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Before I proceed now to comment on the bearing of dialectical work on philosophy, let me repeat that I have merely summarized our conclusions. I have not tried to establish their validity. There are certainly no *a priori* reasons why they must be true. Their truth

is entirely a matter of fact, ascertained by us through our experience of trying to discover the controversy about such subjects as freedom. Anyone who wishes to ascertain the truth for himself must submit himself to a similar experience.

Taking the truth of our conclusions for granted, let me proceed now to develop their consequences for the study and future of philosophy. In the time that remains, there are four points I would like to make briefly.

First, a division of labor is needed within the philosophical enterprise as a whole. The problem of dealing with the diversity of philosophies is quite distinct from the problems of philosophical inquiry itself. To solve the problems of philosophy, we must make and defend judgments that answer questions about the objects of philosophical inquiry. To solve the problems raised by the diversity of philosophies, we must make and defend, not philosophical judgments, but judgments about philosophical thought. Here, then, are two different kinds of work—the work of philosophizing and the dialectical work of constructing the controversies that are implicit in the diversity of philosophies.

Conceivably, both kinds of work might be done by the same individual. There would, however, still be a tension between them which would make it impossible for one man to perform both tasks at the same time. Actually, it is unlikely that any individual could discharge both tasks well, even if he had the talent and skill required for each. Each is so arduous and exacting that it would be very difficult for an individual to meet the demands of both upon his time and energy. Prudence, therefore, recommends a division of labor in order to accomplish the objectives of dialectical work, in addition to carrying on philosophical inquiry itself.

Because the proposed division of labor has yet to be instituted on a scale proportionate to the magnitude of the dialectical as well as the philosophical task, little dialectical work has so far been done. In the whole history of thought, the only effort that even remotely resembles a separate undertaking of the task of neutral dialectical construction is to be found in Abelard's *Sic et Non* and Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences*, and these make their dialectical contribution to theology, not philosophy. The fact that constructive dialectical work has not been done in philosophy explains why philosophical controversy is still only implicit in the record of philosophical discussion.

The philosophical enterprise thus exhibits a remarkable defi-

ciency. In the absence of adequate dialectical work, something essential is missing, and philosophy falls short of its own ideal. “The ideal of the great philosophers,” Jacques Maritain has written me,

is to achieve agreement, disagreement, and rational debate, but it is for each one an accompaniment of his own individual enterprise and within his own individual mind—precisely because the purpose of each one is to embrace and encompass the whole universe of objective truth and rational debate within his own mind. But no philosopher succeeds in achieving the ideal in question, by reason of the limitations of human nature. As a result, the necessity appears of the special branch of philosophy and the special undertaking which is dialectical work.

What is necessary in the life of philosophy is also necessary in the teaching of it. In a sense, the primary use of dialectic is pedagogical or propaedeutic. It does not solve the problems of philosophy; it merely prepares the mind for the task of solving them. Given the plurality of philosophies, it is not enough for the student to learn why the adherents of a particular philosophy think it is true. Such truth as it possesses must be seen by the student in the light of the positions that that particular philosophy takes in every controversy to which it contributes. But until enough dialectical work has been done to present such controversies explicitly to the mind, the best possible instruction will tend to give the student the subjective disagreements and the polemical refutations which adherents of this or that particular philosophy usually substitute for the explication of genuine controversy. The best teaching of philosophy that is so far possible is not good enough.

What I have just said applies to Thomism as well as to any other philosophy, perennial or otherwise. It applies to the teaching of philosophy in Catholic as well as in secular institutions. But here I am aware of certain differences between the teaching of philosophy in a Catholic and in a secular college.

If I understand Professor Gilson's views on this matter, philosophy cannot be studied in a secular institution as a means of acquiring wisdom. The students are much too young to acquire wisdom, even secular wisdom, while in college or graduate school.¹ If, then, secular institutions persist in trying to teach philosophy, the only course Professor Gilson leaves open to them, it would seem, is a dialectical teaching of the subject.

On the other hand, according to Professor Gilson, and here Father Gerard Smith joins him, some philosophical wisdom can be ac-

quired by the young in Catholic institutions, but only on condition that philosophy is taught under the auspices of dogmatic theology and in the light of faith.² Since in their view it remains philosophy even when so taught, and since Professor Gilson admits that conflicting philosophies exist and are always possible within the framework of Catholic dogma, the task of teaching philosophy even in a Catholic institution cannot now be adequately discharged by adherents of this or that philosophical doctrine. Nor can it be improved until the major philosophical controversies within the tradition of Catholic thought have been explicitly constructed. In addition, I would think that Catholic philosophy, in any of its forms, cannot be well taught until the dialectical work is done which places Catholic doctrines in the larger context of the philosophical controversies that represent the whole of Western thought.

I turn from the role of dialectic in the teaching of philosophy to its bearing on a problem which has become clear only in modern times. That is the problem of the difference between philosophy and empirical science. In my judgment, Maritain's *Degrees of Knowledge* is the best contemporary statement of the problem; it offers a solution that deserves everyone's attention. But even when we understand the difference between the objects of philosophical and of empirical inquiry, and even when we understand the difference in their methods, which enable each to solve problems that are entirely beyond the competence of the other, we still do not understand certain differences between philosophy and science that perplex everyone who candidly examines these two intellectual efforts as human undertakings. Each enterprise has a life of its own, which differs strikingly from that of the other in such matters as the conditions of its progress, or the way in which its representatives agree, disagree, and deal with their differences.

Understanding the critical importance of constructive dialectical work in philosophy will help us to understand these contrasts between science and philosophy. There may be some problems on the fringes of empirical science, especially in physics and psychology, which are quasi-philosophical to the extent that they cannot be solved by empirical methods. These aside, a purely scientific problem is one which can be solved by experimentation or whatever other observational techniques will obtain the special data needed to test competing hypotheses or theories. Within the sphere of such problems, there is absolutely no need for dialectical work. Dialectical constructions are not needed to formulate objective agreements or disagreements among scientists. When scientists disagree about any matter which is susceptible of experiment, they construct an experiment, not a debate, as the best available means

of clarifying and settling the issue.³ In other words, the very methods scientists use to solve their problems, they can also use to resolve disagreements when they are confronted with competing solutions.

But while philosophers can, as individuals, propound solutions to their problems without the help of dialectic, they cannot collectively begin to resolve their differences until their agreements and disagreements have been objectified by the work of dialectical construction. What now passes for philosophical discussion of such differences hardly suffices. It merely perpetuates the misunderstandings, the subjective disagreements, and the polemical refutations to which individual philosophers are prone. Let me say at once that the fault lies not with the philosophers as human beings. They are not, as compared with scientists, an inferior breed. Rather it is something in the very nature of philosophy and in the methods of philosophical inquiry which makes it difficult to tell whether philosophers are answering the same question about the same object, and difficult, consequently, to determine whether or not they objectively disagree.

The necessity of dialectical work in philosophy but not in science thus explains the striking difference between philosophers and scientists so far as genuine agreement and disagreement are concerned. It also explains the difference between progress in science and in philosophy.

Progress in philosophy: is extremely difficult to define and measure, especially if we make the mistake of adopting the special kind of progress that is made in science as the standard for measuring progress in any intellectual pursuit. That kind of progress is not possible in philosophy, and what is possible there cannot be measured in that way. Without attempting an analysis of progress in philosophy, I would nevertheless like to suggest that if philosophy is to make greater progress in the future than it has so far achieved in twenty-five centuries of Western thought, the division of labor I have proposed must be instituted and an adequate amount of dialectical work must be done in the centuries ahead.

Advances in science are not accomplished merely by the formulation of new theories or the improvement of old ones. Such theoretical developments often outrun the data needed to test them. Additions to scientific knowledge finally depend upon the success of empirical research to obtain the decisive data.

In philosophy, the decisive data are always the same—the facts of common experience. The formulation of new theories and the im-

provement of old ones certainly constitute one condition of philosophical progress, on the side of an ever expanding envelopment of the truth about the objects of philosophical inquiry. But such envelopment includes the persistence and proliferation of philosophical errors as well as an increase in the amount of philosophical truth that is available to the human race at any given time. Hence the progressive envelopment of philosophical truth by a multiplicity of doctrines must be matched by a progressive development of dialectical truth about their diversity. The controversies that underlie this diversity must be constructed if philosophical differences are ever to contribute more to understanding than they do to confusion. Dialectical work is, therefore, the other condition of philosophical progress, on the side of the contribution to the pursuit of truth which can be made by a rational debate of genuine issues.⁴

This brings me to the last observation I would like to lay before you. One consequence of the conclusions we have reached is the hope that the future of philosophy will be quite different from its past. Philosophy, past and present, has not been accompanied by adequate dialectical work. Certain deficiencies in the philosophical enterprise as a whole are largely attributable to that deficiency. Hence if, by the expedient of a division of labor, that deficiency were to be repaired; and if, in the future, as the diversity of philosophical views continues to multiply, the dialectical effort were to keep pace with the growing amplitude of the discussion, it might be reasonable to expect a brighter future for philosophy. I must confess that nothing else I can imagine holds out such hope.

I am not thinking here only of greater progress in philosophy, though that, in my judgment, would be the chief benefit to come in the future from the full performance of the dialectical service to philosophical thought.⁵ I am thinking also of the cultural status and stature of philosophy, as compared with science and poetry.

We accept the fact that poets differ, without expecting them, as poets, to agree, disagree, or settle their differences by controversy. But the way in which philosophers differ, without clearly agreeing or disagreeing in an objective manner, and without achieving a decent measure of rational debate, is and has long been a public scandal. The general opprobrium philosophy has suffered in consequence is not entirely unmerited.

In our century, the belittlers of philosophy often contend that the great philosophical systems are like poetry. Unfortunately, the charge has plausibility, because, when philosophy is not accompa-


nied by constructive dialectical work, it cannot help appearing to be more like poetry than it really is and less like science. It is not enough to hold, as we do, that objective disagreement and rational debate are possible in philosophy as they are not in poetry. While it is true that except for this possibility dialectical work would be as inapplicable to philosophy as it is to poetry, we must do more than assert the possibility.⁶ We must demonstrate it in a manner open to everyone's inspection. The false image of itself that philosophy now presents must be corrected in the public mind by constructive dialectical work.

Suppose for the moment that I am right in thinking that such work is needed to improve philosophy in the line of its own development, and to win for it the respect it deserves, even in a culture where it must stand comparison with science. Why, then, has the doing of such work as an essential though separate part of the philosophical enterprise been so long delayed? One answer may be that men whose interest is in philosophy naturally wish to be philosophers and are unwilling to be diverted to the separate and subordinate dialectical task that some would have to devote themselves to in an actual division of labor. But that is not the whole answer.

In Western culture, empirical science and speculative philosophy are about of equal age. Each can look back upon twenty-five centuries of recorded effort. If we think of *science with experimentation* as empirical science finally grown mature, then the maturation of science has occurred in the last three hundred years. There is no evidence of a comparable maturation in philosophy. We can, however, imagine what it might be. Comparable to the transition in science from merely exploratory observation to the construction of critical experiments, the transition from the relatively futile discussion of philosophical differences to the construction of fruitful controversy may bring philosophy to its maturity in centuries still to come.

It may seem astounding that the philosophical enterprise should be so slow in maturing and that, as compared with what it may still achieve, its accomplishments so far are good mainly as a promise of what can be done. Yet what is true of living organisms may also be true of philosophy as a living thing. The late maturity of the higher organisms is a sign of their greater potentiality, which must be actualized in the course of a longer development. In its own line of development, science may have advanced further than philosophy has in its, but philosophy may have much further to go and may therefore need more time.

In addition, philosophical problems are generally more difficult than scientific problems, not only humanly speaking but also intrinsically. For men to conduct philosophical discussion well is more difficult than it is for them to carry on scientific research in an efficient manner. It is easier to lift research to the high plane of the perfect experiment than it is to lift discussion to the high plane of the ideal debate. Here as before, the greater difficulty of the philosophical effort may be relative to human nature as a whole, not just relative to the power of the human mind.

Twenty-five hundred years is a short period in the span of human life on earth. It should not tax our imaginations, therefore, to contemplate a future in which long awaited developments may still occur, such as world peace, for example. The development of philosophy is no less possible or likely. What Dante said of world peace, with the vision of man's whole future on earth before him, might also be said of the maturation of philosophy. It will happen because it is necessary to the fulfillment of the intellectual powers of the human race as a whole. 

Endnotes

¹ See his essay, *Thomas Aquinas and Our Colleagues*, Princeton University Press, 1953.

² See Gilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 14ff. See also Father Smith's paper, "The Position of Philosophy in a Catholic College," in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, Vol. XXIX, 1955: pp. 20-40.

³ Precisely in proportion to the degree to which dialectic is applicable to theoretical differences among scientists, these differences are philosophical rather than scientific.

⁴ In 1916, Professor Lovejoy, in his Presidential Address before the American Philosophical Association, entitled "On Some Conditions of Progress in Philosophical Inquiry," called for "a program of methodical, consecutive, precise joining of issues," (*Philosophical Review*, Vol. XXVI, 1917: pp. 123-163). I personally owe to Professor Arthur O. Lovejoy my own first conception of the dialectical task and my understanding of the service dialectical work can perform to advance philosophical thought. I would also like to refer the reader to an earlier projection of a plan for dialectical work, with an eye on the immediate future, in an essay I wrote for *The New Scholasticism*, entitled "The Next Twenty-five Years in Philosophy" (Vol. XXVI, No. 1, January, 1951: pp. 81-110).

⁵ We may gain some impression of how serviceable dialectical work might be to the progress of philosophy, if we consider the service which Abelard's *Sic et Non* and Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences* rendered theology. The dialectical tasks these books performed brought order out of the chaos of apparently conflicting opinions which had accumulated from centuries of theological speculation. Without that preparatory work having been done for them, even the genius of St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus might not have been able to produce their great and clearly divergent theological doctrines. But, as Dr. Bird has pointed out, the dialectical task performed for theology by Abelard and Peter Lombard was far easier than the comparable dialectical task would be for philosophy. Abelard and Peter Lombard, Dr. Bird writes, "enjoyed a common deposit of faith, which assured a common ground for questions and answers and a common language in which to express them. Neither exists today." (*loc. cit.*) Nor have they ever existed in the sphere of philosophy.

⁶ Philosophy's distinctive character is revealed by the fact that, while dialectic is inapplicable to poetry and unnecessary in science, it is both applicable to philosophy and also necessary for the full achievement of philosophy's objectives.

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