Name
Daniel A. Drain

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Thesis Director
Rodney Howsare, Ph.D. (Theology)

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We take for granted at the outset that there is such a thing as faith and reason, which means we take as given that the Christian God, who perfectly transcends the world, has revealed himself in history, that a new meaning, which could not have been anticipated by reason and remains in some essential way beyond its grasp, has in fact been given, and that, even if it lies beyond reason, this meaning still concerns reason. 1 - David C. Schindler

The above words from the philosopher D.C. Schindler ably illustrate the paradigm in which the following work will be composed, and point toward the central concern of this work, namely, what it means to call God “Creator” in the fullest sense possible. More than a merely academic concern, the relationships parsed out in the fields of philosophy and theology, properly understood, always-already have radical and severe implications for the daily practical matters of which most people are concerned, most especially politics, ethics, and the life of the academy. This is also to say, from the start, that philosophy and theology qua philosophy and theology are the most eminently practical sciences (“science” here understood in its original, Aristotelian sense as a body of knowledge incarnate in a knowing person). The establishment of a full, dynamic understanding of what it means to worship a transcendent Creator God ought to serve the purpose of highlighting the general lack of this full understanding among most people, self-proclaimed believers included. It is precisely the business of philosophy as such to examine the world, concomitantly approach the question of God, and to bring to bear the results of that approach back upon the world. In a complementary and dynamically related fashion, it is precisely the business of theology as such to study God, concomitantly approach the world (or, perhaps one ought to say, creation), and to bring to bear the results of that approach upon an understanding of the Godhead. The following work, therefore, will be undertaken as a work of Christian philosophy, and will act as a playing ground for both fields, philosophy and theology, which at their core (one might

say, at their best, fullest moments) open up to one another in the search for Truth.\(^2\) This is all to say that this work will strive to accomplish the following in a tri-partite division: First, to discuss the development of the classical, Catholic intellectual tradition’s understanding of God as it grows out of, embellishes, and surpasses the Greek understanding; second, to discuss the ‘modern turn,’ namely, the rejection of the classical tradition, as it sprouted from the Middle Ages, through the Enlightenment, and eventually grounds (provides the very possibility of) Liberalism, and therefore American culture; and thirdly, in the spirit of David L. Schindler, to parse out the implications of the negation (and in some cases, outright rejection) of the classical tradition’s understanding of the relationship between God and the world by the current understanding of the secular age, and to draw out some of the consequences of the rejection of that tradition, specifically as it manifests in American culture. As a prelude to that narrative, however, there will be an elucidation and definition of what the characteristics of philosophy and theology are separately, followed by a reflection upon their relationship and the establishment of a model of that relationship by which to proceed; the implications of that relationship in the order of our knowledge and action will then manifest implicitly throughout the rest of this work.

\(^2\) Indeed, the very understanding of the relationship of these two sciences is implicated in the following work.
Prelude: Philosophy and Theology

[Since] philosophy yearns for the wisdom which consists in rightness of soul and speech and in purity of life it is well disposed toward wisdom and does all it can to acquire it. We call philosophers those who love the wisdom that is creator and mistress of all things, which is knowledge of the Son of God. – Clement of Alexandria

In order to properly perform activities within both fields, it seems that one ought to know exactly what philosophy and theology are in themselves, with the condition that one does not simply want one discipline to dissolve into the other. The assumption here is that philosophy does not simply become theology when matters of faith are involved. What, then, is the difference between the two? This is a difference that certainly ought to be drawn in a formal way, but it is also the case that it becomes increasingly more difficult to determine that difference precisely when one gets closer to the concrete. There is a definite similarity in method, and often there is a striking similarity in the object of consideration for both disciplines. It would not be untrue to state that there are moments in philosophy where one wonders if theology is being done, and vice versa. Indeed, one might ask, along what lines do I establish which insight belongs either to reason or faith?

A document promulgated by the First Vatican Council speaks decisively on this issue, among other things teaching that there is, indeed, a division between the two disciplines. Dei Filius states that

The Catholic Church, with one consent, has also ever held and does hold that there is a twofold order of knowledge, distinct both in principle and also in object; in principle, because our knowledge in the one is by natural reason, and in the other by divine faith; in object, because, besides those things to which natural reason can attain, there are proposed to our belief mysteries hidden in God, which, unless divinely revealed, cannot be known.

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What is implicated in the above is that the two disciplines lie beyond one another, not existing merely as branches of one another at certain moments. Yet this still does not offer an altogether clear conception of their relationship. Is this to say that the two disciplines are inherently distinct, and if so, in a negative way? Or is there an intrinsic connection between the two? A negative model of their relationship would hold that the more theological philosophy becomes, that is, the more it “depends on authority . . . proceeds from a given . . . receives and relies on the data of revelation…” the less philosophical it is. So too, theology would become less theological the more it uses data from philosophy. Contrived separately as such, the relationship between philosophy and theology would then be characterized, indeed even “founded on their respective weakness or incapacities.”

In this negative model the two disciplines interact with each other in an unhealthy way, then, manifesting as a dialogue of power and submission, each reciprocally manipulating the other. A healthier mode of interaction, contrarily, would be characterized by openness to the other at their very best moments, when they are most fully themselves. It is more appropriate, then, to embrace the model that portrays the relationship between philosophy and theology as a healthy one. A positive relational model, as such, would allow each discipline to be itself most properly and fully, and further still, would encourage dialogue at those healthy moments. This intrinsic model actually allows the two disciplines to be more independent, that is, to be properly autonomous. This is even implicit from an authentic reading of Biblical texts, namely that “there is a profound and

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7 *The Catholicity of Reason*, 309.
8 Ibid., 310.
indissoluble unity between the knowledge of reason and the knowledge of faith.”^9 D.C.

Schindler, speaking of the implications of this healthy relationship, says,

It must mean that each in its own way is “ordered” to the other, not in the sense that the other adds the “missing piece” that brings the disciplines to completion, but, first and most fundamentally, that the movement “beyond” itself coincides with its own internal completion; second, it must mean that because it coincides with the completion, the transition toward the other discipline exhibits, not exclusively a need, but more basically an essential gratuity, though in a different sense in each case . . .^10

What must we take from this analysis? Namely that philosophy and theology are gratuitously open to one another, speaking to each other of a common love, and cooperating dynamically in the light of that loved object, akin to what Aristotle would have called a virtuous friendship.^11 To further understand this dynamic relationship, we must delve deeper into what characterizes the two disciplines considered separately, determining the proper nature of each in itself.

Considered essentially (that is, perfectly, in its essence) without any reference to theology, one can establish four necessary elements of philosophy as such. First, we can say that, “Philosophy will have the whole of the real as its scope; in technical terms, it will be the science of being qua being.”^12 Being is the object of study of philosophy, which would therefore include any real being, indeed, anything that is, any thing that even exists. The purview of philosophy is grand indeed, since “being” is encountered in a new way in each and every individual thing that exists, revealing to the philosopher that the depths of being are indeed inexhaustible, and, in a reassuring sense, that one will never run out of things to wonder about. Secondly, philosophy must inquire into things radically, that is, at their root (from radix, meaning “root”). Philosophy would necessarily

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^9 Fides et Ratio, 16.
^10 The Catholicity of Reason, 310.
^11 This sort of virtuous friendship is characterized by a unity-in-appreciation of some higher object. The two united “friends” are united primarily by their love of some other, and therefore appreciate each other in the light of the loved object. Ideally, in the Christian sphere, God is the object of this love.
^12 Ibid., 311.
“set its desire to know on nothing less than the highest causes, the most profound and originary principles.”\textsuperscript{13} This radical openness to the truth of all things, this desire for knowledge of the highest causes, therefore opens philosophy, \textit{at its most philosophical moment}, to the discoveries of theology. Even when philosophy comes to conclusions, it would desire, of its own nature, to remain open to further discovery. D.C. Schindler speaks of philosophy’s deepest disposition as “a hungry satisfaction, a happy restlessness, the simultaneity of openness and closure.”\textsuperscript{14} Philosophy, therefore, recognizes and is always open to the ever-greater fecundity of Being itself. A third necessary element of true philosophy is something like a radical humility, or in other words, an awareness that reason always operates in a way dependent upon that which is outside of itself; reason is dependent upon reality, indicating that it is therefore “inherently ec-static.”\textsuperscript{15} It would seem, then, that it is the nature of philosophy proper to be receptive, to receive its data (and indeed, its very possibility) as something like a gift from without, enabling the inquisitive response from within. This is to say that it is built into the natural structure of being, as participation in the divine Logos (‘word’ or ‘reason’), to be decidedly directed towards the other, in other words, to be is \textit{to-be-in-relation} (cf. the work of W. Norris Clarke). This third element has led many, including certain Church Fathers (and following in their footsteps, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Pope John Paul II, David L. Schindler and D.C. Schindler) to reflect upon the inherently Marian character of philosophy, promoting the Virgin Mary and her utterly receptive \textit{Fiat} as the paradigm of Reason itself.\textsuperscript{16} The fourth element of proper philosophy is perhaps the most important, and ought not be separated

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 313.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 314.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 314.
\textsuperscript{16} See \textit{Fides et Ratio}, 108.
from what has been considered thus far. This fourth element is that “philosophy in its most proper sense regards wonder, and its objective correlate mystery, as altogether positive.”

The key element, the primary motivation of the philosopher, then, is sheer wonder at the gratuity of reality in itself, and the philosopher’s proper resting point, in turn, is a certain restlessness in mystery; as before, a happy dissatisfaction. “That is to say,” wrote Henri de Lubac, “there is something sacred in our humble reason,” indeed, a sacred humility and gratitude. Again, D.C. Schindler has the final word on this matter,

A proper philosophy . . . would understand being itself as wonderful by nature, so that an increase in awe would be itself a direct sign of deeper understanding, and the two – wonder and knowledge – would be experienced as flipsides, so to speak, of the same coin. In this view, the silent gaze of amazement would represent the paradigm of philosophical achievement, its completion or closure, which is approximated in every single philosophical act, every instance of true knowing, without exception.

The philosopher, then, when he philosophizes well, does so in a spirit of gratuity, motivated by wonder; this wonder seeks to appreciate and dwell in reality. Reality, for the philosopher, is understood fundamentally as a gift from without.

Likewise, considered essentially, theology can be characterized by four fundamental traits. The first of these four is a primary understanding of the world in light of God’s “fundamental option” for it, which is revealed in the doctrines of creation, redemption, Trinity and incarnation. This is to say that theology proper understands that “The world has no purpose other than to be, and thus to give glory to God.” What does this mean for the interest of the theologian? It indicates that the theologian, too, recognizes reality fundamentally as gift. Posited beautifully by D.C. Schindler, we recognize that the vocation of any authentic theologian is that he

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17 The Catholicity of Reason, 315.
19 The Catholicity of Reason, 315-316.
20 Ibid., 316.
21 Ibid., 316.
goes where God goes, and, in loving God, loves what God loves. In this respect, a theologian must take an interest in the world not simply in relation to God, but in itself, for its own sake (which is not opposed to, but coincides with, taking an interest in it for God’s sake).22

The theologian, then, is called to a profound and love-engendered interest in the world. A second characteristic of true theology understands simply that through creation, something of God is revealed. Indeed, this revelatory quality would extend even to all things known, anything at all that exists. It is a favorite adage of followers of St. Thomas Aquinas that “All knowers know God implicitly in all that they know.”23 Implied therein is the fact that in and through created reality, God intends to be understood as Creator.

Following upon the heels of the first two, the third proper self-understanding of theology indicates that, as the world was created by He Who Is (and Who Is Intelligence), the world as such, understood precisely as natural, is fundamentally intelligible. Reason, without the help of faith, can access and understand the fundamental intelligibility of things qua things. What this third characteristic means for the relationship of philosophy and theology is that, at its best and most authentic moments, theology (when considering things in themselves) opens gratuitously to the input of philosophy. It would seem, even at this point, that philosophy and theology are fundamentally open to one another in their affirmation of reality as gift to be known for its own sake. The fourth point in this series is perhaps the most interesting, and it is that the radical autonomy of philosophy itself is actually grounded within an event revealed in theology, namely, the event of the Paschal Mystery.24 The prime moment of love to be considered in this mystery is the death of God and Christ’s descent into Hell on Holy Saturday. The theologian follows God in

22 Ibid., 317.
24 The Catholicity of Reason, 319.
faith to this event, and discovers that the object of his faith has disappeared; interestingly, Friedrich Nietzsche, in his proclamation that the “death of God”\textsuperscript{25} allows for the free reign of philosophy, is not altogether inaccurate, but unintentionally and inadvertently borrowed from the doctrines of Christianity itself. We see in the event of Holy Saturday the grounds for authentic philosophical exploration apart from the data of faith, for

If philosophy is characterized in a certain respect as a reflection on reality that is not carried out in immediate reference to the revelation given in faith, this disappearance at the “end” of love, the end to which the theologian must follow Christ in discipleship, means that theology opens up to philosophy precisely at the moment that it reaches its own perfection.\textsuperscript{26}

From the perspective of the Magisterium, John Paul II enshrined this characteristic of theology (the profound openness to dialogue at the heart of theology) in his encyclical \textit{Fides et Ratio}, writing that “The Crucified Son of God is the historic event upon which every attempt of the mind to construct an adequate explanation of the meaning of existence upon merely human argumentation comes to grief;” further to this point, he adds that “The preaching of Christ crucified and risen is the reef upon which the link between faith and philosophy can break up, but it is also the reef beyond which the two can set forth upon the boundless ocean of truth.”\textsuperscript{27} This is also to say that, sourced in the divine and human natures in Christ, so too reason and faith can be incarnate in a person without confusion.\textsuperscript{28}

To move now to the implications of this true understanding of the disciplines considered separately, it must be realized practically that “if the points enumerated above do indeed capture something essential in both philosophy and theology,” writes D.C. Schindler, “it follows that any theologian who does not in principle have an intrinsic


\textsuperscript{26} \textit{The Catholicity of Reason}, 320.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Fides et Ratio}, 23.

\textsuperscript{28} Such was the profound insight of the Fourth Lateran Council and Chalcedonian Christology.
interest in philosophy…will be a second-rate theologian,” and so too any philosopher “not interested in principle in theology betrays something essential to philosophy.” It must be affirmed that philosophy and theology possess principles distinct from one another. Both disciplines, however, can operate in conjunction to further apprehend the object of their study. What is to be said about the object of their study? That it is an object “that is itself, in a certain sense, in motion, so that the two objects in fact cover a similar range – both God and creatures – but from a different perspective.” Understood in this fashion, philosophy’s movement will characteristically be “from below,” while theology, in its prime, will move “from above.” To put it simply, we can say with Schindler that “Philosophy, in short, is a movement from the world to God to the world,” and that theology “is a movement from God to the world to God.” Operating in this tradition as a Christian philosopher, interaction with philosophers from outside of the Catholic intellectual tradition would be characterized, too, by a “from below” moment, grasping towards the ultimate questions; the Christian philosopher would think through problems with modern philosophers, take their thought as far as it can go, and then in reflection, dive back down to the root of their thought, identifying the radical problems, that is, problems lying at the root. These will often include basic issues of false assumptions in anthropology, epistemology, ontology, and metaphysics. On this specifically, Schindler remarks,

It therefore follows that the philosopher, in faith, takes a fundamental interest in God’s self-revelation precisely as a function of his proper inquiry. But this interest remains abidingly different from a specifically theological interest, because – by analogy – the theological interest is a direct and immediate one, while philosophy’s interest is always indirect and mediated through the more direct interest in the meaning of being qua being.

29 The Catholicity of Reason, 320-321.
30 Ibid., 322.
31 Ibid., 322-323.
32 Ibid., 327.
Ultimately, when both the philosopher and the theologian are open to a proper self-understanding of their own discipline, there is recognition of belonging to God characterized by an unending drive to understand reality in its integrity.\textsuperscript{33} To conclude this thought about a proper model by which to understand philosophy and theology authentically, we offer the following, again from the pen of D.C. Schindler. He writes finally that

\begin{quote}
The point here is simply to indicate the principle of the analogy to the philosophy-theology relationship: reason has an “ecstatic” dimension, without which it loses its integrity as reason; philosophy, as the fullness of reason, does not cease to be philosophy in the context of faith, and Catholic philosophy, which is irreducibly different from theology even if it shares a commitment to faith, can be counted among philosophies generally, and can enter into unstrained dialogue with them.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

It should be noted that Schindler’s thought is thoroughly founded upon the teachings of the Magisterium; it is indebted to the profound teaching of \textit{Fides et Ratio}. Indeed, to hearken even further back to the First Vatican Council, it is the contention of \textit{Dei Filius} that “Even if faith is superior to reason,” a ‘superiority’ which, indeed, enables a proper autonomy and distinction-in-unity, “there can never be a true divergence between faith and reason, since the same God who reveals the mysteries and bestows the gift of faith has also placed in the human spirit the light of reason. This God could not deny himself, nor could the truth ever contradict the truth.”\textsuperscript{35} This is all to say that truth cannot contradict truth, for such would be nonsense. It is the Catholic understanding simply that theology and philosophy influence one another in a way that is gratuitously necessary and built into the structure of a reality of which God is the source and ground.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 328.  
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 330.  
\textsuperscript{35} Cited in \textit{Fides et Ratio}, 53.
Part One

1.1 De Deo Greco: The Pre-Christian Notion of God

The universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in the visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which we who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed. – Plato, *Republic*36

“In the history of Western Culture,” wrote the Thomist philosopher Étienne Gilson, “every chapter begins with the Greeks.”37 We therefore take an interest, now, in the great Greek thinkers, and look to unpack their notions of “gods”, “first principle”, and “God,” as they developed historically, noting the disjunctions and conflations along the way. For a great number of Greek thinkers up to the emergence of Aristotle, there was a strict separation between the gods of Greek mythology and the first principle of Greek philosophy. This is indicative of the interesting phenomena among Greeks, namely the absolute separation of their philosophy (or natural theology, as it often tended to be), from the pantheon of gods to whom they paid homage in their daily living. What often springs from this separation is a sort of conundrum, which Aristotle saw as a *krasis* (from the Greek, meaning “decision”) needing resolution, and an impoverished resolution is what Aristotle provided. This conundrum is the question of what is truly ‘first’ in the Greek mind, and of how this separation is eventually resolved. We will see, as the major attempt at resolution takes place in the thought of Aristotle, that this ‘resolution’ leaves out the inherently person-al, and therefore it is not until the advent of Judeo-Christian influence that we begin to see a true resolution of the problem of God and Greek philosophy.

This conundrum of Greek thought is aptly introduced in the thought of Thales, who came before both Aristotle and Plato (and who Aristotle highly regarded). What is

37 *God and Philosophy*, 1.
evinced therein is the difference between a ‘god’ of the pantheon and the ‘God’ or ‘first principle’ of philosophy. These two are not, interestingly, the same, at least in the case of Thales. The early philosopher Thales held water to be his first principle, believing it was the originary source of all things, yet did not count water among the gods of the pantheon. A proper reading of Thales, then, is to recognize that philosophy and mythology, in the Greek mind, were not conflated, and often did not interact with each other in a significant way.\textsuperscript{38} Taking him at his word, Thales indicates to us that ‘god’ and ‘first principle’ were not the same. We see this as a conundrum given that the God of Christian philosophy is the ultimate ground of all reality, the absolute first principle.

What, one might ask, was a ‘god’ for a Greek? Gilson offers a definition of the Greek god, namely “a god, to any living being, is any other living being whom he knows as lording it over his own life,”\textsuperscript{39} and these gods possess a number of characteristics, including life, personality, freedom, and a greater relation to man than to the world at large. It should be noted that the Greeks understood the contingency of their existence as axiomatic; Gilson cautions that

\begin{quote}
What happened to a being endowed with life can be explained but by another being also endowed with life, was to the Greeks a point beyond discussion, and the fact that they felt sure of it should be to us a strong reminder not to speak lightly of Greek religion, or of the Greek gods.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Though not developed until the advent of Christianity, it seems that the individual, indeed the \textit{person}-al was enshrined in the Greek pantheon, while being excluded from Greek philosophy. Gilson notes that “the greatest among the Greek philosophers have found it very hard, not to say impossible, to reconcile their religious interpretation of the

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 12.
world with its philosophical interpretation.”41 To highlight this separation, it should be noted that, for the Greeks, ‘Fate’ and ‘Destiny’ were notions tied specifically to religion and the gods, while ‘necessity’ was tied distinctly to philosophy; the great difference being that “behind necessity, there is a law; behind Fate, there is a will.”42 That is to say, behind (or grounding) philosophy is the static, impersonal, merely causal, and behind the theological is the personal, dynamic, active, the revelatory. Listening again to the argument of Gilson, this separation of the two realms, that of the philosophical and mythological (or religious/theological) is inherently problematic. For, in the words of Gilson,

Mythology is not a first step on the path to true philosophy. In fact, it is no philosophy at all. Mythology is a first step on the path to true religion: it is religious in its own right. Greek philosophy cannot have emerged from Greek mythology by any process of progressive rationalization, because Greek philosophy was a rational attempt to understand the world as a world of things, whereas Greek mythology expressed the firm decision of man not to be left alone, the only person in a world of deaf and dumb things.43

This disjunction between faith and thought includes even the great thinker Plato, who posited (or, to be more proper, discovered) the Ideas and the world of forms, the ‘really real’ world, which was higher than the gods. Plato’s contribution to Greek thought, which was revolutionary, consisted in part of his understanding of Idea. Gilson writes that, “Man can know only that which is. Truly to be means to be immaterial, immutable, necessary, and intelligible. That is precisely what Plato calls Idea.”44 What is implicit in this discovery, for Plato, is that the world that truly exists, namely that which is most real, is the world of Forms, of Idea. It is thus by participating in the world of Ideas that man finds his authentic existence; man is only real insofar as he shares in the eternal form of Manhood. Highest among the Ideas/Forms was that of ‘The Good,’ and this was highest

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41 Ibid., 19.
42 Ibid., 19.
43 Ibid., 23.
44 Ibid., 24.
and most primary in Platonic thought because all existing things are found to be, on the ontological level, good. In his Republic, Plato writes about the Idea of Good in terms not unlike those normally ascribed to the Christian conception of God. Yet, the conundrum persists in Platonic thought, for Plato never ascribed to the Form of the Good the term ‘god.’ As in the case of Thales, we must take Plato at his word, assuming that he means what he said and said what he meant, and what he never said was that the Good was a god. Where does this leave the gods, and what might Platonic religion consist of? It seems that since his philosophical reasoning offered him a world ‘above’ the gods, he must continue to hold philosophy and religion as disparate; “It is a fact, however, that in Plato’s mind” Gilson comments, “the gods were inferior to the Ideas.” Given this fact, it seems at least fair to say that Platonic religion, that is, worship of the gods of the Greek pantheon, presents a schizophrenic problem in the light of Platonic philosophy.

Nevertheless, Plato worshipped, and admonished other men to worship. This is not to be read as a critique of Plato; rather, it is the case that, as a philosopher, Plato’s primary paradigm was that of wonder at the existence of anything in the first place. Therefore, Plato’s own discovery of the Ideas could not, for him, trump the gods, for he did not invent the gods, but received them in gratitude, as gift from those before him. The philosopher’s task, as further emphasis of the strident importance of the gods to Plato, is to take ownership of his own divinity and behave in a way pleasing to a god. Therefore, for Plato “true religion…consists in his feeling of adoration toward the innumerable gods to whom men pray and whom they invoke in their individual needs as well as in their

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46 Ibid., 27.
cities.” Still, as before in the case of Thales, it seems that the properly personal is relegated to the gods while it was excluded from philosophical consideration, even as a realm superior to the gods was established. The Greek dichotomy of gods to God is therefore perpetuated in Platonic thought.

Aristotle enters the fray in the footsteps of Plato, taking Greek metaphysical inquiry to its apex. Gilson even calls Aristotle’s contribution an “epoch-making event in the history of natural theology” as he accomplishes a “long-delayed conjunction of the first philosophical principle with the notion of god,” a feat which surpasses his master, Plato. What is at the summit of the universe understood by Aristotle is not the same as it was for Plato. For Aristotle, the Good is not supreme, but rather “a divine self-thinking thought.” In Aristotelian metaphysics, then, the philosophical and theological have wedded, as the first principle is divine and active (indeed, eternally an act of self-thinking).

However, Aristotle’s supreme god is immensely different from the former gods of the pantheon, which, ergo, are rendered irrelevant, less than divine. Although presented as eternal Act, Aristotle’s god did not make the world we inhabit, and further, “does not even know it as distinct from himself, nor, consequently, can he take care of any one of the beings or things that are in it.” This teaching of Aristotle is a tremendous and marked shift in Greek thought; compared to the previously established notion of what a god was, Aristotle’s supreme God is static, impersonal, uninvolved, and cold. From this point on, the Greeks could not rationally believe in the gods of the pantheon, and therefore that the supreme god had any stake in their existence whatsoever; Aristotle’s

47 Ibid., 29.
48 Ibid., 32.
49 Ibid., 33.
50 Ibid., 34.
god was unrelated to men in principle. Aristotle had sacrificed the partial immanence, that is, the relation to man, of the gods, and in return established the utter transcendence of the self-thinking Thought. While this is certainly to be understood as “progress” in Greek thought, it may not be an altogether positive progress; of this de Lubac writes, “Even at times when the knowledge of God seems to have made decisive progress, he is still easily conceived of as an individual with human passions, or, on the other hand, as a vague and diffused Force,” and in the case of Aristotle, God is manifest as that ‘vague and diffused Force.’ This is certainly to be noted as a place in history where various anthropomorphisms were defeated and transcended, but, perhaps, only to be replaced by “hardly more than an abstract Divine or divinized Nature.” This contribution is not entirely negative, as we shall see in the next section, and for that reason it is helpful at this point to quote a cautionary note about this development given to us by Frederick Copleston. He writes,

> Again, it might appear perhaps at first sight that the Aristotelian God, the Thought of Thought, constitutes an incompatible antithesis to the Platonic Idea of the Good, which, though intelligible, is not depicted as intelligent. Yet, since pure form is not only the intelligible but also the intelligent, the Platonic Absolute Good cried out, as it were, to be identified in the Christian synthesis at least, so that both Plato and Aristotle contributed different, though complementary, facets of theism.

This development, from Thales to Aristotle, can be understood as a quest for a balanced understanding of God’s relationship to the world (and therefore to Man). What is witnessed in the Greek saga is, firstly, a strict separation of the gods and philosophy, with the gods understood as immanent and philosophy understood as reaching toward the transcendent first principles, and secondly an impoverished (as is the argument of the current work) understanding of creaturely autonomy in relation to God the Creator.

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51 The Discovery of God, 23.
52 Ibid., 27.
What is therefore accomplished in Aristotelian metaphysics is not a true resolution to the
dichotomy; no, Aristotle simply sways the balance in favor of the transcendence of God,
and at the expense of immanence and human relationship to God.

It would do us well at this point to dwell for a moment on Greek cosmography, if
only to be able to demonstrate later on the newness of other positions, and their
departure from the understanding of antiquity. By no means an entirely full treatment,
though sufficient for our purposes here, we will quickly characterize the cosmography of
Aristotle by its division into the sublunary and supralunar realms, that is, the realms
below and above the moon. Earth, or the realm in which man resides, is situated firmly in
the sublunar realm, decidedly and permanently below (in turn) the moon, Mercury,
Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Beyond the planets there exists the
“stellatum,” or the region of the fixed stars; still beyond the “stellatum” was the “primum
mobile,” the ‘first moveable’ heaven. At the ‘top,’ so to speak, of this system was the realm
of Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover. What is pertinent to recognize is that this Unmoved
Mover exerted no external force of any kind upon what that which was below.
Movement, instead, was constituted by each thing’s own ‘desire’ or ‘longing’ for what was
above. In this system, man’s highest activity was therefore contemplation, indeed,
contemplation of God. This contemplation, it seems, would have never resulted in any
sort of dynamic relationship with man and the Unmoved Mover, given the static nature
of the Unmoved Mover, and the lack of personhood therein. Aristotle, given his
cosmography, could never have really understood reality as something like a gift from
without. This is because Aristotle has actually not departed far enough in thought from
his predecessor, Plato. For Plato, the visible world is not the true world, but much more
like a cave to be escaped at the time of death, and consequent entry and absorption back
into the world of Forms. There is then, in Plato, something like a monism of form, with matter being a sort of derivative principle that is inherently imperfect and to be escaped. Something like this sort of monism continues with Aristotle; in his cosmography, there is ever a gradation of being from top to bottom, with those beings who reside at the bottom (man, animals…matter) not being a different kind of being, but a lesser kind of being. In this system, materiality can be understood as being like diffused light, a sort of lesser derivative principle whose only purpose is to be united and absorbed back into the source. Indeed, for Aristotle, following Plato, one can’t really know any individual particular thing, but only the Form of the thing; there is still a sense that matter is intrinsically imperfect, while abstract, impersonal Form is most real. With a conception of God as primarily Self-thinking Thought, and a cosmography composed of increasing degrees of immateriality and rigidity of order, something like a personal, embodied relationship with the divine would have been utterly inconceivable for the Greeks. If materiality is merely derivative and to be escaped – if one’s selfhood is an obstacle – any sort of authentic conception of reality as being a gift or of God’s true name being Love is utterly unreachable. However, as their underlying metaphysical system was not entirely wed to their cosmography, the metaphysics of the Greeks can be later adapted, without a devastating rupture, in light of the truths of Christianity and the metaphysical cosmography there supplied. In this way, we will see that there is, in Aristotle’s thought, a sort of latent potentiality for recognizing reality and other-ness, and therefore a potentiality for fulfillment in the Christian tradition.
It takes something like the advent of Christian metaphysics to hold in paradoxical tension the notions of transcendence and immanence, and to discover even the notion of person, heretofore absent (though possibly implicit in theology) from the consideration of philosophy. What is lost in the Greek process and is later rediscovered within the context of Christian theology is the centrality of the person; indeed, Aquinas taught that the person is the apex of Being, of reality itself. Aristotle has solved the problem of irreconcilable difference between Greek religion and philosophy, though it seems he has done so at the expense of being-as-relation. In short, he has solved the problem at the expense of religion. A proper resolution to this new problem (the problem being the deposition of legitimate religion) emerges, or begins to germinate, in the thought of St. Augustine. It is to the Judeo-Christian tradition that we now turn our consideration.

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54 For, as David L. Schindler writes, “Paradox…does not sin against logic but is its most profound expression.” From David L. Schindler’s preface to The Discovery of God, X.
I.II De Deo Thomae: The Revelation of Ipsum Esse Subsistens

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Thus you shall say to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” 55 – Exodus 3:13-14

We proceed now in light of the problem that arose in the previous section, namely, the establishment of the utter transcendence of God, at the expense of God’s immanence, previously enshrined in the Greek pantheon, but rejected as a result of Aristotle’s philosophy. This ‘progress’ in Greek philosophy has made it impossible to conceive that Man, indeed even the World, might bear an intrinsic relation to the divine, and thus what was truly cast out from the realm of conception was the identity of God as Creator, and of the world as Creation.

“The Jews,” writes Étienne Gilson, “had already found the God who was to provide philosophy with an answer to its own question.” 56 The self-naming of God recorded in Exodus 3:14, indeed an essentially religious event, came to unfold as a philosophical revolution. God’s nominal revelation to Moses in the burning bush has forever required any thinker identifying as a Christian philosopher to adopt new terms of discourse, terms of tremendous import. For St. Augustine, and therefore for authentic Catholic philosophers after him, “his philosophical first principle had to be one with his religious first principle, and since the name of his God was “I am,”” which originates in Jewish religion, “any Christian philosopher had to posit “I am” as his first principle and supreme cause of all things, even philosophy.” 57 This is an utter revolution in philosophical exposition, as the personal has been wedded to the understanding of the divine, a divine that manifests as an “I” and can therefore enter into ‘I-Thou’ relations.

56 God and Philosophy, 38.
57 Ibid., 41.
with men. Augustine’s theology, with the exception of his soteriology, is robust and authentic, which is to say true, but he seems to have followed unoriginally the philosophy of Plotinus and Plato in terms of epistemology. In so doing, the conception of God used throughout Augustine’s epistemology is absent of something like true transcendence. Given that the personal was absent from any concept of the divine in the thought of both Plato and Plotinus, when Augustine effectively stamped the Trinity on top of Plotinus’s One, the ensuing model was rather insufficient for offering an authentic model of understanding man’s relationship to the divine. As Aristotle had done (though Augustine had no access to any of Aristotle’s work), we see that Augustine doesn’t seem to understand God as dynamic, that is, as active. The result of this misunderstanding is that God cannot be conceived to have granted man any sort of significant autonomy, any sort of ability to act on his own. Rather, in Augustine’s thought, since to acquire knowledge is a spiritual act, and man is inherently a material being, any knowledge that man finds himself to have cannot truly be his own; knowledge is spiritual, and therefore, any knowledge is God’s. Of this, Gilson writes that “Augustine’s implicit reasoning seems to have run as follows: Plato and Plotinus consider man as a god because man is possessed of truth; now man is emphatically not a god; hence man cannot possibly be possessed of truth.”

This is to say, in effect, that man’s thoughts are not his own, but God’s. In a spirit of continuity, Augustine attempted to incorporate whole and entire the best of Greek philosophy that came before him. This effort manifested, again, in solipsism in terms of God’s transcendence. In this interpretation of Augustine, God is not yet

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58 Ibid., 59.  
59 This particular interpretation of Augustine is sourced in the work Étienne Gilson. That being said, Augustinian scholars would more than likely object to a few of the statements recorded here. Granted this possible correction, the point remains that the Christian understanding of God’s transcendence and immanence is still in need of serious development after the work of even St. Augustine.
thought of as transcendent enough, and cannot, therefore, even be understood as properly immanent. What is lost in this misunderstanding is man’s own autonomy; man’s existence is not truly given, but only a sort of lame (dumb, partial) reflection of divine activity. Indeed, Augustine’s attitude can be summed up thusly: “it is not necessary to know the structure of the created world, as soon as one knows the Creator of it.” What is still missing, then, is a balanced relation of the transcendence and immanence of the Divine. This is an aberration of thought that flows from an embrace of Plotinian thought, but is later corrected by Thomas Aquinas. It should be noted, though, that unlike Greek thought, Augustine did have a “clear notion of what it is to create something “out of nothing.”

He had understood that God, as Creator, would necessarily exist outside of time, space, and the creaturely realm, and that God was not simply the biggest being, so to speak, in a chain of otherwise finite beings.

We examine next the emergence of Thomas Aquinas, who manages to recapitulate in his theology the most authentic achievements of Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine in his priority of esse over essence. That is, Thomas preserves in his teaching both the sheer transcendence of God as Ipsum Esse Subsistens, and in the same turn of thought upholds the radical immanence of God that is concomitant with his transcendence. Aquinas understood that God was not simply the greatest among many finite causes, as was effectively the understanding of Aristotle in his doctrine of the Unmoved Mover and the primum mobile. Rather, for Aquinas, God was the very ground of anything existing at all, not one existent among the sphere of existents, nor one instantiation of Being in the realm of the natural, but rather God is the very act of to Be

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61 God and Philosophy, 61.
itself, *Ipsum Esse Subsistens.* Therefore, not only is God wholly other – this was already proved by the Greeks (and, indeed, preserved by Aquinas) in their notion of God’s transcendence – but because of and grounded in that transcendence, God is also utterly and profoundly immanent. Aquinas can therefore say, with Augustine, that God is “interior intimo meo et superior summo meo,” or, God is “higher than my highest and more inward than my innermost self.”62 Put differently, since God is outside and the *causa continua* of the created order, he is ever-present to that order in an eternal now. Because of His profound Otherness to the created order, God is profoundly immanent, the giver and sustainer of reality as such. Gilson attributes this achievement to Thomas’s knowledge of being, and, we might add, his profound gratuity at the fact that anything should exist at all. Aquinas himself states that being (esse) “signifies the highest perfection of all,” and the proof for this is that act is always more perfect than potentiality. Now no signate form is understood to be in act unless it be supposed to have esse. . . . Wherefore it is clear that esse as we understand it here is the actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections.63

Gilson acknowledges this supremely receptive attitude of Aquinas, writing that “because his own existential metaphysics has succeeded in forcing its way through that crust of essences which is but the outer coating of reality,” an ‘outer coating’ not yet breached by the highest of Greek philosophy (Aristotle) nor the triumph of Christian theology (Augustine), “Thomas Aquinas can see the pure Act of existing as one sees the presence of the cause in any one of its effects.”64 The triumphal adage of this whole narrative in the discovery of God is the truth professed by Aquinas that “all knowing beings implicitly

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64 John God and Philosophy, 72.
know God in any and every thing that they know.” What Thomas has acknowledged is the gift-character of reality, grounded in the real distinction between God and the world. Only the true God could create something other than the true God, could create something not God. Thus we have arrived at a true understanding of creation, namely, “This act whereby “He who is” causes to exist something that, of itself, is not, is what is called, in Christian philosophy, “creation.” Highlighting the real distinction between Creature and Creator, Nicholas Healy posits that “God is not one thing among many, and creaturely being differs from him by lacking the subsistence that God has by virtue of the identity of his essence with his esse.” What is to be grasped from this teaching is that all gradations in being among created things will always be infinitely distant from Being itself; this is to say that between creature and Creator, there is an infinite abyss. On the other side of this abyss, creatures will always, no matter their difference, be closer to one another than to their Creator, who is Other, whose very nature it is To Be. We can say with Rémi Brague that, “The devaluing of the created compared to the Creator leads to a relativization of the differences in value within Creation.” To make it even clearer how this development by Thomas exceeds what had come before, David Bentley Hart writes,

The gods are beings among other beings, the most splendid beings of all, but are still dependent upon some prior reality that constitutes the imperturbable foundation of their existence. God, however, is beyond all mere finite beings, and is himself the ultimate ground upon which any foundation must rest.

The truths expounded by Thomas Aquinas represent a definitive climax in the history of what is known as natural theology; Thomas took the data of revelation, and in the light of that data (and by data, we mean here to indicate the events recorded in Holy Scripture)

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66 *God and Philosophy*, 53.
67 *The World as Gift*, 400.
performed a metamorphosis upon the philosophical system of Aristotle and Plato. This had not been done before, and, as Gilson argues, could not have possibly been done before, since

Philosophers have not inferred the supreme existentiality of God from any previous knowledge of the existential nature of things; on the contrary, the self-revelation of the existentiality of God has helped philosophers toward the realization of the existential nature of things. In other words, philosophers were not able to reach, beyond essences, the existential energies which are their very causes, until the Jewish-Christian Revelation had taught them that “to be” was the proper name of the Supreme Being.\(^7^0\)

The apex of being, knowledge, theology, and philosophy, as is finally revealed in the teaching of Thomas, is the person. The God of Thomas’s philosophy is also, most truly, the God of Jesus Christ. It must be said here that in his own work, Aquinas seems to have overly separated De Deo Uno from De Deo Trino, and so it became the task of later theologians to embellish and develop his understanding, but in a way continuous with it, and not simply as a rupture from it. Drawn from Aquinas’ teaching, we learn that Logos is a communion of Divine Persons. What Aquinas teaches us, therefore, is that Being is personal, so to speak, from ‘the ground, up.’ As such, in the Catholic tradition, Man is to be understood as the apex of creation (and Jesus of Nazareth as the apex of Man).\(^7^1\) In this model of understanding, Man is always and already related to God as creature to Creator, and is therefore never simply ‘neutral’ towards God, the Church, or his own salvation. That is, relationship is fundamental to what it means to be a human person; Man, by his very nature as created, is related to God in a way that cannot be rejected

\(^7^0\) God and Philosophy, 65.

\(^7^1\) See the following from Gaudium et Spes, 22: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.” His Holiness Pope Paul VI. "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World - Gaudium Et Spes." Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World - Gaudium Et Spes. Web.http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.
without rejecting his very self. The moderns will reject this prior relationship in claiming that the fundamental disposition of human beings is that of neutrality towards the divine and creation. By claiming neutrality as fundamental, the moderns claim to be guaranteeing the maximum amount of freedom for the human person by freeing him from any sort of primordial relationship, making his relationship to God, others, and the world primarily a matter of choice. This later, implicit claim of Liberalism (neutrality towards the divine and creation) is therefore a profound rejection of the Catholic intellectual tradition (and most certainly, therefore, not a neutral point). From the outset, meaning from the originary circumstances of human action, nothing is ever simply ‘neutral’ towards God. The relationship of creature to Creator is itself a gift. The state of existing is always and already a participation in Jesus Christ the Son’s relationship to his Father (albeit in an adopted, rather than begotten, sonship). Later thinkers, Catholics among them, will err from this discovery by either neglecting the primacy of esse (as in the case of Blessed Jon Duns Scotus, leading to a rational agnosticism), or over-emphasizing divine transcendence rather than immanence (the reverse is a similar and concomitant mistake made by William of Ockham and the Protestant Reformers), and therefore rupturing the God-World relationship in turn. What happens in modernity is not altogether different from what happened as a result of Greek philosophy, namely the emphasis on God’s utter transcendence at the cost of immanence and therefore of relationality between Man, God, and the World; as we will see, the turn of thought in the modern era towards mechanism, neutrality, and utility is the fertile ground upon which the system of thought known as Liberalism grows. We now dive, in earnest (as is the task of the philosopher and theologian, in love) into the modern turn, seeking to radically examine the grounds for our current, American mode of existence.
Part Two

II.I. The Modern Turn: Disenchanting the World

The separation of physics from metaphysics achieved by Christian thinking is being steadily canceled. Everything is to become “physics” again. – Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger\(^\text{72}\)

The modern cosmos is ethically indifferent. The image of the world that emerged from physics after Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton is of a confluence of blind forces, where there is no place for consideration of the Good. – Rémi Brague\(^\text{73}\)

The following section will be the shortest thus far, and this is because the implications of Descartes’ work will be recapitulated in our final section, specifically as it pertains to Descartes’ mechanistic worldview providing the philosophical foundation for Liberalism. Further, Thomas Aquinas and Rene Descartes were separated in time by almost 400 years, and as such it should be acknowledged that during that 400 years, many great thinkers lived and died, contributing to the dialogue that we have been engaged in. That being said, it is best, for our purposes, to situate the beginning of ‘modern thought’ with Descartes, as his thought represents the most obvious departure from Aquinas and the previous Catholic intellectual tradition.

Descartes lived in a time when there was great progress being made in the realms of physics, astronomy and mathematics. Some of these developments, it should be noted, were from his contributions. There was a contrast, for Descartes, in the progress being made in these realms versus the lack of progress being made in the realm of philosophy. This was a situation that he also wanted to contribute to, to remedy, and so Descartes set out to provide a new basis by which philosophical inquiry could be done. The starting point that he set out to find was also to provide a foundation for the physical and mathematical sciences; all sciences were to be related and grounded in the teachings of


\(^{73}\) The *Wisdom of the World*, 185.
philosophy. This new foundation begins with self-examination, and extends to an awareness of the ideas that become immediately present to the mind. Among the things that enter into consideration at this point are the various inanimate objects encountered daily, as well as plants and animals. This awareness extends to Descartes’ own ideas and beliefs, and even his awareness of his own body. Descartes then asks himself “Is it possible that in believing what I do about all of these I am deceived?” His response to this question is a resounding “yes,” which is indicative of an epistemological distrust of the power of the senses to commune with sensible reality. He cites hallucinations, the phenomenon of dreaming, and the daily mistakes of reasoning to be justifications for doubting the legitimacy of sense perception. In the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, Descartes’ conclusion from the foregoing is that:

> So on any particular occasion I may be deceived without knowing it. And it may therefore seem to be the case that on any particular occasion I cannot know that this is not one more occasion on which I am in error. Hence I must doubt the truth of all my judgments.74

What Descartes has therefore established as his method of inquiry is that of doubt. A radical, methodological doubt that will pierce the veil of what it is possible to be mistaken about, diving to the root of knowing to locate one guaranteed truth. He wonders whether or not he can be reasonably assured of the truth of any judgment made. Ultimately, Descartes does locate and grasp one ultimate truth that cannot be doubted, namely, “Cogito ergo sum,” that is, “I think, therefore I am.” This conclusion is arrived at by way of the realization that doubt can only be performed by an agent that is capable of doubting, and so if an agent is doubting, he cannot doubt that he is doubting. Realizing further that doubt is an act of thought, and that thought is performed by something that exists, Descartes guarantees his own existence by recognizing that he thinks. It is to be

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noted here that the only thing that Descartes has guaranteed, via his methodological doubt, is solely his own existence as a mind. Out of the realm of guarantee, and therefore logically separable from his existence, is Descartes’ own body. What has been established by this methodological doubt is a radical body/soul dualism. Beginning in doubt, Descartes has derived a single truth, namely that he exists as a mind, and not as a body; rather, he is a mind logically distinct from his body. Further along in his methodological exploration, Descartes determines that matter is absolutely distinguishable from mind, and therefore matter and mind are radically different from one another. What Descartes has (perhaps) inadvertently made problematic again is the “mind-body” relationship; that is, Descartes has set aside matter, and therefore exterior reality – nature, the world – as “essentially inert and inherently meaningless.” It would do us well at this point to allow David L. Schindler to parse out exactly what has been established by Descartes’ efforts. He writes,

> The heart of that understanding consists in a two-fold claim: (a) that matter is an absolute concept, something apart from, not-relative to, anything “more” like internal – formal and final – activity; (b) that nature, now absorbed into matter in this way, is whole (in any of its instances) only in the sense of being a collection which is exactly the sum of its externally interactive parts.\(^7\)

The view of reality bequeathed to the world by Descartes is, therefore, a mechanistic worldview. Without speaking here of specific thinkers who took up Descartes’ teaching and developed them, we will rather only speak generally of “Descartes’ worldview,” granting that he can be identified as a primary cause of what follows. According to the worldview Descartes constructed, mind has an absolute priority over matter, since matter possesses within itself no meaning apart from that which is imposed upon it by a viewing


There is further a separation of the human being from his body, and an identification of the human person with his mind, and never with his body. Human beings operate their bodies as a driver operates an automobile; there is a stark dualism between body and soul. With this dualism comes a paradigm of scientific, mathematical certainty as the guarantor of anything like knowledge. That is, in order to know anything at all, one must know it clearly and distinctly, as in a mathematical formula. Descartes emphasizes this way of knowing because it appears to be the most objective method possible, in that all people have the same basic capacity to make these sorts of observations by way of syllogistic reasoning. This is actually to limit reason to solely the third of its three acts (classically understood). Radically so, Descartes has changed the paradigm of philosophy and theology, demanding a method akin to those present in the empirical sciences, and has, just as radically, altered the commonly-accepted understanding of what it means to be a human being. To quote Schindler again,

...Descartes' dualism of subject and object is of a piece with a primacy of doubt, a loss of a primitively theoretical or contemplative disposition toward the object (the other), a mechanizing of the meaning of the body and matter (Aristotle’s organism becomes a machine, his psyche-soul a ghost in the machine), a reduction of wholes to the sum of their parts, a reduction of causality to the forceful activity of one thing on another, a disjunction between "facts" and "values," a "rationalizing" of the intellectual life, and a "voluntarizing" (or "fideizing") of the moral-social life.78

It is thus to be understood that in Descartes’ very mission of constructing a new starting point for the sciences, he already presupposes the content of that method; the merit of neutrality is simple accepted as given, indeed as axiomatic. This turn to the subject accomplished in Descartes' analysis actually seems to render the subject into a mechanical object. The human person is therefore understood as a mechanizing agent,

77 That is, if one even grants anything like interiority to matter after Descartes. It could be argued that the problem with mechanistic materialism after Descartes is that it is not materialistic enough; namely, it does not actually regard matter as a reality, much less the sole reality.
one from whom any inkling of subjectivity is to be evacuated. Desiring to perceive the
implications of what Descartes has done, Schindler continues,

…It is necessary to see the scope of what is involved in Descartes’ intended priority of formal
method over substantial content, in the would-be innocence of his pure formalism of method. In
fact, this priority or pure formalism of method expresses already and as a matter of principle an
ontological claim about the nature of subject(-ivity) and object(-ivity) . . . These substantial positions
together make up what Descartes is presupposing about the nature of the knower in his relation to
the object, in his very appeal to a purely formal method.

Thus Descartes’ vaunted claim of a method essentially neutral toward any ontological
content already and in principle favors an ontology which primitively separates the subject and
object and dichotomizes objectivity and subjectivity. His methodological procedure already
commits him to a worldview consisting of mechanism, to which subjectivism is then juxtaposed as
a logically necessary corollary. 79

It is this axiom of neutrality, originating philosophically in the work of Descartes,
which provides the framework for what becomes known as Liberalism. 80 What is to be
noted is that, beginning by way of a sort of “pure technique” in search of a proper
method by which to ascertain content in any of the various academic disciplines, a
definite content, meaning, and undergirding onto-metaphysical structure of reality has
been presupposed. The implications of this presupposition, which manifests as a rejection of
man’s nature, and, further still, the nature of reality, will be addressed now in the final
section of this work.

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79 Ibid., 164.
80 We find in this particular instance an example of how the teachings of philosophy manifest
practically. Indeed, in this case they provide the very framework by which even something like a culture can
be constructed.
Part Three

III.1 Metanoia: Re-cognizing the Gift

The question is whether reason, or rationality, stands at the beginning of all things and is grounded in the basis of all things or not. The question is whether reality originated on the basis of chance and necessity and, thus, from what is irrational; that is, whether reason, being a chance by-product of irrationality and floating in an ocean of irrationality, is ultimately just as meaningless; or whether the principle that represents the fundamental conviction of Christian faith and of its philosophy remains true: “In principio erat Verbum” – at the beginning of all things stands the creative power of reason. Now as then, Christian faith represents the choice in favor of the priority of reason and of rationality. This ultimate question...can no longer be decided by arguments from natural science, and even philosophical thought reaches its limits here. In that sense, there is no ultimate demonstration that the basic choice involved in Christianity is correct. Yet, can reason really renounce its claim to the priority of what is rational over the irrational, the claim that the Logos is at the ultimate origin of things, without abolishing itself? – Josef Ratzinger

“Entailed in a proper understanding of God as God is an understanding of the world as creation,” writes Michael Hanby, and this creation is “something at once distinct from God and thus possessing integrity of its own and yet intrinsically dependent in its very distinction from God upon its participation in God’s own life for its being and meaning.” It has been the burden of the previous sections of this work to parse out the development of the classical understanding of God and the World up to its rejection in the mechanistic worldview of Descartes. This mechanistic worldview has largely persisted into our current time, and what is now called Liberalism is a direct outgrowth of such a philosophy (among other factors and thinkers). Liberalism is not merely a political category; indeed, American politics is always and already Liberal. The question is not one of liberalism or conservatism, but rather of degrees of Liberalism (namely, “liberal-
Liberalism” or “conservative-Liberalism”). That is, Liberalism is itself a meta-narrative. Meta-narratives, by nature, entail an account of the whole of reality, and therefore always hold within them presuppositions on matters of theology and philosophy, as well as of anthropology. This is to say that the oft-heard claim of “neutrality” towards any one religion or philosophical school is itself a philosophical claim. Another way to say the aforementioned is that there is no such thing as neutrality when it comes to the claims of theology and philosophy; one’s relationship of contingency to God precedes one’s choice, and one’s reasoning is always performed within the context of a tradition. To this end, the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre once commented, “Liberalism is the only meta-narrative that has convinced the world that it is not a meta-narrative.”\footnote{MacIntyre made this comment during a talk on Edith Stein given at the Lumen Christi Institute in 1998. Cited in Chapp, Larry S., and Rodney A. Howsare. "David L. Schindler and the Order of Modernity: Toward a Working Definition of Liberalism,” in \textit{Being Holy in the World: Theology and Culture in the Thought of David L. Schindler} (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2011. 193-212), 207.} There is a sense in which, then, an acceptance of Liberalism is a sort-of unconscious one, as it represents the primary \textit{ethos} of American culture. The dominance of scientific mechanism and of “what works” is one of the more obvious characteristics of our Liberal society, but it is the claim of David L. Schindler that something subtler, and therefore more threatening, undergirds Liberalism.

A working definition of Liberalism in its “metaphysical core” provided by Schindler is that of a “dualism . . . between truth and freedom and between nature (reason) and grace (God of Revelation).”\footnote{Schindler, David L. "Christological Aesthetics and Evangelium Vitae: Toward a Definition of Liberalism." \textit{Communio: International Catholic Review} 22 (1995), 207. Cited in \textit{David L. Schindler and the Order of Modernity}, 196.} Presumed, therefore, in a Liberal culture is a separation between God and the World, and also a separation between Man and the World. Lost is a sense of God as Creator and Man as creature (and certainly nature as
creature). There is a dualism of matter and spirit, of Man and God, and again, a loss of God’s transcendence (and, therefore, immanence, too). The conception of God that is presupposed in Liberalism is very different from what Thomas Aquinas would have thought about God; one of the key attributes that Aquinas identifies in regards to God is his infinity. It seems to follow then that, if God is infinite, without bounds, he would affect everything, be implicated in every action, known (if only dimly) in every act of knowledge. A God not conceived as infinite and therefore affecting everything is no God at all. What is implicated by this loss? D.C. Schindler has this to say on the matter:

If God is the Creator of the world, then his existence has effective, formal, final, and indeed in some sense material significance for everything in the world, and so the affirmation of God’s existence must coincide with a particular way of thinking and speaking about, and dealing with, all the other things. If God does not make at least implicitly a difference in the way one thinks about everything that is not God, if one assumes that God’s existence is simply a “fact” that can be tidily captured in sociological data, empirically gathered, one is in fact denying God’s existence. A fervent believer may be a practical atheist.87

One might be tempted, at this point, to simply set out to correct the general conception of God in popular culture, that is, to manifest a merely moral critique of Liberal culture. This would be to miss the point, and to not address the real crux of the matter. Prior to any sort of moral establishment, there is being. What Liberalism seems to deny, at its heart, is the nature of being, and, in so doing, the nature of God. This is not a denial that can be reversed or regulated by the simple enforcement of something like Christian morality.88 To critique a culture’s morality is to critique an aspect of that particular culture, accepting as fact the implicit goodness and soundness of that culture’s

88 It is a common objection to the existence of God that God is not necessary to explain something like a humanist morality. Without parsing out what that sort of argument would look like, it is sufficient here to admit that similar moral systems to the Christian one have arisen across time and across cultures, and so a morality being Christian or not doesn’t address the real issue at hand, namely, the rejection, by Liberal culture, of its nature as created.
ontological foundations.\textsuperscript{89} This is why it is of the utmost important to get at the heart of Liberalism, to critique the culture at its roots, and to offer a \textit{radical} alternative that might preserve the realities that inevitably disintegrate in a Liberal culture. Foremost among these realities which become diminished in a liberal culture is that of \textit{difference and otherness}.

Following the lead of Descartes, Liberal culture is essentially dualistic, separating many realities that had never formerly been torn asunder. This Liberal dualism can be quickly characterized as a negation of the gift-character of reality. Dualism, as we have seen, rejects at the start any sort of primordial or original relationship with God, the world, and others. By rejecting these fundamental relationships, a view of reality develops in which is everything is simply a given, that is, a brute fact; nothing is from another, from a giver. With neutrality as a starting point, there is an implicit rejection of any sort of relationship entailed in the giving and receiving of a gift, especially devastating in this case, as \textit{what is not seen as given is one’s very existence}. Denying the given-ness of one’s own existence therefore resounds throughout one’s life, thereby constructing a paradigm of neutrality affecting all spheres of interaction (social, political, religious, economic, academic, etc.). This negation of gift manifests in a number of ways, leading to various conceptual dichotomies that, in their turn, engender practical problems. Some of these conceptual separations include: The understanding of intellect and will as having an extrinsic relation, neither fundamentally oriented to ‘the good’; the association of objectivity with scientific inquiry and scientific inquiry alone, rejecting all other forms of knowing as subjective; the separation of faith from reason (in the classical Christian

\textsuperscript{89} In regards to this particular point, the following selection from \textit{David L. Schindler and the Order of Modernity} is especially pertinent: “But stating that our nature has, as one of its moral obligations, the requirement to honor God is very different from acknowledging that nature, \textit{qua} nature, is inwardly oriented to God, i.e., \textit{to God as that which is its most proper fulfillment},” 201.
tradition, faith is considered reason’s highest manifestation); the association of rationality with methodological naturalism alone; the claim that technology is always ‘neutral,’ and that its goodness or badness (if ever considered) lies only in the way in which it is used; and the general assumption that philosophy and theology are subjective fields of inquiry, entailing a wholesale rejection of their former place as the highest sciences. The conception of Man implicit in the above is that of a primarily active agent (in the ‘state of nature’), whose fundamental responsibility is to make of the world whatever he wills. With the world conceived as simply a machine, with no sort of value in and of itself, certainly not having an inner-directedness towards a goal (a lack of teleology), and with Man as a fundamental doing thing, it follows that Man’s task is to manipulate nature as he wills.

What is absent from consideration entirely is the fact that Man himself is contingent, is not responsible for his own continued existence; Man no longer considers his existence a gift, but as simply a given, as a brute fact. In this way, Man views his own being as a rational soul operating a sort of irrational machine – his own body is considered to be a burden – and his primary mode of discovery, and only authentic path to knowledge, is that of mathematical certainty. As we saw in Descartes, Man’s primary intuition is that he is because he thinks (cogito ergo sum), and this thought-verified existence is a fundamentally solitary one. Alienated, wholly other from his own body, Man is not intrinsically related to other men. Relationship with other human beings is only “entered into” contractually, as a matter of convenience. This solitary ‘state of nature’ is a quasi-equivalent to the Biblical creation narrative, and offers a foundation for the construction of a Liberal

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90 I am entirely indebted to D.C. Schindler for this list from his Beauty and the Holiness of Mind, 24.
91 Notice even the language of “entering into” relationship. This is a stacking of the deck, so to speak, in terms of Liberalism. Only with a primary paradigm of neutrality could one conceive of a relationship with God as something to be “entered into” as if, prior to entrance, one was outside of relationship with God. This is entirely contrary to the Catholic understanding of Man’s relationship to God.
society. The prevailing method of understanding therein is that of scientific method; the prevailing relational paradigm is that of social contract; and the prevailing attitude towards metaphysical questions is that of agnostic neutrality. In principle, according to Liberal logic, metaphysical questions cannot be verifiably answered and, therefore, are of no real importance. In this instance, questions of morality are transposed into questions of utility; a man’s worth is, in this system, simply equal to his work. Adherence to this paradigm offers easy justification for practices such as euthanasia and abortion, practices that eliminate any person deemed useless or inconvenient. The question that must be asked, and precisely the question that is never asked within the system of Liberalism is this: “Is Liberalism sound in its fundamental principles, and therefore are the evils we see today mere distortions and corruptions of these originating liberal ideals or the inevitable by-product of Liberalism’s flawed metaphysical understanding of reality?”

It is the thesis of authentic Catholicism (and of the current work) that the answer to the previous question must be that Liberalism’s fundamental principles are flawed, and that, therefore, some of the obviously heinous societal disagreements (pick any hot-button issue here: abortion, gay marriage, Church and State, etc.) are not merely malfunctions of an otherwise well-working system, but are rather, and more sinisterly so, the logical developments of a system that has forgotten God. Again, it seems that founding a society upon this notion of Man’s fundamental neutrality towards reality is an outright denial of the Catholic tradition’s understanding of God who is Love, and who therefore creates a reality in that Love. In forgetting God, Liberal culture forgets Man, denies what is to be a

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92 This is precisely the sort of claim that would be denied by Liberalism; any account of Liberalism’s genesis, on Liberalism’s own terms, is considered as being simply speculative and irrelevant for practical matters.

93 Questions such as: Why is there something rather than nothing? What or who is God? What is the meaning of existence?

94 David L. Schindler and the Order of Modernity, pg. 195.
human person; Liberal neutrality, ironically, takes the form of a contradiction to Catholicism. This forgetfulness leads to a profound loss of identity; a society that denies God at its roots denies itself at its roots; without a Creator, there can be no creation. As Hans Urs von Balthasar describes the ‘soul’ of modern man in the light of Liberalism, without God, Man is *anima technica vacua*.\(^95\)

Something like a polar opposite is posited by the Christian tradition (most especially by St. John Paul II and his theological anthropology). It is the profound understanding of Christianity that God is both utterly transcendent and radically immanent, and that God, in himself, is a communion of persons (*communio personarum*). This is to say that in God there exists a community of persons, and that these persons are each distinct – different from one another – and yet united in a perfect way as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What is to be gleaned from this understanding of the Trinity is that unity itself is made possible only when difference is present. This is also to say that God can enter into relationship with something most profoundly when it is different from him; it is thus that the Christian tradition teaches that there is a real distinction between God and the World. When God creates, we can say, he truly creates something other than himself, *gifting* it a relatively autonomous existence. Our reality is not therefore a sort of derivative shadow of lesser being than God, and it is also not a machine waiting to have meaning imposed upon it. Rather, as its Cause, God is seen *in* creation. One can examine creation and discover God’s mark upon it, as effect to cause.\(^96\) Christianity also teaches that God made Man in his image and likeness, in the image and likeness of the Trinity. From the beginning, Man is oriented towards community and towards union. The

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 196.

\(^{96}\) Think here of the Five Ways of Thomas Aquinas, whereby he offers Cosmological arguments for God’s existence, examining the world as the *effect* of God’s *causative* agency.
original action of a human being, therefore, is not to enter into contractual relations with other human beings for the sake of convenience. Rather, Man’s first action is to receive his very existence from God as a gift. Indicated therein is the sheer impossibility of something like neutrality towards God; relationship with God and other human beings is always-already integral to human nature qua human nature. The same is true of the whole of creation, namely, the goal of being united with others in communion. In light of the truths that the Church offers, the Liberal claim of neutrality towards questions of metaphysics is simply false; one can never be neutral towards God, as the relationship is prior to one’s choosing.\(^97\) That this neutrality, a central claim of Liberalism’s dualistic logic, is accepted and appreciated as appropriate by the practical acceptance of the structure of American government and mainline academies, including Catholic institutions, is to embed within American culture the deepest falsehood about what it means to be a human being. The denial of God’s sovereignty as Creator, as ultimate giver of the Gift of being, is to deny the meaning of Man, of the world, of reality. This fundamental claim of Liberalism is absolutely antithetical to the most basic of truths offered by Catholicism, namely the fact that the Triune God is the cause of reality.

What must be realized is that Liberalism as such is metaphysically, ontologically, and anthropologically incompatible with the claims of Catholicism. We hold it to be implicit that the goal of any Catholic, or any Christian for that matter, is that of holiness. The consummate end of this holiness is unity-in-difference with the Trinity, and as such, Man is from the beginning oriented to communion. It follows that any ontological system, such as Liberalism, which claims to deny this fundamental orientation from the ground-

\(^{97}\) One’s behavior within that relationship is a choice, however. This is simply to say that one is either always coming or going towards God; \textit{stasis} is impossible.
up, cannot simply be embraced practically by anyone claiming to be Catholic. To put it a bit tersely, a Catholic ought not accept as legitimate any construction of an academy in which the teachings of theology and philosophy do not extend outside of that particular department; it is simply not enough to secularize the teachings of a great Christian humanist and apologist for the faith, like Francis de Sales, by way of reduction to mere aphorism his teachings and then claim to be authentically living in the Catholic humanist tradition. This is not to say that scientists and English professors need to be able to recite the *Catechism*, or indeed even that they should include its explicit content within course material, but it is to say that the general acceptance of philosophy and theology as esoteric, subjective and void-of-practical-import is decidedly not Catholic. It is the duty of any university claiming to be Catholic to allow the full meaning of God’s gratuitous Gift of existence to reality to be its fundamental and primary presupposition; Holiness is to be engendered in a structure that lives in the Truth “all the way up and down.” An environment which values technique, mechanism, profit, and expertise over and above the sanctity of its students, faculty, and staff, is an environment which takes for granted, from the outset, that sin and sanctity are extrinsic to the success of a human life, and therefore denies, from the outset, the basic presumptions of Christianity. Liberalism, and its incarnation in most academic institutions, governmental structures, and American minds is a *worldview*, which rejects the core of what it means to profess belief in Jesus Christ.

Given that the Trinity is a relation of Love, indeed, a *Logos* – an order – of Love, and that it is from the Trinity that reality flows, the deepest meaning of any life, of all things, is Love. Liberalism, in its logic, rejects this Love by claiming neutrality to be Man’s fundamental, original disposition.

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98 Jesus Christ would, no doubt, be the preeminent example of this.
We now close this work, encouraging those who read it to continue their pursuit of holiness, praying that they might ever seek sanctification in the totality of their spheres of interaction, leavening the world that yearns to be consummated in Christ. Offering a benedictory note from D.C. Schindler, we say with him that

If the world is created, and if its intelligibility includes the relation creation implies, then we falsify the meaning of things by reducing them to objects of an abstract scientific method. To know them truly, we ourselves must participate in the relation that founds their being: “Only in love, by falling in love, can we truly see the meaning of being which is love.” The intelligence, too, can – and must – “fall in love,” which means it can and must con-form to the form of love, which bears the name of beauty. And this is its holiness.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ *Beauty and Holiness of Mind*, 29.
Bibliography


