilization*, trans. Lionel Landry (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943), 6.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

humanism open to spiritual and transcendent realities and supported by liberal education:

If mankind overcomes the terrible threats of slavery and dehumanization which it faces today, it will thirst for a new humanism, and be eager to rediscover the integrity of man, and to avoid the cleavages from which the age suffered so much. To correspond to this integral humanism there should be an integral education....

Bourgeois individualism is done for. What will assume full importance for the man of tomorrow are the vital connections of man with society, that is, not only the social environment but also common work and common good. The problem is to replace the individualism of the bourgeois era not by totalitarianism of sheer collectivism of the beehive but by a personalistic and communal civilization, grounded on human rights and satisfying the social aspirations and needs of man.<sup>6</sup>

The problem of replacing bourgeois individualism and avoiding totalitarianism by means of an integral humanism, then, is, in Maritain's eyes, a problem of education. For him, however, education is a function of philosophy. Furthermore, he thinks "liberal education cannot complete its task without the knowledge of the specific realm and the concerns of theological wisdom."<sup>7</sup> As he sees it, also, this is particularly so in the case of education in Western culture and civilization. Hence he says:

...theological problems and controversies have penetrated the whole development of Western culture and civilization, and are still at work in its depths, in such a way that the one who would ignore them would be fundamentally unable to grasp his own time and the meaning of its internal conflicts. Thus impaired, he would be like a barbarous and disarmed child walking amidst queer and incomprehensible trees, fountains, statues, gardens, ruins, and buildings still under construction. The intellectual and political history of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, the Reformation and the Counter Reformation, the internal state of British society

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<sup>6</sup>Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, 88-89.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 74.

after the revolution in England, the achievements of the Pilgrim Fathers, the Rights of Man, and the further events in world history have their starting point in the great disputes on nature and grace of our classical age....Modern philosophy itself, from Descartes to Hegel, remains enigmatic without that, for in actual fact philosophy has burdened itself all through modern times with problems and anxieties taken over from theology, so that the cultural advent of a philosophy purely philosophical is still to be waited for. In the cultural life of the Middle Ages philosophy was subservient to theology or rather wrapped up in it; in that of modern times it is but secularized theology. Thus the considerations I have laid down regarding philosophy are still truer of theology. Nobody can do without theology, at least a concealed and unconscious theology, and the best way of avoiding the inconveniences of an insinuated theology is to deal with theology that is consciously aware of itself.<sup>8</sup>

If such be the case--if, that is, the replacement of anthropocentric, bourgeois humanism, and the avoidance of totalitarianism require an integrated liberal education, and if such an education is impossible without an understanding of philosophy and theology; if, in fact, education is a function of philosophy, and, as Maritain asserts, of philosophy of man--then the achievement of a truly integrated liberal education, and its attendant truly communal society, becomes impossible without shattering once and for all the confusion which abounds in philosophy and theology in our age and which has roots in the philosophy of subjectivity created by the *Father of Modern Misosophy*, René Descartes.

Yet such a shattering presupposes that one have clearly in view just what is the nature of this philosophy of subjectivity which lies at the root of modern and contemporary bourgeois individualism, its totalitarian replacements, and (since philosophy is the source of formal education<sup>9</sup>) of the educational system which fosters these warped views of human nature. What, then, is the nature of this so-called *philosophy*?

According to Maritain, this philosophy is no philosophy at all. Philosophy in modern times, he tells us, is "secularized theology"; but

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<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 73-74.

<sup>9</sup>Jacques Maritain, "Philosophy and Education," *The Education of Man*, ed. Donald and Idella Gallagher, 40.

what is secularized theology? Certainly it is not supernaturally revealed theology; if it were Maritain would not have called it "secularized." Furthermore, it is not, properly speaking, philosophy. For, in addition to what he has already said, in *The Peasant of the Garonne* Maritain states quite emphatically that a philosopher cannot be a subjective idealist of the modern sort. "All these men," he asserts,

begin with thought alone, and there they remain, whether they deny the reality of things and of the world (Descartes still believed in it, but on account of a wave of the magic wand by the God of the *cogito*), or whether, in some way or another, they resorb this reality into thought. What does this mean? They impugn from the outset the very fact on which thought gets firmness and consistency, and without which it is a mere dream--I mean the reality to be known and understood, which is here, seen, touched, seized by the senses, and with which an intellect belongs to a man, not to an angel, has directly to deal: the reality *about which and starting with which* a philosopher is born to question himself: if he misses the start he is nothing. They impugn the absolutely basic foundation of philosophic research. They are not philosophers.<sup>10</sup>

Begging his readers not to take his statements as the whims of a crazy old man, and admitting the exceptional intelligence, importance, worth, and even genius, of many modern thinkers in the lineage of Descartes, Maritain, nonetheless, stated he had never "spoken more seriously" than when he challenged "with might and main, and with the certainty of being right" the right of subjective idealists to call themselves philosophers. Maritain called such people "ideosophers" and their doctrine "ideosophy."<sup>11</sup>

What, however, is *ideosophy*? Clearly it is important to have a precise understanding of the nature of this doctrine in order to get a precise understanding of the root causes not only of contemporary bourgeois individualism but also of modern totalitarianism in all its forms. What, then, is *ideosophy*? Is it philosophical knowledge? Is it religious knowledge of some sort? Is it a kind of art?

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<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 101-02.

<sup>11</sup>Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne*, trans. Michael Cud-dihy (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 100.

In order to answer the question about the precise nature of ideosophy, it seems to me that one might be greatly assisted by a rather startling assertion made by Dr. Mortimer J. Adler in his excellent text, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*. On page six of this work Adler observes:

I have never thought that Plato was right in his assessment of the poets. His characterization of them was right, but not his judgment of their influence. They are storytellers; they are men of imagination rather than of thought; they certainly cannot be relied upon to give youth sound moral and political instruction; but they are not important as compared with other educational influences, much less so in our day than in earlier times.<sup>12</sup>

What is startling about Adler's remark is how off the mark it seems to be with respect to the educational and political influence which poets have had both in ancient times and in the modern period. In ancient Greece they were the chief educators of the people, and among the people most responsible for the death of Socrates; and in the modern age, if one understands the term "poetry" more or less in the same broad sense in which it was understood by an ancient Greek of the time of Plato and Socrates,<sup>13</sup> these individuals seem to me still to maintain positions of major educational and political influence.

In order to understand why I make the latter claim, however, one needs to recall some things about the origins of the discipline we call "philosophy," and just what was the nature of the age-old battle between philosophers and poets in ancient Greece which is reported by Plato in Book X of his masterpiece, the *Republic*.<sup>14</sup>

Before the coining of the term "philosopher" --reportedly by Pythago-

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<sup>12</sup>Mortimer J. Adler, "This Prewar Generation," *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1988).

<sup>13</sup>Of course, if one understands the term "poet" to mean what it commonly does in twentieth century American English, then Dr. Adler's assessment of Plato *would be* on the mark. To attribute such an understanding of this term to Plato, however, is without justification.

<sup>14</sup>Plato, *Republic*, X, 607A-608C.

ras--philosophers were called *sophoi*-- that is, wise men. This label was used to classify not only men such as Socrates but also men such as Homer, Hesiod, Themistocles, Simonides, Daedalus, Aesop, and any other man the Greeks considered to be possessed of extraordinary knowledge. At first, the term was used to identify people who were possessed of extraordinary practical knowledge, and who were commonly thought by the Greeks to possess their extraordinary ability through inspiration from goddesses whom the Greeks called "Muses." Hence the *sophoi* were also called musicians, and the subject of their expertise was named "music."<sup>15</sup>

Because these people provided the ancient Greeks with those technical skills whereby they were empowered to free themselves from ignorance and the toil of manual labor--because, that is, they provided them with the means to achieve the leisure needed for higher intellectual and moral pursuits--Aristotle called these individuals the greatest of benefactors,<sup>16</sup> and the ancient Greeks as a whole treated them with special respect and considered them to be superior human beings.<sup>17</sup>

Since the source of the special knowledge possessed by Greek *sophoi* was thought to come from the gods, the originating principles and causes of ancient Greek sophistic knowledge were inextricably joined to Greek religion; and since, among the Greek men of wisdom, it was the poets who, as sons of gods,<sup>18</sup> transmitted to the Greek people the message of the

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<sup>15</sup>See Plato's treatment of the education of the guardians beginning with Republic II, 376E and continuing through Book III; for additional support of this interpretation of the ancient Greek understanding of the terms "music," "poetry," and "sophist" see: Joseph Owens, *A History of Ancient Western Philosophy*, 155-57, 268; Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Ancient Greek Philosophers*, 1-17 (especially, 9-10), and *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 36-43; C.M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience* (New York: New American Library, Mentor Book, 1957), 134-54; *The Worlds of the Early Greek Philosophers*, ed. J.B. Wilbur and H.J. Allen (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1979), 6 and 241.

<sup>16</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, A, 1, 981b13-35.

<sup>17</sup>See Plato's ironic and critical descriptions of those possessed of sophistical knowledge, especially the poets, in the *Meno*, 99A-100C; see also *Ion*, 530A-D, and *Republic*, 365A-366A.

<sup>18</sup>Plato, *Republic*, 366B.



special election of the Hellenes by the gods, the poets occupied first place among the Greek *sophoi* in the area of professional honor. They were the most highly respected of ancient Greek *sophoi*--at least until philosophers came on the scene.

Philosophers arose from the class of Greek musicians--specifically from the class of Greek poets. Similar to other *sophoi* who had come before them, they sought to apprehend the super-visible realities at work in the sense world in order that they might become wise as the gods are wise. In a manner different from the other *sophoi*, however, the ancient Greek philosophers sought to derive their inspiration about the gods totally from activities which they could causally connect to sense events. They derived their rules of reasoning not from supernatural inspiration but from an ordinary human one--namely, from generalizations naturally initiated from happenings in the sense world.

This approach taken by the ancient philosophers caused a revolution in ancient Greek education, and it shattered the poetic distinction (which, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates says the poets were always "dinning into the ears" of the ancient Greeks)<sup>19</sup> between sense knowledge, which was imprecise, and inspiration, which was wisdom channeled directly from the gods. The philosophical approach to learning, in other words, was a direct challenge to the educational monopoly held by the ancient Greek poets, and through them, to the other Greek *sophoi*. By opening up learning to the natural powers of all human beings the ancient Greek philosophers were undermining the authority and monopolistic power of the established professional educators of Hellas.

Viewed from the perspective of these professionals, there could be only one cause for this challenge to their authority--alien inspiration coming from alien gods.<sup>20</sup> Consequently they considered it their civic

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<sup>19</sup>Plato, *Phaedo*, 65B.

<sup>20</sup>Since the poets and other non-philosophical *sophoi* of Socrates's era had reduced all knowledge to two categories--namely, ordinary sense knowledge and inspiration by the gods (that is, extraordinary knowledge)--and since they had reduced all artistic and scientific knowledge to *inspired knowing*, they logically concluded that the source of Socrates's peculiar knowing powers was divine inspiration; and since Socrates was critical of their own brand of knowing--and, indeed, used his own special knowledge as a weapon against their *arts*--they similarly concluded that

duty to short-circuit the influence of the new *lovers of learning*<sup>21</sup> both by behind-the-scenes smearing of their reputations and through formal political moves—such as the trial and death of Socrates.<sup>22</sup>

Even a cursory glance at the development of ancient Greek philosophy reveals the extent to which this new method of learning was essentially dependent upon the origins of philosophical knowledge in sensation.<sup>23</sup> The uniqueness of the ancient philosophical method, in fact, was

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the gods or spirits who were the source of Socrates's inspiration were *alien or new*.

<sup>21</sup>*Phaedo*, 82C-84C.

<sup>22</sup>It should be recalled that the chief prosecutors of Socrates at his trial were representatives of non-philosophical groups of *sophoi*—that is, artists of various sorts (poets, orators, statesmen, craftsmen), and that Socrates claimed to have been especially appointed by the god Apollo (indeed, similar to Hercules, he was give his own Labours to perform) to test the knowledge of people who had a reputation for being wise. Socrates, in short, was claiming to be a super-hero sent by the god to expose the bogus knowledge of the charlatans of his own time who were claiming to be legitimate educators. See Plato's *Apology*, 20E-23C.

<sup>23</sup>None of the ancient Greek philosophers—including Parmenides, Plato, and Plotinus—proceeded from ideas to sensation. They always did the reverse. As Joseph Owens states: "Parmenides...correctly appeared to Aristotle and the Greek doxographers as a physicist in the ancient sense, a philosopher of nature" (*A History of Ancient Western Philosophy*, 70); see Aristotle's comments about the origins of ancient philosophy, *Metaphysics*, A 3, 983b8-993a28; G.S. Kirk and J.E. Raven, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 270, note that the incorporeal was unknown to Parmenides and that "no vocabulary therefore existed to describe it"; regarding the first of the ancient philosophers they state: "What gave these the title of philosopher was their abandonment of mytho-poetic forms of thought, of personification and anthropomorphic theistic explanations, and their attempt to explain the seen world in terms of seen constituents," 72; see also: Werner Jaeger, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, 103. It should be noted that Aristotle supports the view that no conception of a separate realm of immaterial beings existed before Plato (*Metaphysics*, M 3, 1078b30-32), and he says that the Platonists were seeking the causes for physical things (*Metaphysics*, A 8,

precisely due to its ability to derive rules of reasoning from a purely natural intellectual consideration of activity taking place in the sense world, rather than from subjective inspiration channeled directly to the human intellect from the gods. What gave birth to philosophy, that is, was precisely the rejection by philosophers of the subjective method of mental inspiration intrinsic to the wisdom of the poets—the very same method which was enshrined by the *Father of Modern Misosophy* as the only legitimate approach which could be taken to achieve genuinely scientific learning. Clearly this method of learning is nothing more than a return to the method of ancient mythological poetry.

According to Descartes, it was precisely because they began their philosophical reasoning with knowledge derived from sensation that the ancient philosophers were precluded from ever achieving true philosophy. Hence, for him, there exists an inverse proportion between a person's study of ancient philosophy and that person's ability to learn a true one.<sup>24</sup>

For Descartes human wisdom is perfect knowledge of all that man can know.<sup>25</sup> To achieve such knowledge one must begin with a perfectly known principle; for "all the conclusions deduced from a principle that is not evident cannot themselves be evident."<sup>26</sup>

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990b1-5). Also, in the dialogues of Plato Socrates continually reasons from physical realities to forms (see, for example, the procedure he uses with Menon's slave in the *Meno*, 82B-86B; the way he proves the existence of different parts of the soul using a universal principle of motion in the *Republic*, IV, 436A-441; and the sense origins for his arguments for the nature of temperance (*Charmides*), of piety (*Eutyphro*), of friendship (*Lysis*), and of the art of reciting (*Ion*). One must first see the images on the cave world before apprehending the light of the Good (*Republic*, VII, 514B-517A). Regarding Plotinus it should be noted that he begins his reasoning from sense beauty and ascends to the One; he does not start his reasoning from a conceptual grasp of the One and proceed to reason to the reality of sense beauty (see *Enneads*, I).

<sup>24</sup>René Descartes, "Letter Preface," *Principles of Philosophy*, in *Descartes: Discourse on Method and Other Writings*, trans. Arthur Wollaston (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960), 178-80.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 173-74.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 178.

According to him, such principles can never be derived from sense knowledge. For sense knowledge lacks the evidence demanded of truth. It is far too obscure to be the starting point of perfect human knowledge. Perfect knowledge must start with perfect thought. Philosophy, in short, is the knowledge of truth through its first cause--that is, through the clear and distinct idea of absolute perfection, or God.<sup>27</sup>

This is so true (in a non-Cartesian sense of "true") that Descartes claims the idea of God "contains in itself more objective reality than any other," there being "none that is more true in itself, and less open to suspicion that it is false";<sup>28</sup> he contends he has within him in some way the notion of God "anterior...to the notion of the finite, that is to say to the idea of myself";<sup>29</sup> and he states, further, he does not think it is possible for the human mind to know any other idea with more clarity and certainty because the idea he has of God is "at once the truest, the clearest, and the most distinct, of all the ideas I have in my mind."<sup>30</sup>

In short, for Descartes, the idea of God is the natural light of human reason, against the background of which he deduces all his other objective ideas. God, indeed, is recognized by Descartes to be the author of every clear and distinct idea;<sup>31</sup> and he says he recognizes very clearly "that the certitude and truth of all knowledge depends upon the knowledge of God alone so that, before I knew Him, I knew nothing perfectly."<sup>32</sup> Having this knowledge, he states, he has the means of acquiring a perfect knowledge of an infinity of things, not only relative to him but also concerning physical nature, "in so far as it may be made the object of mathematical enquiry and proof."<sup>33</sup>

Because of the utter dependence of philosophical knowledge upon the idea of God, Descartes considers metaphysics to be the first of philosophical disciplines in the order of learning. After this comes physics and all the other sciences which, for him, grow out of physics--which consist

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 176, 179.

<sup>28</sup>René Descartes, *Meditations*, in *Descartes: Discourse on Method and Other Writings*, "Third Meditation," 128.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 150-51.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 151.

principally of medicine, mechanics, and ethics. The proper order of human reasoning is, therefore, not from the world to God but from God to the world.<sup>34</sup>

Clearly, given such a bizarre understanding of the nature and method of philosophical investigation, can there be any serious doubt about the poetic and mythological nature of Descartes's teachings? Descartes the philosopher is really Descartes the fiction-monger. His writings are not philosophical; they are poetic myth; and his approach to philosophy is not that of a philosopher but that of a creative artist.

The order of reasoning followed by the ancient philosophers was not just one way of doing philosophy among other ways; the philosophy of objective realism is the only way of doing philosophy. Hence Descartes's critique of ancient philosophy is not a philosophical critique; it is a poetic one. Indeed, the philosophy of Descartes is not philosophy at all. The thinking of Descartes owes its line of historical, intellectual descent not to philosophy but to *secularized Christian theology*. For what it is is a synthesis of the meditative method of the medieval mystics and the ontological argument of St. Anselm constructed, among other reasons, to eliminate the influence of pagan Greek thought from Christian theology. It is precisely the meditative doubt about the reality of the philosophical world of the ancient Greeks, the world of natures, apprehended with the aid of the senses, from physical beings, which distinguishes the thought of this man. Descartes was no philosopher; he was an anti-philosopher.

Modern philosophy, as a Cartesian creation, therefore, is not an age in which practical science dominates over theoretical science. Rather, it is an age in which unbridled artistic creativity (creativity based upon uprooted, realistically blind, and subjective inspiration) is the measure of all truths--those of practical and theoretical science included.

At the root of Descartes's meditative method, in other words, is not natural reason enlightened by the world, but unmoored inspiration of the will--what, today, is commonly referred to as *freedom of expression*. It is the will, one should recall, which Descartes says principally tells him that he bears "the image and resemblance of God."<sup>35</sup> It is through the strength of the will's attachment to the idea of God, which idea God has

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<sup>34</sup>Descartes, "Letter-Preface," *Principles of Philosophy*, 182-85.

<sup>35</sup>Descartes, *Meditations*, Fourth Meditation, 138.

put into Descartes's mind, that Descartes apprehends all clear and distinct ideas. It is the will that affirms and denies, and it is the will that meditates. It is by freely choosing to see things only through the idea of God that one comes into contact with the objective world. Clear and distinct ideas must be true for Descartes, however, because, once seen, one cannot choose to judge them otherwise; and one cannot choose to judge them otherwise because God will not let them be otherwise than the way one judges them.<sup>36</sup>

What we have as the source of objective truth in Descartes, then, is a will determined by divine inspiration, not an intellect determined by the being of sensible things. Clearly such a source of truth can never be a philosophical one. The so-called *philosophy* of Descartes, therefore, is, more precisely, a *mythology*, or, as Maritain has rightly labeled it, *secularized theology*. For Descartes begins his reasoning not from principles derived from sensation, but from personal revelation based upon the authority of God as a perfectly good being. From this he proceeds to speak about the sense world the way Homer and Hesiod would speak to the ancient Greeks about the gods.

What Descartes gave the modern world was not a new philosophy; it was a new theology—a theology of the subjective spirit (what I call "psychotheology"<sup>37</sup>); and what he gave to the modern world along with this theology was a new mythological poetry, a mythology about the world. The "philosophers of subjectivity" who inhabit the Philosophy departments of so many of our universities today, therefore, as historical descendants of Descartes, are actually mythological poets and secularized theologians.

If one wants to know why Catholic theology is in such a mess today, one needs to look no further than this fact. Catholic theologians, even if they apprehend the way theology and philosophy have to be related in a Christian soul, have a totally inadequate handmaiden at their disposal when they attempt to apply modern philosophical principles to their

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<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 138-43.

<sup>37</sup>For a further discussion of what I call "psychotheology," see my article "Romance of Wisdom: The Friendship between Jacques Maritain and Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *Understanding Maritain*, ed. Deal W. Hudson and Matthew Mancini (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 1987), 91-113.

study of revelation. For they are actually studying God not through the eyes of the saints, but through the mythology of the subjective spirit. Is it any wonder that our Catholic schools are in disarray today?

Is it any wonder, in addition, that Western culture is also in disarray? All our cultural institutions, which in one way or another have their roots in Greek philosophy and Christian theology, are being restructured to fit an alien myth. Is it any wonder that we in the West have lost our sense of identity? For the medieval Christian philosophical objectivity was guaranteed by principles of natural knowledge derived from sensation interpreted against the background of divine revelation. Today philosophical objectivity is guaranteed by mythological principles derived from the human consciousness interpreted against the background of the revelation of mathematical physics. Physical science alone today is the measure of objectivity. Consequently, outside this domain, human beings, if they are to be truly modern, must only talk in myth. The result of this arbitrary subjectivism is relativization of all knowledge which is not of a positivistic and mathematical sort.

Such a world, as Jacques Maritain saw so well, is fertile ground for totalitarian domination. For if we eliminate natures from physical reality, and make mathematicized human consciousness to be our criterion of moral and political truth when judging the objectivity of freedom and morality, we wind up losing both our liberty and our morals. In this sort of world we have no rational way of settling moral and political disagreements among people; we have only brute force.

What gave to Greek philosophy its objectivity and its greatness was the connection it maintained between natures and the physical world. Because they grounded human knowledge upon the being of physical things, and derived their philosophy from principles rooted in sense realities--rather than in their own fantasy--the ancient Greeks were able to establish a legitimate science of philosophy. What robs modern philosophy of the same legitimacy is its failure to imitate the wisdom of the Greeks. The whole of modern scholarship owes Jacques Maritain a debt of gratitude for awakening the twentieth century to this truth.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>For a good example of Maritain's critique of the modern approach to doing philosophy see, in particular, Jacques Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944).