

## METAPHYSICAL AND ANTI-METAPHYSICAL

***The Prevalence of Metaphysics.*** Metaphysical or *a priori* thought can appear in countless examples where one starts from some ideas concerning X, and then proceeds to say things about X which follow logically from those original ideas, without appeal to experience. This is most often done when there are few data available, and it explains why metaphysical thinking fell into disrepute. Everything depends on whether the initial ideas as to what was essential to X were adequate or not. If they were, then the deductions that follow will be true *a priori*; if they are not, then the deductions, however logical, will be untrue. However, in ordinary life, a vast amount of metaphysical thinking always goes on, though never consciously thought of as such, simply from a need to avoid the expenditure of time and effort required for accurate data.

Clear examples of this kind of thought occur in mathematics, e.g. given that a solid figure has so many equal faces of the same kind, one can correctly deduce all its other properties from that definition. That is because in mathematics, the initial ideas are few in number, and have nothing obscure about them. But it is also possible to use this deductive mathematical method in non-mathematical realms, as where a biographer reasons deeply about what he understands of a certain person, and builds up a picture of his or her life accordingly. G.K.Chesterton has apparently done this successfully with St.Thomas Aquinas and St.Francis of Assisi, in the opinion of scholars, but in the great majority of cases,

metaphysical accounts persons or things in the natural world are wrong. Another example is where, in Eckermann's *Conversations With Goethe*, we can see that Goethe was often able to make correct statements about matters of fact of which he had no direct experience, but that was owing to an exceptionally deep intellectual grasp of the essences of things which was too rare to be imitated.

This is why this kind of thought should be avoided where empirical tests are possible, but where it is not, as in the realms of pure metaphysics and theology, one must perforce reason about things for which there cannot be any empirical data. Here one must reason *a priori* if one is to learn anything at all. This is a kind of knowledge which is needed where we can get nothing from sense-perception. Consequently, in its proper place, it is in no way a substitute for empirical knowledge, but a fundamental alternative to it.

There is, however, a notable asymmetry between the claims of these two kinds of knowledge. On the one hand, metaphysical knowledge claims to be one special kind of knowledge, while admitting the claims of others, at least as justified true belief, whereas empiricism involves an over-ambitious claim that *all* knowledge must be empirical. That claim is very hard to justify, especially as the claim "all knowledge is empirical" is *a priori* and not empirical, (because of the word "all" which leads beyond sensory limits), and is thus metaphysical in spite of itself. This position involves something self-

contradictory, besides which it is also very hard wholly to exclude other cases of reasoning from principles instead of from sense-data, as they happen so naturally. Such is the logical problem of denying the validity of *a priori* judgements based on innate ideas, extending as they usually do to classes of things too large for individual observations.

**Truth and Sense.** (11/5/06) Metaphysical thought usually begins with doubts as to whether sense perception gives us the truth. Descartes knew that both Sextus and Montaigne gave reasons for doubting sense experience, on the grounds of the "dream problem" and the "demon problem." Descartes works on the idea of the self as "a being whose whole essence is thinking," not sensation.

This kind of thought is usually rejected by both Catholic and atheistic philosophers today: in "Crossing the Threshold of Hope," Pope John-Paul II says that, to defeat rationalism, we should return to the values of the Medieval world and to the empiricist thesis that 'there is nothing in the intellect that is not first in the senses.'"

Typically, we are not told which sense experience this belief comes from, just as we are not told what sensory source there is for the belief that Christ is both God and man. Besides, no one can see the eyesight of other people or hear their sense of hearing, so why do the common sense realists believe in the sense-experience of other persons? Solipsism would therefore be an

appropriate option for such realists, which shows how little realism there is in their idea of realism. Above all, there is no hint of a sensory source for *generalizations*, which are as necessary for empiricist thought as for any other kind, unless it confined itself to statements about particular attributes of particular objects.

According to H.M.Bracken, Dualism is a problem to some people precisely because it must involve mental privacy. There would not be merely accidental or artificial barriers between individual minds and the authorities, but an ontological one; mental privacy would be part of the nature of things. Those of a power-seeking disposition are never willing to accept ideas like that, wedded as they must be to naïve or common sense realism, and this at the same time reveals the political implications of rationalism. The reality of innate ideas is very much part of this privacy as well, not least because, without them, the private aspect of the mind would serve only for the storage of sense data.

Descartes made use of innate ideas, and that, it is said, put him on the same side as Calvin, who accepted them so that there could be an innate idea of God. On the basis of mental privacy and innate ideas, therefore, the individual could be capable of a direct relation to God which would not necessarily depend on any particular religious affiliation. This shows that dualism and innate ideas belong to esoteric philosophy. For the purposes of

the exoteric, it must be held that there is nothing in us but what was put in there from our environment, and that what we are is one and the same as what we appear to be to other people, and vice-versa, the self and the ego being identical.

**Scholastic Empiricism.** (6/1/14) What I have said concerning Aquinas' argument against Plato and the innate ideas can be extended in view of a particular argument he uses, as follows:

"The falseness of this opinion [Plato's innateness thesis] is clearly proved from the fact that if a sense be wanting, the knowledge of what is apprehended through that sense is also wanting. Thus a man who is born blind can have no awareness of colours. This would not be the case if the soul had innate likenesses of all the intelligible things." (*Summa Theologica* I,Q.lxxxiv art.3, J.F.Anderson tr.)

If we presuppose that our only source of knowledge is sense perception, and knowledge cannot occur in any other forms, then of course it would mean that a man who was blind from birth would not know colours. But this does *not* prove that we have no innate ideas, because that was assumed when it was said that the blind man knows nothing of colours. Conversely, if in fact we do have innate ideas, the blind man *will* have knowledge of colours; the fact that he does not identify them with the names we give them does not detract from any innate knowledge he may have of them.

In short, this argument is a standard case of question-begging, which can escape notice because what it concludes with coincides completely with what materialistic common sense thinks in any case. It is sure to be received sympathetically by the great majority who fail to see why common sense should be challenged.

In any case, the denial of innate ideas is a practical absurdity, because the task of imparting knowledge to minds that were really blank slates would be almost impossible; truth and nonsense would be equally satisfying and therefore inseparable. Besides, the possibility of recovery of sight gives factual support to the idea of innate ideas, for without them, it would do one no good to recover his sight, for in that case, optical sensations would have nothing to connect with in the mind, and they would be as useless as words in an unknown language. It is curious that Aquinas' argument against innate ideas coincides with the empiricist view of reality given by Locke. Somehow, one was expected to make a standard out of common sense and at the same time maintain Christian doctrines, without any thought as to how far those doctrines are from common sense.

(3. 19. 14) One clear implication of the denial that there was anything in the intellect except what was first in the senses is that the self is one and the same with its ego. This is because the intellect's transcendence of sense would necessarily raise it above the level of the ego, as one would expect it to do in the light of the doctrine that man is made in the Divine image. This issue

makes it clear that Aquinas saw that an empirical idea of knowledge was a necessary implication of his adoption of Aristotle's philosophy, its destructive effects on Christian doctrines were to emerge in the following centuries, most prominently in Luther's doctrine. Luther simply took the Scholastic sidelining of metaphysics at its face value, but even that was not enough to turn Catholics against Aristotelianism.

This naturalization of doctrine, besides equating persons with their observable egos, also had negative consequences in the realm of ethics. Catechisms may deny that the end can justify the means, but why should one accept that, if principles do not transcend the level of

the senses? Similarly, the truth of a belief can easily be equated with the extent of its influence in society, if only empirical and pragmatic criteria are involved. Most people believe that in any case, along with the assumption that the majority is always right.

***The Metaphysics of Belief in God.*** (8. 4. 16) For belief in God, the primary issue is not that of proofs of God's existence, not because faith is meant to be subjective, but because there is *an innate idea of God* in us all, (which can be equated with Plato's Form of the Good), just as we all have an innate idea of truth. On this basis, Anselm's proof of God must be valid. Aquinas was at least consistent in rejecting this proof, along with innate ideas in general, so that he had to rely on rationally-constructed proofs of God's existence, e.g. the argument from Contingency.

Awareness of other and different selves awakens an idea which does not come from the senses, namely the idea that different selves have an order among themselves. This order connects with the innate idea of God as the greatest among them. There can nevertheless still be particular proofs of the existence of God, because God is an idea in a unique category, the presence of which leaves its marks on the manifest world. On the other hand, Truth is solely an innate idea because any proof of its existence would have to be recognized as *true* at each stage before the conclusion was reached.

(It is sometimes said that we do not need a word for "true" because we can just as easily say that something is "so" or "the case," but the effect of those words depends on our idea of truth. Statements that are said to



be "so" or "the case" can easily be mere affirmations that the statements were in fact made, whether true or false).

Aquinas' rejection of innate ideas or Forms in the intellect had the unintended effect of reducing belief in God to a matter of subjectivity, as with belief in ghosts, vampires, fairies, or Martians, which is irreverent to put it mildly. If there is nothing in the intellect which was not first in the senses, it would follow that *God could not be in anyone's intellect*, since empirical or sensory knowledge of God is impossible. If God were unknowable, therefore, theology could only be about rational constructions applied to representations of God, which is hardly suitable for "the Queen of the sciences."

This denial of an innate idea of God has also the effect of excluding a direct or "naturally supernatural" relation between the average Christian and God. It would also mean that the faith of simple, illiterate people had no intellectual basis, but could only be a matter of emotion and social compliance. This retreat from intellectuality could only mean an increasing subjectivization of faith and an increasing dependence on social rules; thus culture trumps intelligence.

It can be seen from this that denials of the metaphysical content of faith must marginalize the faith of simple believer, and make the faith the property of a literate class, with divisive consequences. The Reformation was, among other things, a populist revolt

against this situation, despite the fact that Luther had no time for metaphysics. He solved the problem by the lower route, that of a cult of equality for all, regardless of its spiritual basis.

***Depth or Flatland.*** Some minds have feel intuitively the truth of the idea that the world of our common everyday experience is a surface without depth, and they feel trapped if they cannot find any confirmation of their view of reality. They instinctively see and feel the falsehood of Empiricism. At the risk of stating the obvious, this dimension of depth is the only home of metaphysical knowledge, and its reality can be grasped before one can grasp that of any of the particular issues of philosophy. Such was the order in which I became aware of such things, and that is doubtless common to a large number of others who may never succeed in articulating it. This is, equally, the realm in which God must be sought and found, at least when one has been introduced to an idea of God by one's own religious tradition. It cannot, in any case, be equated with God, except by a Pantheism which chooses to ignore some of the Divine attributes.

The denial of this dimension of depth results in what could be called the Flatland Antivision, because it is the denial of the naturally supernatural vision of the intellect. It prevails in conjunction with common sense and the least demanding idea of knowledge in assuming that the appearance of the world as a surface without

depth is perfectly real as it stands and is even self-sustaining. In short, this is the assumption that appearance and reality are one and the same, which is in sharp opposition to both religion and philosophy, but it persists because most people foolishly build their happiness on it whenever conditions are tolerable.

However, although both religion and metaphysical philosophy assert a difference between appearance and reality, the sense of metaphysical depth has an ambivalence in relation to religion: it causes one to be strongly drawn to religious belief, but it also causes one to be resistant to it at the same time, because of the human conditions under which it exists. Religions are inevitably altered by the fact that the majority of those with religious belief are content with the Flatland Antivision nearly as often as are unbelievers, because it can be easily combined with a professed belief in God when one has no interest in the requirements of logic. What is worse, religious minds can be even more attached to it than are unbelieving ones, owing to a perceived need to create a unity of outlook among the faithful at almost any price.

In any case, a collective unity of outlook is only possible on the basis of the most commonly-held idea of reality, and that is the one least likely to be valid. Such is the situation which grates against the central idea of reality with which the philosophic mind is necessarily involved. Those who see through the

Antivision may thereby have their insight reduced to nothing by those who neither see through it nor believe that there would be any point in doing so.

Another reason for the philosopher's resistance to the commonly-held idea of reality lies in the way in which his kind of vision affects the idea of sin. The orthodox religious position is that, ideally, man needs to have more faith and to avoid sin, and that that should suffice, no matter what one takes for reality. Insight into the dimension of depth shows that this is just a half-truth taken for the whole truth. Sin and unbelief are essentially *effects* of the Flatland Antivision, that is, they are the effects of our basic epistemic problem, not the causes of it.

Where faith is concerned, the Antivision idea of the real world as a surface without depth is necessarily atheistic, because God cannot be known empirically, but only in the dimension of depth. Weakness of faith can always be aggravated by the common sense belief that the two-dimensional view of reality is a complete one. Attempts to teach revealed religion and its values with the assumption that everyone rightfully believes in the Antivision is practically unavoidable, but it gives rise to some strange conflicts which can create the impression that there is something confused about religion itself. The main conflict is the way in which a consciously metaphysical mind is naturally drawn to religion while being given grounds for resistance to it at the same time.

The resistances and evasions of the anti-metaphysical mindset are also manifest in a belief that the world of sense-perception is wholly real, publicly and independently real. It is taken as independently real to the point of being self-caused: thus one's perception of a black hat would be caused by nothing more than a black hat, while the perception is exactly the same for everyone else. In this way, the distinction between objective realities and personal responses to them is ignored, despite the fact that this flies in the face of everything known to science about the effects of molecules and sub-atomic particles. This position is held with a determination which has something basically biological about it, rather than philosophical, so the religion cannot be disengaged from it.

***Historicism and Pragmatism.*** Another issue related to the above is that of Historicism, the idea that what is right inevitably wins the day. Marxism is a prominent example of that way of thinking about history, but it is far from being the only one. The fact that history is inevitably winner's history gives rise to the obvious circularity that right must have prevailed when the party one believes in has prevailed. On this basis, a never-ending series of innovations are accepted because they were striven for successfully, or merely because they were the latest things to appear. For this reason, the nature of the real world becomes progressively harder to discern with the passage of time, until the Apocalypse is inevitable.

When the same process involves successive adaptations of a revealed religion to social reality, the original purpose of religion is hidden or even reversed. The Law of Unintended Rewards (see Anthony Flew) ensures that a profane world is shored up by the religion which was intended to transform it. Under such conditions, Christianity is always in danger of losing its true identity, because its adaptation to society means it must share the prevalent idea of truth, which is today automatically and unthinkingly that of empiricism and pragmatism.

However, the essential Christian truths were never empirical or pragmatic, but live by the light of the intellect, as is also the case with Platonism. By the modern standard of truth alone, therefore, no one could be blamed for denying the truth of Christianity, along with every other truth which involves a deep distinction between appearance and reality.

The dogmatic equation of appearance with reality is also the source of Historicism, with its denial of the separation between the realm of facts and that of values and principles. If the broadest category is that of materialism, its principal components are certainly those of empiricism, pragmatism, and historicism, which are all closely related by nature. The adaptation of religion to the values of society can be given some justification on the basis of historicism, but only at the price of reducing religion to public morality and utility.

***Two Pillars of Anti-metaphysic.*** There is a remarkable parallel between two positions which are in effect institutionalized:

Firstly, the usually unspoken first principle of evolutionism, that an entire series of events in space and time was caused by an event in space and time.

Secondly, the equally unstated premise that the world as one perceives it is what causes one so to perceive it and causes everyone else so to perceive it in exactly the same way.

To take the first of these, it enables one to see why evolutionary explanations have no power to explain anything. For example, an evolutionary-type explanation of why I am sitting here would go as follows: I walked across the room, stopped near the chair, turned my back to it, and bent my knees until it supported my weight. This whole series would, on these terms, be caused by my entry into the room or house where the chair was.

All evolutionary explanations can be shown to be as empty as that, and the reason is not far to seek: they make no reference to either intelligence or purpose, but instead remain focused on a collection of sense-objects which must be equally perceptible to most animals. However, this exclusion of intelligence as such suffices to make evolutionary theory a bastion of anti-metaphysic. The sense-world thus appears all-sufficient.

(ref. Ch.2 of *"Keys of Gnosis"* and the Introduction to *Self and Spirit*, and the Introduction to *Person, Soul and Identity*.)

25. 10. 14 The belief that the series of events in space and time is caused by an event in space and time is a typical anti-metaphysical position, because it implies that it is a waste of time to seek any cause outside the world of sense, but without putting it in so many words. Instead, it tries to make thought move in a circle, so that one will not cross the bounds of common sense. This is paralleled by another pillar of the Flatland Antivision, namely, that the world as one perceives it is caused by the world as one perceives it; that it causes us so to perceive it, and causes everyone else to perceive it in just the same way as we do. One's perception of, say, an orange would be caused by an object with all the properties one finds in an orange.

This too is a way of eliminating the metaphysical dimension, by making sense-objects to be self-sufficient, and in effect self-caused. If the world as one perceives it really was the cause of our seeing it thus, and of everyone else perceiving it in the same way, it would mean that all the input we get from other people was occasioned by things in the world-as-one-perceives-it as much as our responses would be occasioned in the same way.

One's relations to other persons would be in exactly the same context as their relations to oneself, and each person would be known completely in the context of a sense-world which was supposedly common to all. In this case, everyone would be fully defined by their egos, which as much manifest to our own perceptions as to those of others. As empirical and relational entities, we would



not *have* egos but rather *be* egos, and the soul would be irrelevant. In this case, as much as in the evolutionary one, the answer to the problem of original causality is equated with the problem itself, as is always the case with question-begging.

The delusion involved in this, that we are all entities held in a single container, consists in what is believed about the nature of the container, not in the idea of the container as such. As ensouled beings, we are no doubt all contained in a metaphysical whole, or reality as known by God, but the delusion is that of equating this kind of container with the sense-world. That world can only contain the physical egos of persons, and very little else; whole persons, never.

Conversely, the content of the true container would be the whole range of the physical, psychical, and spiritual orders, and therefore it must contain the sum of all the individual worlds as represented in the souls of all beings. This allows large realms of individual autonomy which are unintelligible to those whose thinking is fixed at the sense level. In the great majority of persons, such realms are unrealized and ignored, despite the interior slavery that results from this, while they pursue what they believe to be their self-interest.

14. 11. 14. ***Anti-Metaphysics in Religion.*** For the Catholic Encyclopaedia, common sense knows all about the nature of reality or, at very least, all we ever need to know about it. Thus philosophies like that of Platonism

which criticise common sense beliefs are taken to be invalid. That response would naturally imply a belief that there could not be any reality other than that of this world, which would be a strange belief for persons whose thought must by definition be centred on God and Heaven. Instinctive materialism dies hard. There is, therefore, no attempt to explain how common sense supports miracles, Trans-substantiation, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the two natures of Christ, the Resurrection, the perpetual virginity of Mary, and the Immaculate Conception.

Platonism departs from common sense on at least three issues: the independent reality of the Forms or universals, and the dependent condition of their material instances as known to the senses. This inverts the common sense order, for which the greatest concreteness is that of material objects. Closely related to that, there follows the idea that the difference in concreteness between soul and body is owing to the greater concreteness of the soul, thereby again inverting the common sense order.

This position of Platonism results from a very simple problem: we know that we have knowledge, but we also know that the sense world never gives us anything exact enough to be more than opinion and approximation. The Platonic resolution of this problem is that the objects of knowledge are beyond the senses, even though they have the power to cause things experienced by the senses.

Because the point of view of common sense is always

that of sense-perception, the self or person is always conceived as a small object in a huge container. That is the standard view of materialism, but for Christian thought it is no better than perverse. If, with Platonism, one takes the point of view of the soul as distinct from the ego, one's view of the self is the exact opposite: the soul is the container in which the world and the egos of all persons are contained. True personal identity would be the sum total of this with the self of common sense. The difference between the perspectives of soul and sense is an extreme one, so that one or other of them must be false if taken for the whole truth.

Common sense thinking is necessarily empiricist and exclusive of *a priori* conceptions, while all the essential Christian doctrines depend on metaphysical realities beyond the possibilities of the empirical, no matter how their presence may be made manifest in history. Thus a common sense philosophy is of no use for Catholics, with its assumption that the intellect cannot reach anything above the sensory level, and is fit only for sorting out workaday practical matters.

The idea that common sense is more valid than any conception which criticises it is itself a philosophical position, and needs to be defended. That does not in fact happen, because it would require us to entertain at least theoretical doubts about common sense, and locate it among other constructions of the mind.

The exclusion of metaphysics in favour of a common-sense empiricism has led inevitably and quite logically

to Modernism, but even the severest critics of Modernism do not appear to notice that it has resulted from anything wrong with the official ways of thinking. In reality that thinking has gradually become increasingly empirical and humanist, ignoring the fact that metaphysics and religion both originate at the same point: this is where the mind grasps the fact that true reality and the sensory appearances of things are not the same, and are in many cases far apart, even though they may coincide in some things.

After this, the ways usually diverge, between those who take this first insight as an endorsement of the intellect and its primacy in relation to the external world, and those who take it to indicate a higher reality, above even the intellect. The former pursue the difference between appearance and reality on a theoretical level, while the latter take it practically, identifying it with the work of God. This may or may not include the intellect.

These two ways are those of the philosopher and the religious believer, and they may or may not coincide in the same person. There is no reason in principle for conflict here, but there usually is in practice, because their common origin naturally implies that the philosopher should believe in God, and that persons of faith should learn philosophy.

However, the typical problems are that philosophers usually fail to see that religious teachings are not intended to be philosophy, and cannot be verified in the

same way, while religious believers usually think that philosophy is simply not practical. Not being philosophers, they do not know what constitutes practicality in religion or spirituality, and so they relate it to some contingent need or other. What is practically desirable is thus equated with what is practically desirable in the opinion of most people, and uncritical common sense is in control, despite the fact that the contents of Revelation have nothing to do with common sense. What draws the philosopher to religion for reasons of principle can cause him to be resistant to it for accidental reasons.

(20. 11. 14) The essential practical need of religion is the discovery of relations between faith and reason, because that is needed to prevent it from declining into formalism. Formalism can be practiced with conviction and passion, in the belief that the irrationality involved in this must increase its merit, at least by those who can ignore the need for deeper forms of understanding. Exoteric religion relates mankind (the immanent in the immanent) to God (the Transcendent in the transcendent). However, this necessary relationship must always be incomplete without the transcendent in the immanent, or immanent transcendence, because different orders of being are necessarily joined by mean terms.

This immanent transcendence is a direct consequence of the scale of different realities which inhere in the human state, and the philosophical act is accordingly the study of the most universal ideas with their relations to

the external world in which they are manifest. In this way the world is known as contained in the self, reversing the commonsense view of the self as contained by the world. The true self has the combination of these two perspectives, so that it could be represented by a Star of David, with one triangle with its apex uppermost, and the other with its base uppermost. Such is the union of opposites in man by which he can be the mediator between God and nature, whence all attempts toward the fuller actualization of this possibility cannot fail to be the Will of God. Here metaphysics joins itself most clearly with spirituality, and for this reason philosophy cannot be simply equated with a human cultural activity when it is a dimension of the spirit and the realm in which the essential purpose of creation is realized.

(Continue from 25. 11. 14)