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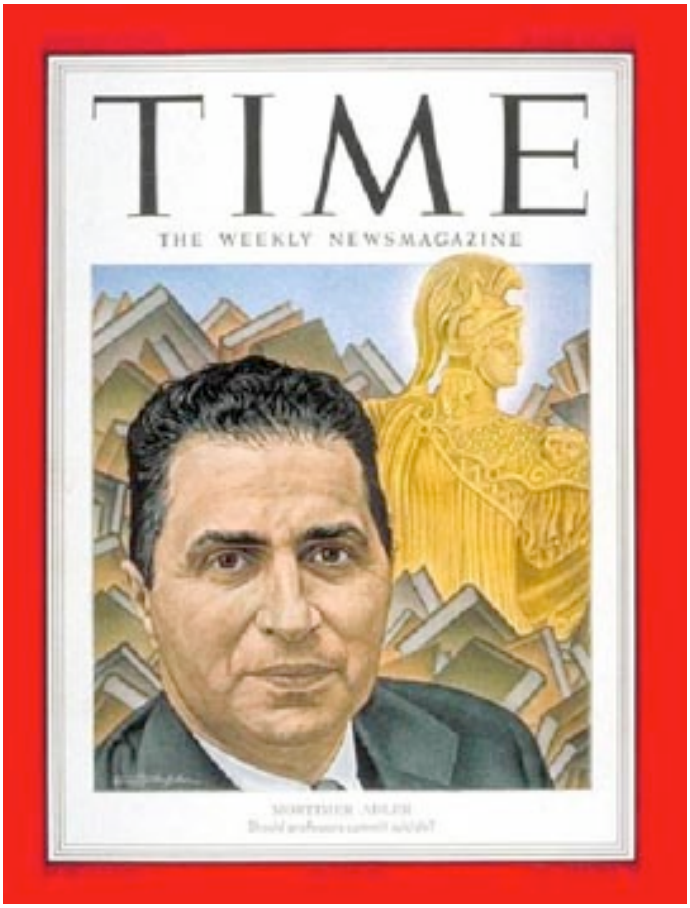
It is necessary to call into council the views of our predecessors, in order that we may profit by whatever is sound in their thought and avoid their errors. **—Aristotle**



THE NEXT TWENTY-FIVE YEARS IN PHILOSOPHY

Mortimer J. Adler

Part 2 of 2

The same question can be asked about their view of the relation of the philosophy of mathematics to mathematical science, the relation of, the philosophy of man to empiriological psychology, or the relation of practical philosophy (ethics and politics) to the social. sciences? Only metaphysics is excepted, because in the case of this one philosophical science, their understanding of its formal distinction from the philosophy of nature makes it impossible for them not to see its separation also from all the positive sciences which are subalternate to the philosophy of nature.

It is not only the growing number of these medieval revivalists which darkens the hope that contemporary scholastics will carry out the program of philosophical work that *The Degrees of Knowledge* should inspire. Having a sound conception of philosophy's autonomy, and of its relation to science as well as to theology, was only one of the two conditions previously stated as prerequisite to advancing philosophical knowledge or wisdom in our own day. The other was "that philosophical work he 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." On this score, several things must be said—without exaggeration, I hope, and certainly without malice.

In the first place, too many scholastics are still either not willing or not prepared to take account of the last five hundred years in the tradition of philosophy. Too many are simply not well enough read in the basic literature of modern philosophy—the great books themselves, not just scholastic critiques of them. Even among those who are acquainted *first-hand* with such figures as Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Hume, Kant, and Hegel, too many are not actively conversant with contemporary trends, through the reading of the current literature of philosophical analysis and controversy outside of scholastic publications or periodicals.

In the second place, there is among scholastics generally the tendency to emphasize the continuity of present-day philosophy with its past, mainly its medieval and ancient past, and to neglect, even in some cases to deny, the possibility that philosophy, present and future, can substantially improve upon its past. They conceive *philosophia perennis,* not as something perpetually and continuously growing, but as something perennially and reiteratively the same. One even feels, in certain quarters, the reverential assumption, if one does not find the explicit statement, that the work of philosophy was completed by Thomas Aquinas, and that our only task is to teach his doctrines faithfully and well to all future generations. Not only does this amount to idolatry, unbecoming a Christian as

well as a philosopher, but it flies in the face of the most reasonable assumption we can make about all human intellectual work, namely, that it will not be completed, that inquiry and discovery will go on in philosophy and theology as well as in science, until the end of time.

For the several reasons given above, I cannot be optimistic about genuine philosophical progress in the next twenty-five years, so far as the contribution of scholastic philosophers is concerned. For another set of reasons given earlier—not; only the serious misconception of philosophy itself and its relation to the sciences, but also the fact that they, for their part, tend to neglect or reject the ancient and medieval periods of philosophy's tradition, and sometimes even the early centuries of the modern period—I cannot be optimistic about genuine philosophical progress in the next twenty-five years, so far as the contribution of American or English philosophers is concerned, or, for that matter, other nationalities as well. I do not see; in short, sufficient signs of awakening or reform in either camp—certainly none of their coming together—to warrant much hope that philosophy in the immediate future will enjoy a change for the better. So much for prediction. I turn now to exhortation, or, less grandiloquently stated, a few recommendations about work to be done and ways of doing it.

II

The relation of philosophy and science has so far been central in this essay. It underlies my hope for a promising development in modern philosophy—one which I think will take place *if* certain things are done. I have already mentioned two of those things: first, that philosophical work be done in the light of the whole tradition of its past, with respect for both its recent and its remote past; and second, that it be done in the light of a sound conception of philosophy's province and limits and its relation to both science and theology. The things which I am now about to mention are subordinate to the two points just repeated and, like them, draw some part of their meaning from the peculiarly modern fact that philosophy and science now co-exist both separately and side by side. Where before it was the difference between science and philosophy that seemed crucial, here it is the similitude between them which seems to me suggestive of what is required for a constructive and forward-moving program of philosophical work.

I shall presently try to be precise about the character and extent of the similitude between philosophy and science. But before I come to that I would like to indicate why I think the similitude is rele-

vant to a consideration of philosophy's future—in the next twenty-five years or beyond.

Suppose I were a scientist and were asked to write an essay on the next twenty-five years in science or, more restrictedly, in the natural sciences, in the physical sciences, or in some branch of physics, such as nuclear physics. If I assumed such a prophetic task, what part would be given to prediction, and what to exhortation?

I think the answer is that most of what I had to say would be prediction and, let me add, not the sort of predictions which resemble threats or promises conditional upon adopting or not adopting certain recommendations to be made. I have the feeling that my only recommendation would be that scientific work should continue as it is now going on and as it has been going on for the last three centuries; and since I would have every reason to think that all my colleagues in science felt the same way, I probably would not even bother to mention it. On the assumption that scientific work would continue along its present well-established course, I would confine myself to making predictions of a certain sort.

These predictions would not require unusual clairvoyance on my part. They would only require a decent understanding of the work now being done, and some imagination founded upon such insight. They would all take the form of projecting trends plainly in evidence in work now in process or just completed. They would consist in extrapolations of the various lines of research which scientific inquiry has been following in the recent past. The problems which have just been solved, or at least deemed solved, would indicate the next stages of inquiry, either concerned with further tests of these solutions or with ascertaining the consequences of taking these solutions as conditions for further research. Other parts of immediately future inquiry might be projected from a knowledge of those problems now being worked on which were as yet not even tentatively solved. Still other parts, less definite than either of the foregoing, might be projected from a knowledge of methods of research that had only recently been developed and had not yet been applied to all the phenomena to which they were applicable, so that their fruitfulness for discovery, far from being exhausted, remained to be tested. In making all of these predictions I would, moreover, be dealing with the immediate future, not the remote future; for the next twenty-five years of science, or of any division of science, would be more predictable than the whole of the next century.

One part of even that immediate future would, of course, remain

unpredictable. No one can predict the work of genius—either in the form of startling inventions in apparatus and techniques, or in the form of genuinely novel departures in theory or in applied or applicable mathematics. No one can predict the accidental, whether it be a single lucky discovery or the coincidence of a number of trends, which, reaching a certain development at the same time, opens a new line of inquiry. But with respect to the unpredictable, philosophy and science are on the same footing, at least so far as the contributions of genius are concerned. It is with respect to the predictable in the immediate future of science, that philosophy by comparison seems to be so blank.

Can anyone project the trends of philosophical inquiry that are indicated by work now in process or just completed—if anything at all has been "just completed"? Can anyone extrapolate the lines of speculation or analysis which philosophical thought has manifested in the recent past? What problems have just been solved, or are even deemed solved by all who are competent to judge of the matter? And even if such unanimity is preposterous to expect, can anyone say what further steps of inquiry will be taken by those, however few, who may think that certain problems have now been solved? Can anyone say what further tests will be made of these solutions, or what further analyses will be based upon them? Again, without making outrageous demands for unanimity in judgment among those competent to judge, can anyone project the next stages of philosophical inquiry with respect to problems now being worked on and considered as yet unsolved? Or, to make an even less exacting demand, can anyone say what important philosophical problems, now plainly in view, remain to be solved; and say this with some assurance that techniques of philosophical work now possessed will at least make some progress toward their solution in the immediate future? Can anyone point to particular types of analysis, recently developed and tried out by philosophers, which promise fruitful application to other problems in the immediate future?

I, for one, cannot say any of these things about philosophy as a whole, for philosophy in its present state does not have enough unity to be talked about as if it were *one* going concern. And as I look at the contemporary philosophical sects, taking for the purposes of this essay the suggested division of philosophy into "American" and "Thomistic," the following paradox presents itself.

The secular philosophers, and here mainly those who either are logical positivists or are in some degree affiliated with the school

of analytic philosophy, would be more likely to come forward with answers to these questions and would, in addition, be able to document their answers more fully, than the scholastics or Thomists. The logical positivists or analytical school seem to have a definite program of research; some generally shared convictions about what problems have been solved, at least tentatively; some common feeling about the most fruitful of their techniques to be used in new areas; and some conception of the problems next in order for attack, accompanied by a certain degree of confidence that these problems can be made to yield solutions, as similar problems have already done in the immediate past.

What is paradoxical about this fact will, of course, be seen only by those who share my opinion that of all the contemporary sects the logical positivists have the least sound conception of what philosophy is; whereas the Thomists, or at least some of them, with the soundest conception, are at the opposite pole on this matter of prediction. Supposing for the moment that my opinion is correct, is it not strange that those who know better what philosophy is should be less able to say what steps should next be taken in carrying forward philosophical work, or what consequences for the future course of philosophical work should follow from problems just solved or conclusions just reached?

The paradox may disappear, or at any rate be less baffling, when we realize that the logical positivists or analytic philosophers would say that it is precisely the way they conceive philosophy that makes it possible for them to have a definite program of philosophical work, to know what they have accomplished, and to predict what will be done next. Because philosophy for them is after all only a special sort of science—a logical or semantical science that is like, even if it is not continuous with, mathematics, and deals only with the same type of logical necessities—philosophy can have a program of work and a predictable future just like any other special science. If one can know what sort of work is now going on in mathematics and can predict what sort of efforts are likely to be undertaken in the immediate future, the same things should be possible in philosophy, provided, of course, that philosophy sticks to its knitting, and drops none of its analytical stitches (nor any pearls of wisdom either).

Against the opinion that logical positivism has the least sound conception of what philosophy is, the analytic philosophers may argue that their program of work, partly accomplished and partly projected, is *prima facie* evidence to the contrary. Those who know best how to do effective and forward-moving philosophical work

would seem to have some reason for thinking that their conception of philosophy itself is right.

The other side of the paradox still remains, however. If the Thomists think that their conception of philosophy is right—and, *a fortiori,* if it is right—why should they not, in their own terms, have a comparable program of work, partly accomplished and partly projected? They seem not to. If I am wrong in this judgment, that must be shown in the only way it can be shown, namely, by answering the sort of questions about the immediate past and the immediate future which any scientist can answer about his science, and which logical positivists claim to answer about philosophy, according to their conception of its nature and work.

Instead of answering such questions to show that I am wrong, some Thomists may, of course, reject the questions themselves, as thoroughly inappropriate to philosophy, however acceptable they may be with regard to the positive sciences or with regard to philosophy misconceived as a purely logical or semantical enterprise. They may say that it is just as outrageous to talk about problems being solved or about problems remaining unsolved in philosophy, as it is preposterous to expect in philosophy the sort of unanimity in judgment among competent peers that is generally the case in the positive sciences.

If there are any Thomists who would say this, I would like to point out in reply that such statements violate their own conception of philosophy as valid and objective knowledge, as *scientia,* in a more eminent sense than empiriological science, mathematics, or logic. If, for Thomists, philosophy does not consist in problems solved and problems still to be solved, if it does not consist in approved methods of solving problems and a right order for solving them, then philosophy is opinion, unfounded speculation, system-building, world-pictures, eloquence, poetry, anything but *scientia* in even its barest essential notes.

To this they may reply in turn that, with one exception, philosophy has all the requisite traits of *scientia,* the one exception being simply that philosophy has already solved all its problems, none remain to be solved. *Scientia* it is, but a dead science, with no future except for its disseminators.

Because it makes a travesty of writing an essay under this title for The New Scholasticism, I shall dismiss the possibility of such a reply as a travesty on Thomism. We are brought, therefore, to the point of examining more closely the similitude between philosophy

and science, to see it's bearing on the comparative predictability of the immediate future of their work for Thomists and logical positivists.

For logical positivists, and for all others who regard philosophy as a purely formal science, a science dealing with propositions or sentences rather than real facts or existences, the situation is, as we have just seen, the same as in a science like mathematics. But for Thomists, all philosophical sciences (except logic, of course) are sciences of the real. As such, they are on the same plane of *first intentions* as the empiriological sciences (though on this plane they are distinguished by having a different generic type of formal object and a different noetic aim). For this reason they have greater similitude with the empiriological sciences than does philosophy conceived as a purely formal science. The same generically as sciences of the real, the philosophical sciences are more eminently scientific in character than the empiriological sciences, because their principles have greater certitude, their conclusions are more demonstratively established, and the necessity of these conclusions is more readily shown by reasoning which demonstrates them from axiomatic truths.

If these things are so according to Thomists, then Thomists, much more than logical positivists, should have the kind of judgments about the present stage of their work and insight about its significance for the immediate future, that we would find in any of the positive sciences. Furthermore, if empiriological scientists are able to have a program of work which connects the immediate past with the immediate future, in terms of a fair measure of agreement about the problems which have been solved, or are to be solved, the solutions which should be tested, and the methods of solving problems or testing solutions, then philosophical scientists—scientists eminenter—should certainly have a program of work involving agreement about the same sort of things, perhaps even in larger measure. Finally, if empiriological scientists can work cooperatively, because they are all working with common methods in the solution of common problems or the testing of such solutions, then philosophical scientists should be even more able to work cooperatively.

In making all these points, I do not mean to suggest that the philosophical sciences should *imitate* the empiriological sciences. I am not holding up the empiriological sciences as superior examples which their weaker sisters, the philosophical sciences, should try to copy slavishly. On the contrary, I am trying to say that the philosophical sciences should possess, as more inherent in their

nature and therefore to a greater degree, the intellectual traits which make science admirable as a human enterprise.

Community of problems and methods and an acknowledged common program of work should, ill the very nature of the case, bind scientists together in a cooperative undertaking; and philosophers, as more eminently scientists than experimentalists, should have such intellectual community, share such a common program, and engage in such a cooperative undertaking. If they do not, then there must be something wrong somewhere. Either philosophy is not *scientia* in the highest sense (maybe not in any sense), or there is something wrong about the way philosophers have worked and are now working.

I choose the second alternative. My diagnosis of what is wrong will be plain enough from the prescription I have to offer as the remedy. I have only a few recommendations to make. They follow directly from what I think is the root of the trouble, the most obvious and painful symptom of which is the difficulty anyone would have in trying to predict the trend of philosophical thought in the next twenty-five years. But before I offer my recommendations, I would like to say a word about those to whom they are addressed.

They are addressed to students of the next generation. The members of my own generation are all matured in their habits and committed to one or another definite manner of work. It would be both unreasonable and unrealistic to expect them to alter the pattern of their habits or commitments. The recommendations I am going to make do not, however, make unreasonable or unrealistic, demands upon those who have yet to begin their study of philosophy, among whom some, by talent and inclination, will devote their lives to its pursuit. They, at least, can be guided by these recommendations in what they do to prepare themselves for such work; and perhaps even some teachers of the present generation may be persuaded by these recommendations to direct the training of such future philosophers accordingly.

When I imagine this future generation of philosophers in training and at work, I imagine them as somehow able to rise above sectarian divisions which are so much part of our present ills. In making these recommendations to them, I must conceive them as philosophers *without qualification*—not as Thomists, or scholastics of any other ilk; not as positivists, pragmatists, or materialists either.

Yet, though I wish to regard them as philosophers *without qualification,* I must repeat once more two qualifications concerning the

way they conceive the study of philosophy and themselves as philosophers. The first is that they should make their study of philosophy include the *whole* tradition of its past, with a just apportionment of attention to its recent and its remote past. The second is that they should not accept the vocation of being philosophers in the modern world unless that calling has for them the intellectual dignity of scientific work while at the same time being both different from and independent of the empiriological sciences.

If being a philosopher is in its own proper sense scientific work, then philosophers must, like all other scientists, have principles and conclusions.[1] Hence my first recommendation is with respect to principles, and my second recommendation is with respect to conclusions.

With respect to principles, I propose, first, that the effort he made to discover what principles, if any, all philosophers from the beginning to the present hold in common. Whether none or some are discovered, I propose, second, that all of the issues on the level of principles be stated. This second proposal calls for the most explicit formulation of philosophical differences concerning principles, accompanied by whatever is relevant to understanding and resolving these issues.

With respect to conclusions, my two parallel proposals must be made subordinate to whatever is discovered on the level of principles. *Only in terms of some agreement about principles, can any intelligible consideration of conclusions take place.* Hence only if one or more principles are found to he commonly accepted by all philosophers, can we ask, first, what problems have been solved in the light of these principles, and, second, what problems, that are genuinely problems in the light of these principles, remain unsolved. The first of these questions requires the discovery of conclusions agreed upon by those who accept the principles; the second requires the discovery of disagreement about conclusions among those who accept the principles. Here as before, the second proposal calls for the most explicit formulation of philosophical differences concerning conclusions, accompanied by whatever is relevant to understanding and solving the problems thus indicated.

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[1] If philosophy has the genuine future which these recommendations are intended to help bring about, then it cannot be the case that all of its principles have as yet been perfectly expounded, or defended, or even all stated; nor can it be the case that, from these principles, all conclusions have been drawn, all problems finally solved, and all solutions tested. For if all of these things were the case, philosophy could have no future. It has a genuine future, and there is genuine work to do, only if one or more of these things remains to be done.

It may be, of course, that no unanimous agreement at all will be found on the level of principles. Then my two proposals with respect to conclusions must be carried out in terms of partial agreements about principles. If there is some agreement, short of unanimity, about *this* particular set of principles, then within the framework of *this* set of principles, what problems have been solved (what conclusions have been agreed upon by those who share the principles), and what problems remain to be solved (what conclusions are in issue among those who share the principles)? If there is some agreement, short of unanimity, about *another* particular set of principles, then within the framework of *that* set of principles, the same two questions can be asked; and so on for all the partial agreements which are found on the level of principles.

So far as the substance of the work to be done is concerned., these are my only recommendations. But I have a few more things to add about the way in which, such work should be done, or about its external conditions.

In the first place, it should be done with the whole field of philosophy in mind, including all its speculative and practical disciplines. This kind of work cannot be effectively done by those who *specialize* in ethics or aesthetics or metaphysics or logic. Here, by the way, is a. striking example of how philosophy may have the virtue *of scientia* without imitating the methods or means of the empiriological sciences. The latter call for more and more minute specialization. Philosophy, on the contrary, abhors specialization of every sort, and demands of its workers that they concern themselves with all its departments.

In the second place, the work should be done cooperatively. This means a meeting of the minds who are engaged contemporaneously in doing this work, in some way more effective than anything now available in the form of annual meetings of philosophical societies or the pages of the philosophical journals. The public disputation once provided a more effective means of philosophical confrontation and cooperation than anything we now have. Perhaps something as good can be devised for the task as it is here conceived. Cooperative work means not only effective ways of getting minds to meet in the process of doing it, but also a willingness to submerge pride of authorship and to give the common product the common authority of all who have participated in its production.

In the third place, the work should be done with sensitivity to the rigorous demands of analysis and demonstration. It should eschew poetry, imagery, eloquence, and all literary embellishments as phi-

losophy's worst plague. It should content itself with achieving precision of statement, orderliness of exposition, and cogency of argument. To these ends, it should aim at devising a rhetorical form appropriate to its logical needs.

In the fourth place, the work should take advantage of all relevant historical scholarship, since it is to be done in the light of the whole historic tradition of philosophy's past. But it must safeguard itself at every turn against becoming historical scholarship, and thereby ceasing to be philosophical work. Ideally, it should be possible to present the results of the work here projected without referring to a single historic philosopher by name or a single historic period by date, or, for that matter, to a single historic doctrine by the *ism* which has become its caricature.

In the fifth place, and finally, the work should be undertaken and executed as a dialectical, not a dogmatic or doctrinal enterprise. The construction and exposition of a philosophical doctrine is the highest work the individual philosophical genius can perform. Nevertheless, most of the great philosophers have done dialectical surveys of philosophical thought and opinion as preliminary exercises, and have presented them as introductions to or as context for their own doctrines. What geniuses have done in the past, they may be able to do again, unless the accumulation and complexity of the tradition make the task impossible henceforth even for the genius. In any case, there is cooperative philosophical work to be (lone by those who are not geniuses; this should consist in dialectical surveys and summations, by their very nature preparatory to the doctrinal creations of genius.

If such work is well done, it will provide a better philosophical environment for the geniuses of coming generations. If it is poorly done, or, worse, not done at all, the lack of it and the impossibility of its being done by any one mind might greatly impair or completely frustrate the efforts of the most fertile and resourceful philosophical genius. The future of philosophy depends on more than the happy accidents of God-given genius. It depends on the patient, persistent, intelligent labors of all the rest of us to prepare the soil for creativity.

In all these recommendations, both as to the substance of the work to be done and the manner of doing it, I have said in essence no more than is contained in the two maxims which Aristotle laid down for himself as rules of philosophical work, rules which he followed so faithfully and well in all the dialectical surveys that precede or accompany his own doctrinal expositions.

The first maxim is contained by implication in his statement that "the investigation of truth is in one way hard, in another easy. An indication of this is found in the fact that no one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, we do not collectively fail, but everyone says something true about the nature of things, and while individually we contribute little or nothing to the truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed."

The second maxim is more explicitly stated as a rule: "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." 🕮

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