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It is necessary to call into council the views of our predecessors, in order that we may profit by whatever is sound in their thought and avoid their errors.

—Aristotle

THE NEXT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS IN PHILOSOPHY

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Part 1 of 2

The subject calls for prophecy, but prophecy may consist of unequal parts of prediction and exhortation—of saying what will happen and what should. Lacking clairvoyance, I shall confine myself mainly to the latter. Following an ancient style in prophecy, I shall make no predictions except those which cannot help but resemble threats. Whoever dares to think he knows what should be done always finds himself, implicitly at least, in the posture of threatening calamity as the consequence of not heeding his exhortations. He may also, of course, engender hope in the promised land that will be the reward of those who take counsel.

Either alternative—threat or promise—necessarily reflects a dim or dismal view of the present situation. If the present state of affairs were good, the future might be expected to be equally good or even better on the single condition that the generations to come conduct themselves according to the policies responsible for the happy situation which now exists. But if the present is unsatisfactory, things will remain as bad or get worse if present policies are continued. A change for the better requires some amendment or reform of what is now going on.

There may be some who think that all is well with philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century. I have not seen the two essays which report and judge the situation in American philosophy and in Thomism during the past twenty-five years. Whether what I am going to say agrees with both of them depends on whether they agree with one another. I can only hope that the contrast which is usually drawn in scholastic discussions of such matters is not offered for our self-satisfaction in this anniversary issue of The New Scholasticism—the contrast between the degeneracy and moribundity of American philosophy and the healthy growth and vitality of Thomism. If two such articles were written for the anniversary issue of some non-scholastic journal of philosophy, one might, of course, expect the reverse contrast to be made. But this tendency to see the mote only in our brother's eye is, perhaps, less pardonable in scholastics or Thomists. If there is any justification for supposing that they know better than their brethren what philosophy should be, they might reasonably be expected to see their own shortcomings as well as those of others.[1]

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[1] As an example of penetrating self-criticism of American philosophy by an American philosopher, I recommend the Presidential Address; delivered to the American Philosophical Association in 1919 by Professor A. O. Lovejoy. It was published under the title. "On Some Conditions of Progress in Philosophical Inquiry," in the *Philosophical Review*, XXVI (1917), 2.

The shortcomings are not the same, nor are their causes.[2] That the deficiencies, and the reasons for them, are different may excuse the division of the retrospective survey and judgment of philosophy in the past twenty-five years into one piece dealing with American philosophy and another dealing with Thomism. Nevertheless, the fact that such a division has come to seem unavoidable and is habitually acknowledged by both parties indicates the existence of party-lines in philosophy—the most striking sign that philosophy is not whole and healthy.[3] All its other ills would seem more curable, if philosophy were not deformed by this crippling schism. However bad the situation was, it would be better if we could contemplate the immediate past or future of *philosophy,* not "American philosophy" or "Thomistic philosophy." At least the word "philosophy" would not be equivocal, as it certainly becomes when the full significance of the qualifying adjectives is realized.

For these reasons, I wish to emphasize that the subject of this essay is the future of philosophy, not of American philosophy or Thomistic philosophy. If anyone joins me in thinking that it may be possible to contemplate the future of philosophy, rid of all its sectarian divisions, I would regard that as a happy augury for its future. If philosophy could be rid of all the *isms* which have beset it in the past and which, in the present, almost destroy its unity and being, it might have a future worth contemplating. This might be too much to expect in the short period of the next twenty-five years. But I take it that the choice of that number is purely an accident of the anniversary we are engaged in celebrating. Its present plight is not something which befell philosophy—American, Thomistic, or otherwise—in the last twenty-five years. It has been in the process of development for centuries, almost from the beginning of what we call "modern times." It may take the rest of modern times to effect the remedy. If and when the remedy is effected, that accomplishment, more than anything else, may mark the culmination of the intellectual or cultural development; which is char-

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[2] The excellences are not the same either. Yet if the achievements in the last twenty-five years in American and Thomistic philosophy are measured in terms of their most notable productions, they would seem to be quite comparable. Each side can claim two eminent minds whose philosophical work has been serious and challenging: Dewey and Whitehead, on the one hand; Maritain and Gilson, on the other.

[3] The one and only time a joint meeting of the American Philosophical Association and the American Catholic Philosophical Association took place was in New York in 1935. So unsuccessful was that event, so far as communication was concerned, that it is understandable why it was never repeated. It would take more than bringing the two groups together in one room for a single afternoon to establish a meeting of minds.

acteristically modern.

In insisting that it is the modern life of philosophy itself which must underlie any consideration of the recent past and immediate future of philosophy in any of its sectarian forms, I do not mean to suggest that the remedy for the peculiarly modern ills of philosophy consists in returning to its medieval or ancient condition. On the contrary, I think that the peculiarly modern ills of philosophy provide the occasion for an improvement in the status and a development of the stature of philosophy, which would make it clearly superior to any formation of philosophy which existed or could have occurred in the ancient and medieval worlds.

The central historic fact is that only in the modern world do philosophy and science become radically distinct. This separation from philosophy of the natural and social sciences—call them "positive," "empirical," "experimental," or "empiriological," but always understand them, negatively at least, to be *non-philosophical sciences*—has consequences both bad and good. So far it has had mainly the bad result of putting philosophy on the defensive, of subjecting it to invidious comparisons with science (in respect to objectivity, progress, the cooperation of workers, and the measure of agreement reached by the competent), and, above all, of leading to the positivistic denial that there is or can be knowledge of the real—of existences or phenomena—outside the positive sciences. This means that there are no philosophical sciences which have being, nature, man, and society for their objects and that the only way philosophy can have a scientific character is by moving to the level, and adopting the method, of mathematics, logic, or semantics.

This bad result, which began to show itself as early as Descartes, reached its full development as early as Hume's basic division of all learning into experimental knowledge of matters of fact or real existence, on the one hand, and non-experimental knowledge of the relations between our own ideas, on the other. The logical positivism, or, as it is sometimes called, the analytic philosophy, which has dominated philosophical teaching and research in the secular universities of England and the United States for the past twenty-five years may be an extraordinary extension in detail of Hume's position, but it does not involve a single addition in principle.[4]

[4] For one of the first statements of the program of analytic philosophy, see Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy* (Chicago, 1914), especially Ch. If, "Logic as the Essence of Philosophy." The writings of Moritz Schlick, Rudolph Carnap, Hans Reichenbach, Phillip Frank, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Otto Neurath, Felix Kauf-

Logical positivism or analytic philosophy is, of course, only one of the consequences of Hume, though it is certainly the most prevalent in contemporary English and American philosophy. Those who have reacted against Hume must be considered as well as those who have followed him.[5] With few exceptions, most philosophers since Hume's day have been affected or infected by him, even when they have not espoused the sort of positivism which seems to he the logical consequence of accepting Hume's principles.

Their attempts to avoid or evade this consequence while somehow still beginning with Hume instead of rejecting him entirely have led, in the first instance, to Kant's construction of philosophy as transcendental, pure, or *a priori* knowledge, and, subsequently, to the major lines of post-Kantian thought—absolute idealism, dialectical materialism, radical empiricism, and pragmatism. It is not the truth of any of these doctrines, or of any of their tenets, which is here our concern. What concerns us is only what happens to the conception of philosophy itself in each of these doctrines or, for that matter, in others not mentioned which, like these, show traces of Hume's influence.[6] Philosophy is either made dependent on the changing content of the empiriological sciences, or its independence is purchased at the cost of surrendering what should be the common attributes of both empiriological and philosophical science, if both are to be sciences of the real, namely, that both are knowledge of the same world, not of different worlds, and that both, as knowledge of the real, are subject to the same ultimate tests of what is true and false.

To make philosophy dependent on the changing content of the empiriological sciences is to deny that it has principles of its own, from which conclusions can be validly drawn. To make philosophy

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mann, though mainly continental in origin, have exerted tremendous influence on this phase of Anglo-American thought. For indications of its present, status in American philosophical teaching and writing, see two recent books: *Readings in Philosophical Analysis,* edited by Herbert Feigl and Wilfrid Sellars (New York, 1949); and *Elements of Analytic Philosophy,* by Arthur Pap (New York, 1949).

[5] Outside of scholastic or Thomistic circles, the most vigorous dissent from Hume is to he found among dialectical materialists. It was originally expressed in Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism.* On this point, see Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York, 1937), p. 290.

[6] Cf. Gilson, ibid., Ch. VIII-XI, especially Ch. XI, "*The Breakdown of Modern Philosophy*."

knowledge of a different reality from that studied by the positive sciences and to give it its own special standard of truth—to do these things in order to secure philosophy's independence from the positive sciences—is to nullify the content of ancient and medieval philosophy, for the reality which ancient and medieval philosophers tried to know and the criteria of truth they accepted and employed are the same as those of modern science. To do these things, furthermore, is to secure the independence of philosophy from science by putting them out of all relation to one another. If the separation of the positive sciences from philosophy should not result in the false relation in which philosophy is dependent on the sciences, neither should it result in making their independence of one another equivalent to no relation at all between them.

Though both of these results are, so far as philosophy's nature and existence are concerned, less extreme than the positivist's denial that the philosopher can claim to have anything significant or valid to say about reality, they no less than it are deformations of philosophy. How serious a deformation each is can be measured by the following test: (1) Does it acknowledge the achievement of any real knowledge or genuine wisdom by ancient and medieval philosophers? (2) Does it permit any of this knowledge or wisdom to stand unamended or unaffected by all the findings of modern science? (3) Does it retain such knowledge or wisdom as something which modern philosophy can improve upon, either by addition or modification?

Philosophy may have a future for those who answer these three questions negatively, but it will not be a future continuous with its past.

The effort of this paper is to conceive the future of philosophy as continuous with its past. It therefore rests upon an affirmative answer to the three questions stated above. But, as an affirmative answer to the third question indicates, the future it conceives for philosophy is not merely continuous with its past. It also consists essentially in an improvement upon that past—an advance beyond all existing formulations, a progress in philosophical knowledge or wisdom. Only on this condition is the future of philosophy a genuine future, not simply a reiteration of its past achievements.

Those who make the modern development of philosophy discontinuous with its past—a more or less complete break with the tradition—tend to think that much philosophical progress has already been accomplished. This is particularly true of the logical positivists, the analytic philosophers of recent date, who think that phi-

losophy only got started on its true course in this century and regard the work done since this fresh start as a substantial accomplishment. I agree with them only to the extent of thinking that genuine progress is possible in philosophy, but I do not think that modern philosophy, including all recent developments, has yet begun to realize its inherent potientiality, except, perhaps, in an inchoate form.

The advances in philosophical knowledge and wisdom which, in the very nature of the case, should be possible in modern times will not be fully and articulately realized until two conditions are satisfied: (1) that philosophical work be done in the light of the whole tradition of philosophy's past, including the last five centuries as well as antiquity and the middle ages; and (2) that it be done in the light of a conception of philosophy which properly defines its autonomy and rightly delimits its province in relation to religion (or dogmatic theology), on the one hand, and in relation to the positive or empiriological sciences, on the other.

The foregoing statement is likely to raise a number of questions. First, it may be asked why anyone should suppose that progress in philosophy in modern times is something to be expected *in the very nature of the case.* And, second, it may be asked whether, among all contemporary philosophical sects, scholastics or Thomists should not be deemed best fitted to advance philosophy by reason of satisfying the two stated conditions, especially the second.

The answer to the first question could be briefly given if it consisted simply in saying that, on the whole, it seems a fair assumption that learning can be advanced in every period and every century provided the human intellect has enough leisure and peace and whatever equipment it needs to do its work well. There seems to be no evidence which would suggest, to the contrary, that human inquiry can ever come to rest, on earth and in time, by virtue of having absolutely completed its work in any field of learning or in all.[7] If philosophy is a genuine field of human learning, then this assumption must be as applicable to it as to science or theology. Hence, progress in philosophy is certainly possible in the modern period and can reasonably be expected in the centuries to come.[8]

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[7] Cf. Gilson, *ibid.,* pp. 317-318.

[8] The realization of the possibility and the fulfillment of the expectation depends, of course, on certain special conditions, some of which have been stated, for doing good philosophical work. The perpetual possibility of progress in philosophy from century to century does not mean that progress is necessarily as-

This answer is unsatisfactory precisely because it applies to science and theology as well as to philosophy; and because, in addition, it applies to every epoch alike—ancient and medieval as well as modern. What we are looking for is an answer which will tell us why, *in the very nature of the circumstances peculiar to the modern life of philosophy,* philosophical progress can be made which could not have been made in antiquity or the middle ages. What characteristically modern factor, never operative before, gives modern philosophy its special opportunity?

I have already intimated what I think this circumstance or factor to be. It is, in my opinion, the one historic event which, more than any other, characterizes modern culture and is responsible for most of its other salient features. Over the span of at least three centuries, modern times has witnessed the gradual separation of the sciences from philosophy, and has both gained and lost from the vigor of their separate development. The losses suffered have been in philosophy (and perhaps also in religion), not in the field of science itself or in its applications. The separation has been good for all of the sciences; in fact, it was absolutely prerequisite for their development. The separation so far has been mainly bad for philosophy, as I have already pointed out; but it has been bad for accidental, not essential, reasons.

When I said earlier that the "separation ... has consequences both bad and good," the good result which I had in mind is one which seems to me to follow, not accidentally as the bad result does, but essentially, because the separation of philosophy from science is as indispensable to philosophical progress as the separation of the sciences from philosophy was prerequisite to their modern development. It is precisely the advantage to philosophy which springs from its distinction from science that gives modern philosophy its special opportunity to advance beyond ancient and medieval wisdom. The advantage should not be lost sight of because it has so far not been properly exploited, or because it has been overshadowed by all the bad consequences that have accidentally followed the separation of the sciences from philosophy. These bad consequences obscure the one essential advantage, precisely because they all involve misconceptions of the autonomy of philosophy and of its relation to science.

Scholastic philosophers, and Thomists particularly, should understand the advantage which accrues to modern philosophy in conse-

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sured or inevitable simply with the passing of time.

quence of its separation from science, in the light of their understanding of the advantage which accrued to medieval philosophy in consequence of its separation from sacred theology. They should also be aided in understanding why it has taken centuries and may still take considerable time to establish an autonomous philosophy in right relation to the separate positive sciences, by remembering how many centuries it took to solve the characteristically medieval problem of the relation between philosophy and theology. In fact, the solution came almost at the end, or certainly at the culmination, of medieval thought—most perfectly, perhaps, in the formulation of St. Thomas Aquinas.[9]

Among the disorders which St. Thomas sought to rectify were two which closely resemble—one might almost say they are perfect parallels of—two modern disorders in the relation of philosophy and science. One, making philosophy logically dependent on revealed truth, or articles of faith, denied that it had principles of its own. In consequence, its autonomy was impaired or destroyed, just as in modern times those who make philosophy dependent on the changing content of the positive sciences impair or destroy its autonomy. Another medieval disorder consisted in securing the independence of philosophy and theology by assigning each its own radically different type of truth. In consequence, the truths of faith and the truths of reason became incommensurable, and the independence of philosophy; and theology was distorted into a total unrelatedness, just as in modern times those who make philosophy and science represent different types of truth substitute unrelatedness for independence.

But what was the advantage which finally accrued to medieval philosophy when St. Thomas succeeded in so conceiving the domains of philosophy and theology that each had its own proper problems and its own principles for solving them, yet conceiving them so that the truths of each necessarily remained in relation to the truths of the other, because there is only one kind of truth and only one reality for the human mind to know truly? Stated briefly, the advantage was simply this: that, guided by the light of this conception, the philosopher would no longer make the mistake of trying to answer by reason questions which could be answered only by faith; or of supposing that reason could refute the answer given by faith to questions peculiarly its own.

There are other consequences of the separation and right relation of theology and philosophy (such as the regulative and directive func-

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[9] Cf. Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1937).

tions which theology performs in. relation to philosophy, and the ancillary functions which philosophy performs in relation to theology); but I have chosen to emphasize the grave tendencies to error from which philosophy was freed by its separation from theology, and by the separation of theology from it. Ancient philosophy was subject to these errors because, at a time when philosophy and religion were inchoately merged, ancient philosophers could not know that many of the problems they tried to solve were not properly philosophical.

The solution of the problem of the relation of theology and philosophy occurred so late in the middle ages that the advantage which accrues to philosophy from their separation and right relation has manifested its fruits mainly in modern times and then mainly among the followers of St. Thomas. Yet the advantage is open to all, and for this reason modern philosophy can be sounder than most of medieval and all of ancient philosophy. This advantage is not, however, the only one which falls to modern philosophy, nor is it the one with which we are here principally concerned, the one which is exclusively modern in origin.

The peculiarly modern advantage of philosophy is to be freed from making the mistake of trying to answer by the methods of philosophy questions which can be answered only by the methods of science; or of supposing that philosophy can refute the answers given by science to questions that are answerable by its methods alone.[10] This, it will be observed, is strictly parallel to the advantage which accrues to philosophy when the domains of reason and faith are properly distinguished and related. When, within the general domain of the truths to be learned by reason from experience, the provinces of philosophy and science are properly distinguished and related, philosophy will be freed from a burden which distracted it, and from tendencies to error which marred it, during the whole of its ancient and medieval existence.

Wherever ancient and medieval philosophy were inchoately merged with science, we can find examples, too numerous to cite, of doctrines advanced by philosophers as if they were philosophical, which are not merely false but unphilosophical because the

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[10] The converse of this principle is equally important. It is stated by Gilson in terms of the relation between metaphysics and particular sciences, but his statement can be generalized to hold for all philosophical in relation to all empiriological sciences. Gilson writes: As metaphysics aims at transcending all particular knowledge, no particular science is competent either to solve metaphysical problems, or to judge their metaphysical solutions." (*The Unity of Philosophical Experience, op. cit*., pp. 309-310.)

problems, properly understood, belong to the investigative sciences, not to philosophy. One example will suffice to represent the type of all such errors: it is the Aristotlelian doctrine, repeated by St. Thomas, that heavenly bodies are incorruptible and compounded of a different kind of matter from terrestrial. If this were just a scientific error, it would be of no special importance. Many errors as egregious have been made in the course of modern science, as the result of inadequate observation or insufficient data. But as stated by Aristotle and St. Thomas, as integrated into their whole philosophy of nature and even touching their metaphysics, this doctrine represents a philosophical error on their part—one which they could hardly help making in their day and one which hardly any contemporary philosopher could make.

It is the separation of astronomy from philosophy, and its development as a special science by empiriological methods peculiarly its own, which saves the contemporary philosopher from making errors of this sort. I say "contemporary" rather than "modern" here because in the first centuries of the modern period philosophers were still making errors *of this sort.* Furthermore, all the special sciences did not break away from philosophy simultaneously, nor did they develop at equal rates or with equal success, so that philosophy was not freed all at once from the mistake of dealing with problems for which it is unfitted.

The type of error exemplified by the doctrine of incorruptible bodies—which, perhaps, should not be called a philosophical error, but an "unphilosophical error," because it is the mistake of dealing philosophically with a non-philosophical problem—can be found in all other fields of subject matter which now belong to the special positive sciences; and just as the empiriological development of astronomy saves philosophy from that error, so the empiriological development of mechanics, chemistry, biology, and psychology saves philosophy from similar errors.

I turn now to the second question raised some pages ago, namely, whether among all contemporary philosophical sects, scholastics or Thomists should not be deemed best fitted to advance philosophy. One fact favors an affirmative answer. A contemporary Thomist, Jacques Maritain, has, in *The Degrees of Knowledge,* given us the soundest conception of the measure of autonomy which belongs to philosophy, both in relation to theology and in relation to the empiriological sciences.[11] He has specified the distinct provinces of

[11] New York, 1938. The original French title of this work, *Distinguer pour unir,* says most compactly and emphatically why the separation of theology, philosophy, and science as three distinct disciplines serves the end of their being prop-

philosophy and science in terms of the difference in their formal objects and the consequent difference in their methods of inquiry, appropriate in each case to these objects. He has done all this without rendering philosophy and science incommunicable, or isolating each from significant contact with the other. If all scholastics carried on their philosophical inquiries in the light of Maritain's distinctively modern conception of philosophy—of its autonomy and its limits, its proper principles and problems—it seems to me that this would favor their making a substantial contribution to the peculiarly modern progress of philosophy.

But unfortunately for the future of philosophy—or, at least, its future in the next twenty-five years—all contemporary scholastic philosophers do not carry on their inquiries in the light of Maritain's conception of philosophy's province and task. In fact, there seems to be an increasing number of them who, in the name of fidelity to the principles of Aristotle and St. Thomas, tend to move in the opposite direction. They regard the separation of philosophy from the positive or empiriological sciences as a typically modern fault.

Because the subject matters treated, the objects studied, and the problems dealt with in modern times by the various natural sciences were once inchoately merged by Aristotle and St. Thomas with natural philosophy, as if all belonged to the same domain, these contemporary "Aristotelians" and "Thomists" seek to return to a state of affairs in which philosophy lacked the great advantage it has acquired in modern times. If, with regard to the relation between theology and metaphysics, they can see that there is some advantage to philosophy in being a Thomist rather than an Aristotelian, why, with regard to the relation between the philosophy of nature and the natural sciences, should they not be able to see that there is some advantage in being a modern Thomist, like Maritain, instead of a medieval one, like John of St. Thomas?[12]

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erly related to one another in an harmonious and hierarchical order of the degrees of knowledge. When, as in ancient times, philosophy contains theology and science inchoately within itself, that good order cannot be achieved, for instead of the unity that results from distinction, there can only be the unity of confusion. See also Maritain's *Science an Wisdom* (New York, 1940), Part T; and *Scholasticism and Politics* (New York, 1940), Ch. II, "Science and Philosophy."

[12] The fact that John of St. Thomas wrote in the 17th century does not affect the sense of this remark as it applies to his philosophy of nature. The 17th century was too early for him, or anyone else, to understand the distinction between empiriological and philosophical physics.

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