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### John Paul II on "Faith and Reason" [\(1\)](#)

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#### 1. Faith and Reason

##### 1.1 The Catholic tradition

'Faith and Reason' is the topic of my conference. It is also the title of Pope John Paul II's encyclical issued in September 1998. An encyclical is a letter addressed by the Pope to the bishops and faithful of the Roman Catholic Church and is an action of the *Magisterium* or teaching leadership of the Church. The encyclical, [\(2\)](#) '*Fides et Ratio*,' is a highly personal essay in the spirit of John Paul's book, *The Acting Person*, and the two chapters of the Second Vatican Council which he helped to write, *Dignitatis Humanae* on human freedom, and *Gaudium et Spes* on the pastoral constitution in the world. [\(3\)](#) It is unusual in that it has a reflective and searching tone in contrast with the teaching and expository tone of most papal encyclicals. It does not claim to lay down new Catholic doctrine, although it refers copiously to the ecclesiastical tradition that there is one Truth that integrates natural and supernatural knowledge. While holding that neither the contents of nor the evidence for divine revelation are accessible either to pure philosophy or to the methods of experimental science, it assumes that faith -- Christian faith in divine revelation -- is not irrational.

This is the standard Roman Catholic tradition. In the theological spectrum of Christianity in America, it is in conflict mostly with Pietism. Pietism is the position that religious faith is the response to private religious experience or 'born-again' religious 'enthusiasm,' something that is not subject to rational analysis or

open to public scrutiny and judgment. For this reason, as both James Burtchaell(4) on the Catholic side and David Hollinger(5) on the secularist side agree, that theology has always had a precarious place among the disciplines, even in the older religiously affiliated colleges and universities in America. Even this was lost when theology was challenged from an intellectual point of view by Enlightenment oriented natural scientists, led by a coalition of Deweyite Pragmatists and refugee academics trained in the natural sciences who emigrated from central Europe. Catholics, almost alone among major Christian denominations in America, defend the rationality of faith, a rationality that must be able to transcend judgements about this life, this world, and history itself.

In this encyclical, John Paul states that the Church needs an adequate philosophy of *truth* and *being* within which the truth and being of the Christian revelation can be presented, explored, and argued. He also claims that the academy has need of such a philosophy to expound the 'fullness of truth' about physical nature and human beings, cosmos and culture. Such a philosophy, he says, is a 'metaphysics.' I will return later to what this term might mean for the context of the encyclical.

Let me consider the two terms that enter into the title of the encyclical: 'faith' and 'reason.'

## **1.2 Faith**

Faith is Christian faith, the human response to a supernatural divine intervention in everyday life occurring in human history. The supernatural events towards which Christian institutional faith turns, took place in the world. They are a part of human history, though what we know about them in this and other respects may be more limited than we currently think. However, as historical events, they are 'real,' and support the kinds of

exploration and analysis that we give to real events, including philosophical analysis.

Institutional Christianity is based on sources that are divinely inspired. Among them are the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament writings. These are addressed to the community of faith and interpreted by a tradition that uses human reason in solidarity with the authentic religious leadership of the Church, namely, the *magisterium* comprising the bishops and theologians in union with the Pope. The four gospels and the other books that form the canon of the New Testament are the primary texts in which the early Church preached to hearers of the Word the salvific events as meaningful within the language, history, and cultural circumstances of their time, thereby carrying out the command that Jesus gave his apostles, 'Go, teach all nations.'

A close study of the gospels reveals the following. 1. Each of the gospel books is multiply redacted from a variety of partially overlapping sources. Each was intended for a particular audience and had its own particular agenda. The three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are diverse among themselves and very different from the fourth gospel, the Gospel of John, the Beloved Disciple, which differs from all three synoptics in its tone and message. 2. In the gospels, then, we have inherited four late first century texts composed and redacted by different apostolic preachers addressed to four different early Christian communities. 3. Though the gospel presentations are several and different, they intend, nevertheless, one theological Truth, one theological Salvation, and one theological Savior, Jesus Christ. In short, turning now to philosophy, not only is the object of Christian faith presented as ontologically 'real', but its truth, as told in the different gospels, though various, is nevertheless, fundamentally one. Is the

oneness of the theological Jesus Savior a metaphysical one? If so, in what kind of metaphysics? Is the oneness of the theological Truth about the Savior an epistemological one? If so, in what kind of epistemology? I'll return to these questions later. The theological content of the Christian message encounters today multiple sticking points -- the evolution of man, the meaning of life, suffering, moral evil, immortality. In particular, there is the Christian positing of life after death, often interpreted, but not without some controversy, as the final fulfillment or failure of each human individual. In practical life, perhaps the greatest sticking point is the enjoining of a moral code that demands unconditional love for other people, even strangers, even when to do so would put one's own welfare in danger. All these elements of Christian faith introduce puzzles that seem to be unresolvable by pure human reason within today's academic philosophy. At least to the modern philosopher, these lay claims that seem to be suspect of mystification, myth-making, and superstition.

### **1.3 Reason**

Returning to the title of John Paul's encyclical 'Faith and Reason,' the second term is 'reason'; by it John Paul means philosophy, the principal home of reason in the academy. The encyclical is John Paul's attempt to open up a dialogue between the institutional Church and the institutional academy, for, as he says, the Church needs reason to articulate the fullness of the truth about religious faith and the academy needs faith to articulate the fullness of truth about human life, culture, and the natural cosmos. What, however, is *reason*? For John Paul, *reason* is divided. As the Pontifical writer of the encyclical, he ties reason to the discourse that was shaped by the institutional Church over two thousand years when it first began to address

the topic of 'reason' and 'faith.' This was in answer to the question posed by Tertullian as early as the second century, 'What has Athens got to do with Jerusalem?' The traditional answer to this question today is scholastic metaphysics, about which more later. However, as a former professor of philosophy, John Paul was accustomed to the discourse of philosophy as it was practiced in Poland - in his case, phenomenology. And yet another discourse stems from the ancient older use of philosophy as a spiritual exercise. Among these three, scholastic metaphysics has been privileged for the past one thousand years and John Paul's discourse, as one would expect, massively reflects its use.

#### **1.4 Philosophy as a spiritual exercise or as a metaphysics**

How did the Church come to have such an affinity for scholastic philosophy? Pierre Hadot, [\(6\)](#) Professor of Classical Antiquity at the Collège de France, in his book, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, points out that for the first millennium of the current era early Christian writers did not regard or use philosophy as a metaphysics in the medieval or modern sense. For them it was rather a spiritual exercise on the model of Socrates and the ancient Platonic and Stoic writers who presented the philosophical life as a way of seeking spiritual wisdom, that is, a way of living a good life and dying a good death. Only in the second millennium did classical Greco-Latin philosophy [\(7\)](#) take on the role of an Aristotelian science the goal of which was to define the First Principles of all things knowable in a timeless and objective way. From this later development came scholastic philosophy the purpose of which was to vindicate for all human beings the rationality and consistency of God's Creation as revealed by God's twofold Revelation, in the Book of Nature and in the Book of Scriptures

Scholastic philosophy, then, provided the Church with a privileged philosophical language, Christian metaphysics, that served a new purpose, to fix permanently and objectively in propositional language, the truths of faith, and this new purpose tended to overshadow its older traditional role as a spiritual exercise. It put at the disposal of the Church a toolbox of philosophical grammar and vocabulary suitable for standardizing expressions for the sacred meanings implicit in the heterogeneous sources of Christian doctrine and it offered the Church a Christian *philosophia perennis*, claiming universal and timeless validity over all phenomena, natural and supernatural. It offered at the same time a secure institutional medium of communication within the Church, a universal *lingua franca* with the help of which the core Christian theological message could be preserved and transmitted without distortion over extended times, places, and peoples. Moreover, it could be used as an instrument for testing and maintaining orthodoxy. We often hear it then called 'Catholic Philosophy.'

### **1.5 Metaphysics as the 'institutional philosophy' of the Church**

In sum, metaphysics became, what should be called an '*institutional philosophy*', by which I mean what sociolinguists call, the internal 'discourse' of a community or institution. This is the character of the discourse necessary for the maintenance of its cultural identity and for the efficient planning and implementation of its activities. Every institution has its own internal 'discourse.' Let us listen to sociolinguist, James Paul Gee(8): such discourses have five important characteristics: 1. they are inherently 'ideological' ... [and] involve a set of values and viewpoints in terms of which one must speak and act'; 2. they are resistant to internal criticism and self-scrutiny; 3. they

lead to discourse-defined positions ...[that] are taken also ... as standpoints in [their] relation to other, ultimately opposing, discourses; 4. any discourse concerns itself with certain objects and puts forward certain concepts, viewpoints and values at the expense of others; and 5. discourses are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society which leads to dominant discourses and dominant groups.

Every institution has its institutional discourse, whether it is the Red Cross or the Federal Government, an academic discipline or a scientific research group, a TV series, such as NYPD, or the Roman Catholic Church, it has an institutional discourse, and this is fundamental to its identity. Each institution 'owns' its own institutional discourse. This, of course, leads to tension between tradition and adaptation within the institution, between the forces of conservation and the forces of evolution and change, and between the old guard and the new guard. It also leads to problems of intercommunication among different institutions.

## **2. 'Fides et Ratio': The Encyclical**

With these considerations in mind, let us look at the encyclical.

**Fides et Ratio** is about the harmony between human reason and Christian faith, and the necessity for faith to ground human reason in order that the harmony between freedom and truth be maintained. This was disrupted by modernity and it is imperative that the harmony be restored (5, 6). The theme of the failure of modernity looms large in John Paul's thought. The disruption of reason it caused in the 20th century is evidenced (he says elsewhere), on the one hand, by Communism and Nazism which derived tyranny from an ideology of truth, and, on the other, by the free-market societies of America and Western Europe which derive skepticism from a utilitarian conception of freedom. This opposition can be overcome within

the context of Christian faith, and modernity's benefits can be enjoyed in the spirit of a re-defined responsible freedom that is oriented towards the 'Absolute Good' which is the possession of 'Absolute Truth.' Only this can give a secure guarantee of responsible human freedom. Under these abstract terms, 'Absolute Truth' and 'Absolute Good,' John Paul means very concretely Christ and God as discoverable in the course of everyday human experience. Again and again, he repeats, Christ and God are found in the 'things of everyday life'[\(9\)](#) as the objects of one's supreme personal commitment in faith and love. To the contrary, they are not discoverable by philosophical or scientific argument[\(10\)](#) stemming from the question, 'Does God exist?' -- they are not, nor do they follow from, theories about the existence of God. However, once discovered as 'real' in everyday life, as making demands on everyday intellectual and moral life, Absolute Truth and Absolute Good need to be enfolded into philosophical reflection and inquiry. Philosophy as a discipline should be open to embrace them, and a philosophy open to them is richer and more comprehensive than one that is not.

Where is such a philosophy to be found? Quoting the Wisdom books inspired by Hellenistic philosophy of the later platonic schools, John Paul says, 'reasoning about nature, the human being can rise to God' (19). He finds the same theme in St. Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, about which he says, 'through all that is created the "eyes of the mind" can come to know God' (22). This is exemplified only in a philosophy in which the revealed truths of faith and the truths of reason can be together in harmony.

Summarizing what the encyclical says about philosophy: John Paul's preference (80-82) is for scholastic 'metaphysics' with roots in the 'world of Greco-Latin thought' (72) and transformed

by the work of Bonaventure, Anselm, and Aquinas. Note the characteristics he applies to 'metaphysics': as knowledge it is certain (27), universal (56, 27), absolute (27, 56), perennial (27, 95), final (27), based on public authority (32), transcendent (44), objective (44, 56), disembodied (30) expressed in 'human language [that] embodies the language of God' (93). It is the search for the kind of truth 'attained by the speculative powers of the human intellect' (30) the content of which is objective,<sup>(11)</sup> universal (true for everyone always, and truly expresses the essence of things),<sup>(12)</sup> and absolute (context-independent), and ultimate<sup>(13)</sup> It is a *metaphysics*, a perennial philosophy, that refers to 'the transcendent and the absolute.' This is a term that John Paul uses for God or Christ (22). The content of this metaphysics is, using modern technical philosophical terms, theoretical, transcultural, transtemporal.

The encyclical goes on to say that there is no 'official Catholic philosophy.'<sup>(14)</sup> Philosophy is a work of human reason alone, not of revelation. At the same time, he notes, that 'in preaching the Gospel Christianity first encountered Greek philosophy.' While 'this does not mean at all that other approaches are precluded' (72), he privileges 'the providential Greco-Latin inculturation' of the Christian Church (72). In particular, he makes clear that this 'providential Greco-Latin inculturation' of the Christian Church is the use of 'metaphysics' in theology and in the life of the Church. Furthermore, when John Paul asks other Christian cultures to respect 'the providential Greco-Latin inculturation' of the Christian Church, he means giving *metaphysics* a privileged place and, given the long association between Christian spiritual theology and scholastic philosophy, it is understandable that he has a preference for scholastic philosophy. Metaphysics, however, makes an additional claim.

Having as its object 'all that is,' it can claim to be the principle of integration of all human knowledge. To quote John Paul, 'The segmentation of knowledge, with its splintered approach to truth and consequent fragmentation of meaning, keeps people today from coming to an interior unity. How could the Church not be concerned by this?'(85)

### **3. Commentary: internal and external discourses**

#### **3.1 Dominant discourse of scholastic metaphysics and neothomism**

The dominant discourse of the encyclical is scholastic metaphysics which had its high point in the 13th century with Anselm and Thomas Aquinas. From the 14th century on, scholasticism developed -- some would say, declined -- into a variety of materialistic or pantheistic rationalisms and empiricisms that prepared the way for the scientific revolution. These last turned out eventually to have a greater affinity with the internal discourse of the new science than with the internal discourse of Christian theology. Then, in the latter half of the 19th century, Catholic scholars feeling themselves challenged by the forces of a largely anti-Christian modernity that, nevertheless, legitimized itself as the successor to late scholasticism, returned to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas in order to recapture scholasticism's Christian roots for a modern world. This Neothomism was praised by John Paul in his encyclical (58, 74) where he singles out some of its better known scholars, such as Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain, for praise. He omits, however, to mention much that he might have used to ground the kind of openness to modern scientific methods in the study of scripture and early Christian sources that he nevertheless clearly supports from the evidence of the encyclical and of his other writings. Particularly puzzling is his

silence about the significance of the neothomist Bernard Lonergan who drew out from Thomas Aquinas a method of cognitional analysis that sowed the seeds of a dialectical metaphysics and a hermeneutic and historical approach to theology and science. Perhaps, this was judged to be at this time too great a challenge to the traditional tone of ecclesiastical discourse. Such changes take time.

### **3.2 Discourse of phenomenology of the Lifeworld**

That the predominant scholasticism of the encyclical does not say all about John Paul's complex understanding of the relationship of faith and reason can be shown by turning to John Paul's own life and looking for the traces of the influences that shaped his philosophical and theological vision. The first is phenomenology. When he was a professor of philosophy in Poland his own style of discourse was not that of scholastic philosophy, but of the phenomenologies of Husserl and Scheler. Phenomenology is characterized by a turning away from scholastic or theorizing metaphysics in favor of a return to everyday life or the Lifeworld, where truth and values are local and joined in perception and action, and where the relevance of experimental data produced by theory-laden practices in science are judged by the free and local assent given to them. John Paul's emphasis throughout the encyclical on the 'things of everyday life,' where God and Christ manifest themselves, reflects the Pope's complementary use of phenomenological discourse amidst an otherwise predominantly scholastic discourse.

### **3.3 Discourse of spiritual wisdom and the inseparability of the Good**

The second complementary discourse reflects the influence on John Paul's theology of the *resourcement* movement inspired by

the works of (Jesuit Father) Henri de Lubac, (Dominican Father) Yves Congar, and theologian Hans Urs von Balthazar.[\(15\)](#) This is a return to the Church Fathers and early Christian writers, to find there a notion of *Logos* (Reason) that is not just the identity of human ideas with the divine ideas, but the identity of love and commitment to truth that leads one to choose to embrace their objects, to relish them, to find God in them.[\(16\)](#) Such, for example, we find in the writing of Augustine, whose primary commitment as a Christian philosopher was to love God and to find him in loving engagement with the world. Though not incompatible with scholastic metaphysics, this return to the Church Fathers is a return to the first millennium of Christianity where philosophy, as Hadot says, was taken to be a 'spiritual exercise.' In it characteristically truth and goodness were interwoven in the search for wisdom.

In sum, a close inspection reveals elements of three discourses in the encyclical. Depending on how one characterizes their affinities and differences, there are three modes of discourse in the encyclical, one dominant and two complementary. The dominant discourse is that of the Papacy of the second millennium. The two complementary discourses are, that of academic phenomenology with its emphasis on experience rather than theory, and that of Christian philosophy of the first millennium focused on the spiritual life. Both emphasize local over general theoretical knowledge. I conclude from the internal evidence that when John Paul set out in this encyclical to address contemporary academic audiences on faith and reason in the contemporary world, he was constrained by the institutional tradition of the Church to use the language of scholastic metaphysics as his dominant vehicle of expression.

#### **4. Challenges to metaphysics**

## **4.1 Charles Taylor and the institutional philosophy of the modern secular academy**

Turning now to the audience of the encyclical, the contemporary academic audience, I turn to Charles Taylor, the distinguished Canadian Catholic moral philosopher. Speaking at the University of Dayton, Ohio, in 1996, in a lecture entitled 'A Catholic Modernity?', he explored the attitude of modern culture to Christian faith. He takes 'secular modernity' to be the institutional philosophy of the academy today and within it he finds a tension between a secular morality based on individual rights and a Christian morality based on faith and community solidarity.

The central argument of Taylor's paper is that the cultural domination of the Church in Europe, as expressed in certain institutional practices, including the defense of theological orthodoxy by the Inquisition and by the Index of forbidden books, became ironically an obstacle to the flowering and development of some central Christian values -- freedom, individual rights, social justice, care of the poor and sick, etc. He notes that it was the secular Enlightenment that championed these subsequently, but in a world with less and less faith. Throwing off the coercive yoke of the Church led, he says, though not in a premeditated way, to the flourishing of those very good things that were rooted in the Christian ethic. Thus, with no apparent irony, Taylor moves 'a vote of thanks to Voltaire...for allowing us to live the gospel in a purer form'.[\(!7\)](#) Taylor then finds himself supporting the secular modernity of our culture, and within that culture he finds niches where people are prepared to hear the Christian message. These he locates among those already committed idealistically to universal human rights and motivated by social justice with an

unconditioned commitment to the poor and distressed, such as *Medecins sans Frontières* and *Amnesty International*. To him, workers in these NGO's are ready for the Christian message and most in need of it because the frustrations of such work are so grave and the moments of human disappointment so deep, from which he argues that the motivation for dedicated service in these movements is bound eventually to lag without the helping grace that was promised to people of religious faith. Without faith, he fears, they will find ways of turning an original unconditional social commitment into a channel merely for improving their resumé's for their personal political or economic advancement.

Let us turn now to the history of the secularizing of the modern academy. The history of the relationship between Rome and the major universities of Christendom -- Paris, Padua, Bologna, Oxford, Utrecht -- during the religious wars of the 17th and 18th centuries was a stormy one. These wars antedated secular modernity but set the stage for its emergence out of the exhaustion of two centuries of conflict. In the academy, these wars are remembered as conflicts between faith and reason, theology and science, sacred and profane interests in learning. One has only to recall the titles of the two books that, for well over a hundred years, have formed public opinion in the US on the relationship between religion and science ; one is *The History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*, written by John W. Draper in 1874 and still in print, and the other is *A History of the Warfare Between Science and Theology*, written by Andrew Dickson White in 1896 and still in print. Both are still read and in public demand. But in truth, the conflicts were not between science and religion; they were conflicts within theology among men of science who were also men of faith. The

mutual suspicions and misunderstandings, the harsh mutual condemnations, and the violence among parties were about different interpretations of religious faith, including faith in God's Book of Nature and faith in God's Book of Scriptures. The conflicts then took place within the domain of theology.

Our academic colleagues today condemn the institutional violence directed during the 17th century at the emerging modern scientific areas, namely, to mention just a few, Copernicanism, Cartesianism (or mathematical natural philosophy), and anatomical research, believing that these were wars of faith-without-reason against modernity's reason-without-faith. But it was not so. Theologians and people of faith in every Christian denomination found it difficult to be at home within the context of the new emerging scientific world. The new and modern spirit of change among the Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Pietists, and other religious peoples of Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, blew with hurricane force, not just through the groves of theology and natural philosophy, but also through every layer of European society. It first destroyed and then recreated in a new modality political and administrative structures, structures of commerce and finance, legal systems, and relationships between New and Old World indigenous peoples until the point of universal ideological exhaustion was reached. At the center of these storms was theology as it too tried to endow the new with faith and at the same time to preserve the old faith in a world undergoing such radical change. Out of the universal ideological and theological exhaustion came a winner that was not a participant in the previous cultural debates. It was the secular modernity of the 19th and 20th centuries. This winning newcomer simply excluded religion and theology from any credible role in the intellectual life of the

modern academy manufacturing the myth that religious disputes were irrational and could and should be excluded from rational research into nature and the human condition, and should be excluded, therefore, from the academy.

But recent historical studies of the emergence of modern science in the 17th and 18th centuries show that religion was a constructive partner of the new sciences. For example, John Heilbron's, *Sun in the Church: Cathedrals as Solar Observatories*[\(18\)](#) studies astronomy in the century following Galileo, Peter Dear's *Discipline and Experience* studies the role of scholasticism in the development of modern science[\(19\)](#) , and Betty Jo Teeter Dodds' and Margaret Jacob's *Newton and the Culture of Newtonianism*, studies the theological dimension of Newton's natural science. These works trace the development of modern science in the 17th and 18th centuries and make clear that modern science emerged out of a Christian theological background, and that the Christian background actively supported, in experiment, mathematical modeling, and philosophy, the emergent dialogues in which the work of the first great generation of scientists came to fruition as a new mathematical natural philosophy.

We should not forget the central role played at the time by the global network of Jesuit colleges in the institutionalization of modern science in the 17th and 18th centuries. That global network numbered over 600 colleges. Ironically, the newcomer, embodied in the Enlightenment regimes of Europe and its colonies, destroyed that network of free schools confiscating its libraries and real estate. In the ensuing dispersal of the Jesuit faculties, some found a new home in America, where A.M.D.G. they founded colleges like Fordham and Georgetown. In reading accounts of that period, one cannot help but wonder about the

degree of savage violence that the new ideology was willing to display against all educational institutions that maintained the old religious faith. The Enlightenment had itself become a kind of perverse religion, using violence motivated by a perverse faith, and scenes like this were repeated in 20th century by Marxist-Leninist regimes and by the Nazi regime in Germany. The new secularity had come of age as a new civil religion.

Returning to the origins of secular modernity, the sorting out process that preceded the establishment of secular modernity lasted through the 17th and 18th centuries. During that period the debates between religious faith in the scripture and religious faith in the new empirico-mathematical science produced several glitches and these were not confined to the Roman Catholic Church. But among the more notorious, however, was the Galileo Affair. Nevertheless, it is the judgment of historians of science today -- I speak, for example, of John Heilbron of Berkeley and others -- that the Galileo Affair was not a struggle between faith and scientific reason, although it is typically presented in this way. This is best manifested, writes Heilbron, in the fact that it did not set back the scientific movement even in the Catholic part of Europe. Evidence of this is, for example, the use of the great cathedrals as astronomical observatories during the 150 years that separated Galileo's death from the time when the first reliable and accurate optical telescopes were made and the first hard experimental evidence was gathered in favor of the Copernican system. A multitude of cathedrals in Italy, France, Spain, Germany -- San Petronio in Bologna being the best example -- were set up, each as a giant camera obscura with a hole or gnomon in the South transept through which the light of the sun, planets and stars was projected onto the floor of the cathedral. There on the floor a meridian or meridian line was

laid out, the crossing of which by sun, planet, or star marked the exact time of its transit overhead. During that time, our earthly place in the starry universe was studied in the cathedrals of Europe by Copernicans and non-Copernicans and, despite the regrettable condemnation of Copernicanism by Urban VIII in 1620, with little hindrance and much cooperation from the Church.

#### **4.2 When metaphysics becomes an ideology**

It is possible to conclude that both the Church and the academy are institutions that make claims to a universal intellectual mandate. Because of their respective claims, it is at the level of metaphysics that the mutual hostility between Church and the academy tends to show up. For metaphysics is different from all other institutional discourses. It claims to serve not just one institution or one discipline, but all institutions and all disciplines, for the unity of all knowledge is its domain. There are dangers lurking in metaphysics, and they bring into sharper focus the corrective importance of the third discourse within the encyclical, that of philosophy as a neoplatonic Stoic Augustinian spiritual exercise.

A science<sup>(20)</sup> according to Plato and Aristotle is about timeless universal essences and the timeless order among them; it constitutes knowledge for all humanity independently of history. This is what all theory claims to do. However, if reality is comprised of individual entities, not just of abstract kinds, theoretical concepts alone are inadequate to express their being since they reduce individuals merely to what a theory is willing to recognize. A theoretical account then always falls short of including the diversity that reality displays. Theory is useful to the extent that theoretical language serves public order by defining the content of public knowledge. Metaphysics --

supposing it is an Aristotelian science -- is a theory that seeks to secure the unity of all disciplines, and to set criteria for public order in the largest of human communities, the human race itself.

The good, necessary, even ideological side of metaphysics as a discourse is balanced, however ironically, by an almost Augustinian propensity towards evil. Of this John Paul is keenly aware and offers a warning. Racism, communism, materialism, scientism, consumerism -- the evil social and political ideologies of our times -- are, he says,[\(21\)](#) founded on metaphysical systems that have been turned into uncompromising ideologies hostile to human freedom and objective truth.

How can a metaphysics so easily become an ideology? One way is by elevating the internal discourse of one social group, such as the Nazi or Communist party, or a great historical institution, such as even the US Constitution, or the Latin Church or, as the Third World would claim, the democratic principles basic to Western civilization itself, into a metaphysics. This tendency needs to be held in check by reflection on the historicity of metaphysics.

#### **4.3 From the body, language, history, and society**

Modern forms of metaphysics tend to be much influenced by Cartesian, Kantian, and other disembodied models of Mind that stemmed from the bad days of late scholastic philosophy. Such cognitive models have today increasingly come under fire. First among the older critics is Nietzsche, followed by Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and others. They argued that human being and human knowing must be marked essentially by a certain incompleteness, derived from the temporal, embodied, linguistic, and social character of human knowing. Let me

briefly look at some of this evidence and the way it can disturb established metaphysical thinking.

**First**, there is the study of language and the metaphors that dominate and control everyday thinking and the tacit extension of these metaphors into modern science and metaphysical philosophy. George Lakoff's and Mark Johnson's most recent big work, *Philosophy in the Flesh*,[\(22\)](#) pursues this argument, an argument they had already sketched out in their earlier book, *Metaphors We Live By*. They argue that linguistic reason is rarely purely literal; that it largely works with metaphors based on embodied human existence and the embodied imagination; that it is dialogical in character; that it is not dispassionate, but emotionally engaged; that it is evolutionary; that it is not 'universal' in the transcendent sense nor are its 'universals' subsistent 'realities'; and that it is not completely conscious, but mostly unconscious.

A **second** area is perception and cognitive brain science, which are still developing sciences, but which show the connection between thinking, seeing, and manipulating the environment.[\(23\)](#) For example, prior to conscious reflection, as I show in my work on Van Gogh's painting, human vision interprets a picture, not as presenting a scene organized by scientific space, but a scene that is best understood as the visual response to a particular task that the eyes choose to enact from a learned repertory of tasks that it can perform, among which the eyes choose unconsciously without necessary reference to deliberate choice.[\(24\)](#)

A **third** area is in contemporary physics which presents many problems of knowing and being that a classical metaphysics cannot solve. Classical metaphysics is based on the classical metaphor of 'knowing as seeing.' This belief which stems from

Plato and Aristotle was adopted by modern science and incorporated into the early scientific metaphor of the "lynx-eyed." The Roman *Accademia dei Lincei* (predecessor of the present Papal Academy of Sciences) to which Galileo belonged, was the name of one of the earliest academies of science in Europe. Early modern scientists described themselves as 'seeing' more keenly than merely human eyes can see the ideal or limiting shape, number, and quantity of things. But they are not so. They turn out, instead, to be specified by networks of processes related to the life-world by measurement, and processes of measurement are not like seeing, they are more like working with tools in a black box and they are not usually imaginable in space-time terms at all. The more that is learned about physical things, the more problematic becomes the notion that things are distinguishable either by their spatial or temporal boundaries. Whatever we point to, whether a rock, a river, or a living breathing organism, a living cell, its existence involves, and in biology it actually depends on, continuous and mutual exchange processes with its local environment -- whether the materials exchanged are radiant energy or sodium ions, or mud and sand, or food, air, and waste products, and so on. A thing ceases to be a thing-in-the-world when these exchanges cease; and of each individual thing an individual story can be told of its coming-to-be, its trajectory through many local environments, and its eventual dissolution.

The same is true of individual human knowers. Each is embodied in a unique skeleton and set of internal organs surrounded by a permeable membrane, the skin, that is equipped with external sense and motor organs to connect with the world. The Lifeworld is where we live, move, and have our being, and, as some cognitive scientists (such as Andy Clark<sup>(25)</sup>) of

Washington University) now propose, it, our Lifeworld, is a text on which we and our community have downloaded our respective memories and understandings in texts, pictures, architecture, clothes, and music, in places such as the home, the work-place, and places for recreation. And we have downloaded our memories and understanding, not just on things, but also in writing in personal notebooks, journals, and now in disk files. On all of these we have inscribed the individual and communal meaning of our lives. In turn, the environment intrudes on the human body through the neural mappings that coordinate each individual human life with its surrounding world. Looked at this way, each of us is a unique inhabitant of a shared habitat neither of which can exist apart from each other, and our particularity is our temporal existence in that habitat.

Are there then no timeless objective metaphysical 'essences'? 'Essences' may just be one way of grouping particulars that as referents of our knowing are identified by their similarities under some familiar and usable perspective, one among an indeterminate multitude of such perspectives. Many cognitive scientists then -- for reasons I will go into in a moment -- no longer look on the world as if it were made up of objective natural kinds, but see human interests written all over the so-called natural kinds, and see the world as intrinsically and 'essentially,' as it were, a human habitation, the home of human existence. Werner Heisenberg, the founder of quantum mechanics, seemed to anticipate this view: 'Science no longer confronts nature as an objective observer ... [in science] man confronts himself alone.'[\(26\)](#)

What characterizes these critiques of essentialist thinking is an awareness of the multiple entanglements that subjects and objects, whether things, animals, and people, have with other

objects in their environment, that defy the metaphysical goals of a timeless, non-contextual, objective vision of a world of things, and defy too a logic rooted in the Principle of Non-contradiction. The key term is 'entanglement,' a word borrowed from the quantum theory. It means, 1) the impossibility, other than by convention, of drawing precise spatial or functional boundaries around any individual thing, animal, or person, and thereby separating it by a clean 'cut' from other things of the same kind and from all aspects of its environment, and 2) the 'interpenetration' of things spatially and functionally with their environments that early modern science would have taken to be just indicative of fuzzy thinking. Contemporary physical, biological, and cognitive science recognizes these to be real and ineliminable characters of things, animals, and persons. They are truly 'metaphysical,' in a new sense.

All of these challenges are now being elaborated in the sciences. But they cause trouble not just for a scholastic metaphysics or theology, but also for all the Rationalisms and Empiricisms that were spun off from late scholasticisms, including the traditional classical understanding of the sciences. As it turns out, the sciences, just like philosophy, are historical enterprises, renewing themselves in response to the emergence of new human experience.

#### **4.4 Revelation and science as spurs to historical metaphysical change**

Let me pursue briefly this topic of the historicity of metaphysics as spurred by emergent being. John Paul spoke of Christian revelation as an emergent phenomenon within the scene of everyday life. This emergent phenomenon, he said, called for a change in or development of metaphysics. There are other emergent phenomena, such as, new kinds of matter in the

story of cosmic evolution, and new biological species in the story of biological evolution. Notions of political freedom and equality have also emerged within the horizon of history. All of these are contingent emergent facts belonging to the history of 'the things of everyday life' (12). None of these emergent phenomena is (or was) predictable by natural reason, philosophy, or computation from what was known before. Do they not also call for changes in and developments of metaphysics?

Turning to one of the events from which the modern picture of the world emerged, we see what happened to metaphysics when it was challenged by the emergence of a radically new phenomenon. It is a remarkable story. One December night in 1609 Galileo turned his telescope on the planet Venus to see whether it presented itself to an earthly viewer in the full range of Moon-like phases, but particularly he was interested in whether Venus displayed gibbous phases -- the three-quarter and full Moon phases -- because, if it did, then, using a simple geometrical argument, he could prove that Venus must orbit the Sun, not the Earth. Every night for six months he made observations with his telescope and recorded them afterwards in his note book in Italian. Owen Gingerich, the Harvard astronomer, studied that note book, and he told me, that on the night Galileo saw the gibbous phases of Venus, he wrote down his observations in his note book, and this time he wrote, not in his usual Italian, but in Latin, the proper language for a report to the world about the natural revelation that came to him that night. This natural revelation convinced him of two things: that the Earth moved around the Sun, and that the key to metaphysics was truly mathematics. And so, we might say, the picture of modern science was born as an emergent phenomenon. Galileo

with his telescope came to see with his own eyes Venus orbiting as a freely moving space-ship around the Sun, and he inferred what this implied, that the Earth also moved freely about the Sun. Copernicus' mathematical rendering of the solar system was true, and he took the natural revelation that he experienced on that occasion, rightly or wrongly can be disputed, as evidence for a metaphysics of mathematical essences. Few of his contemporaries, however, were as prepared as Galileo for a similar experience when they looked through Galileo's telescope and Galileo faced the hard road of justifying his conviction with abstract reasons. Since the acceptance of a truth is a free act, they chose not to believe what they did not see with their own eyes.

The late historian, sociologist, and philosopher of science, Thomas S. Kuhn, shocked the academy by proclaiming that scientific revolutions occur, changes for him in human rational expectations.[\(27\)](#) He went on to say that there was not just one scientific revolution, namely, the Copernican revolution, but many -- episodes of discontinuity take place time and again within modern science. What did Kuhn think he had discovered? And what had he really discovered? Recent studies raise the question as to what Kuhn himself thought he had discovered. Was it that the scientific community owns science because it is their creation? Or was that no one owns science because under revolutionary change its ownership passes from one group to another? What I think Kuhn unwittingly stumbled upon was the hermeneutic character of human scientific knowing. He found the hole in his philosophy, the hermeneutic hole.

Scientific revolutions change both the theory and the experience of scientific reality. They are not just theoretical changes; they are post-theoretical changes experienced in the scientific

laboratory. Recent historians of science such as Alistair Crombie, Tom Nickles, and Steven Shapin,[\(28\)](#) would say that all historical narratives, including Kuhn's about scientific revolutions, are just consequences of how a particular story is constructed, for what end or purpose. Kuhn's narrative is told from a high altitude perspective, omitting much background detail and aimed at overall structure. But other, more recent, narratives are constructed from a lower perspective where more of the grassroots connections are visible. It is in the grass roots perspective of 'everyday life' where John Paul locates the fermenting source of all philosophical inquiry.

Although it is the character of institutions to speak in a single authoritative voice and of the public to want to listen to such a single authoritative voice, the truth is that there are at all times many competing voices within any institution, even within the scientific community, lobbying for particular and different interests. It takes historians and sociologists of science to bring out the hermeneutical complexity of decision-making processes in research. Science as a historical enterprise is affected by diversity of meanings at every level, at all times, and all the way down. In this perspective, the judgments scientists make show themselves to be freely negotiated decisions elicited by evidence that is weighted variously but moved by a common commitment both to expanding horizons of scientific knowledge and to their unification, in response to what John Paul would call the desire for Absolute Truth.

One of the relatively new challenges of science to Galilean metaphysics is the quantum theory. The quantum theory was discovered by Heisenberg in 1925. Despite controversies, it is the most spectacularly successful scientific theory of all time. But 75 years later it remains a challenge to every modern

classical philosophical system. This, however, does not imply that scientific research is stymied or that science is waiting for a Galileo or an Einstein to solve the problem. No! There are plenty of good ideas around and their very diversity is being used to design imaginative experiments to map the quantum domain in ways that imply a diversity of questions as well as a diversity of answers. Looking at the answers, one thinks them to be incompatible until one also notices that the questions to which they respond are different. This variety of views is as disturbing to the public ethos of science as were Galileo's Copernican claims. We are beginning to recognize that for any group of individuals in conversation, even for groups of scientific researchers, that people do not have to be in total conformity for good communication to take place or even for a consensus to form. For truth is not a mirroring of an abstract world but a domain of possibilities that is mediated by a sufficient sharing of minds and actions and goals in a local place and habitat. Human rationality involves more than a sharing of common ideas, it involves communal actions in a local habitat; it is more like what Aristotle called an art.[\(29\)](#)

For this we require a more complex account of rationality and truth than any one given by a perennial metaphysics. Heidegger, Ricoeur, Gadamer, Lonergan -- perhaps, we should include Nietzsche[\(30\)](#) -- each offer solutions that manage the diversity of meanings with freedom, creativity, a sense of responsibility, fairness, and respect for the diverse commitments of participants.

What is true of life is also true of philosophy, and also of theology. There was never a time when philosophy or theology comprised a single set of ideas; each fills its historical cultural niche with a population of variants. Truth then is not in one

variant, but lies in the sustainable ecology of many variants, each possibly with a significantly different set of commitments and a different hermeneutical and theoretical basis. This is the image of science that we need to cultivate today, one that needs *mutatis mutandis* to be extended to philosophy and theology. Although there is in every discipline and in all systematic science an ecology of diverse perspectives all the way down, nevertheless in relation to this background chorus one public voice is privileged for the time being by the internal 'discourse' of the discipline or institution. Take away this background, and the autonomous voice becomes 'metaphysical' in an inauthentic sense, that is, 'ideological.'

As long as philosophy is metaphysics, and metaphysics is taken to be a totally autonomous and context-free a-historical science, theology and every discipline is at risk of having change imposed upon it from without, for developments within philosophy have the power to make broad changes in all semantic networks. Returning to Galileo, just as his cosmological revelation created a problem about the continuity of natural philosophy as a progressive discipline, so a change in metaphysics like that initiated by Galileo could create a problem about the continuity not just of theology but of every discipline. And it did, notably in the divine right of kings, in the political rights of individuals, in commercial, exchange, and banking systems, in the attitude towards natural resources and human labor, and in the flourishing of bureaucratic institutions of all kinds. Institutions need continuity to maintain public trust, there is evident risk to social peace in metaphysical change, and this, rather than wars between faith and reason, was the deeper cause in the 17th and 18th centuries and again in the 20th century, of the turbulence of those times.

#### **4.5 Is metaphysics reason's integrating factor in knowledge?**

Assuming that in philosophy we have the attempt at creating the fullest expression of human reason in action, what is it in today's academy? And how is philosophy taught there? I will recognize three possibilities: 1. it is a discipline; 2. it is a special kind of narrative; 3. it is the art of radical questioning.

For our present convenience philosophers may be divided into: 1. systematic philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Peirce to mention a few; 2. philosophers who see philosophy as the history of Universal Reason, like Hegel, Gadamer and hermeneutical philosophers; 3. and existentialist philosophers given to radical questioning, like the Socrates of the Apology, Nietzsche, and the Heidegger of the 'death of metaphysics' or Lonergan's transcendental methodology of inquiry. All are concerned, but in quite different ways, with the most general integrations of human thinking at the level of Being, Thought, and Action. Though John Paul expresses in his encyclical a clear institutional preference for systematic philosophy of the type of a *philosophia perennis*, there are, indeed, indications in the encyclical (10 to 15), as I have said, of his awareness that philosophy involves a historical narrative of human rationality, that is, a history of progressive universal reason, and that the historical renewal of philosophy is connected existentially with the art of radical questioning. This would reflect the complementary practice of his academic phenomenological profession. The other complementary level of John Paul's discourse comes from his practice of philosophy as a Socratic neoplatonic Augustinian spiritual exercise. Although these complementary levels of practice are not coherently pursued in the encyclical, they reveal concerns beyond the scope of scholastic metaphysics. I will not develop this point now, but I

turn directly to the last, the intrusion into the encyclical of an existentialist philosophy as a Socratic spiritual exercise given to radical questioning.

Among the practices that have spurred historical change in philosophy is the spiritual exercise of radical Socratic questioning. Socrates referred to himself as a gadfly when questioning those who thought themselves to be wise, but failed under persistent questioning to produce wisdom. The life of the radical questioner is lonely and often the target of persecution, as was Socrates in his life. Some philosophers, nevertheless, have chosen to follow Socrates' example and to become the gadfly of the truth pretensions of scholars. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were such, Heidegger and Lonergan too with their questioning of the very question of truth.

By 'radical questioning' I mean asking the Heideggerian or Lonerganian question of the question: what kind of inquiry are we engaged in and what are its sources in human life and what are its goals? Radical questioning is driven by a hermeneutic of suspicion relative to any entrenched system of knowledge authorized by what might seem to be timeless authority and tradition, and institutionally protected from the renewing cycle of birth/death and ruins/reconstruction, that is, from the temporality of history. It would aim at making visible whatever is passed over as unrecognized in the local lives of people for no other reason than that there is no room for its concerns in the then current great system. These are as likely to be the 'voices' of women, or immigrants, or old age, or death, or injustice in any form, as of quantum physicists, evolutionists, or unfashionable artists. One is reminded of the philosophy of both the Old and New Testaments, that asks us to go so far as to privilege the voices of the 'poor,' the 'oppressed,' the 'faithful remnant' of

those left out of the great picture; since it is they who have a special calling from Christ. From such 'voices' comes insistence on the continuous renewal of life and institutions. It can even be read in this way as a fundamentally Christian urge to attend to the spirit of 'what God does for humanity'[\(31\)](#) which works through local and time-bound individuals in the 'things of everyday life.' In the passage from the encyclical just quoted (10-15), John Paul seems to say this.[\(32\)](#)

What is the integrative goal of philosophy as radical questioning? It is not the goal of the systematic unity of a *philosophia perennis*, but the goal of moral unity of truth and freedom, as an emergent quality of social life springing from justice and responsible freedom -- a very Christian mission -- and one in the spirit of John Paul's contribution to Vatican II.[\(33\)](#)

### 5. Concluding reflections

The encyclical can be read with an eye less on the abstract necessity of the metaphysical discourse or more with an eye on John Paul's other lifelong career as a phenomenological philosopher and theologian of *resourcement*. It was in terms of this latter philosophy that he formulated his political goal as an academic and as a Pontiff, namely, to reconcile '**freedom**' and '**truth**' in a '**responsible freedom**.' Truth is associated in his mind with (Christian) **faith**; responsible freedom is associated with (Christian) **justice**. How do faith and justice, truth and responsible freedom apply to the academy? I hope you would draw with me the following conclusion. Justice and responsible freedom within and beyond the academy are best served both by students and teachers in recognizing that the process of learning truth is embodied, dialogical, evolutionary, emergent, metaphorical, imaginative, lifelong, and committed to the

entanglement of goodness and truth.[\(34\)](#) These, perhaps, rather than in scholastic metaphysics, are the conditions under which John Paul in his complementary discourses thinks we would be most open to the discovery of Christ and God in the 'everyday things of this world.'

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## NOTES

1. I want to thank Heidi Byrnes, Professor of German at Georgetown University, for discussions that have helped to shape this paper in many ways, and contributed substantially to the argument of the paper.
2. The encyclical can be found in *Origins*, and also on the Vatican web page, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/.../c\\_15101998\\_fides-et-ratio\\_en.shtml](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/.../c_15101998_fides-et-ratio_en.shtml). The sections of the document are numbered 1-108. References such as (12) are to section 12.
3. Among the other documents in which the central topics of this encyclical are discussed by John Paul II is the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (1994) on morality.
4. Burtchaell (1998)
5. Hollinger (1996). Hollinger is an intellectual historian.

6. Hadot (1995). Pierre Hadot claims that all Greek and Roman philosophy was of the nature of spiritual exercises to be practiced for the profit of human goodness and happiness, and was so understood for the first millennium of Christianity. The notion of metaphysics as a general discipline is a medieval interpretation.

7. See n. 13 above.

8. As summarized from Gee (1998), pp. 52-53. I am grateful to Prof. Heidi Byrnes, an applied linguist at Georgetown University, who drew my attention to the literature of this field.

9. 'History therefore becomes the arena where we see what God does for humanity. God comes to us in the things we know best and can verify most easily, the things of our everyday life, apart from which we cannot understand ourselves' (12).. 'by a hermeneutic open to the appeal of metaphysics' (95).

10. 'The truth made known to us by Revelation is neither the product nor the consummation of an argument devised by human reason' (15).

11. '... [adults] can distinguish truth from falsehood, making up their minds about the objective reality of things' (25).

12. 'If something is true, it must be true for all people and at all times' (27)

13. 'Beyond this universality, however, people seek an absolute which might give to all their searching a meaning and an answer -- something ultimate, which might serve as the ground of all things. In other words, they seek a final explanation, a supreme value, which refers to nothing beyond itself and puts an end to all questioning.' (27).

14. 'The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others. ... the autonomy which philosophy enjoys is rooted in the fact

that reason is by its nature oriented to truth and is equipped moreover with the means necessary to arrive at truth' (49)

15. See Schindler (1996) who identifies the active political and social thrust of this movement today, the *Communio* movement, as neo-conservative in character, looking towards something like Augustine's City of God. For the Popes's struggle with American Catholicism, see the review of Schindler's book in *The New Republic*, August 30, 1999, pp. 39-44.

16. See Schindler (1996) and the *Communio* Ecclesiology.

17. Taylor (1999), p. 15.

18. Heilbron (1999).

19. Dear (1995).

20. Because the term 'science' in general usage seems to include the natural and social sciences but to exclude the humanistic disciplines, I will use the term 'discipline' to be an inclusive word referring to any organized scholarly speciality, scientific or humanistic. In German it would be translated '*Wissenschaft*.'

21. Not explicitly in this encyclical but in other writings of John Paul. See Schindler (1996), pp. 126-131.

22. Lakoff and Johnson (1999); see also an earlier groundbreaking work on which this depends, Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

23. See Pribram (1991) and Clark (1997).

24. Cf. Heelan (1998, 1983/1988).

25. See Clark (1997).

26. Heisenberg (1958), pp. 24, 29, cited in Heelan (1965), p. 86.

27. Kuhn (1970)

28. Crombie (1994), Nickles (1995), and Shapin (1995).

29. See Babich's insightful introduction to Vol. II of Babich (1999).

30. See Babich (1994).

31. 'History therefore becomes the arena where we see what God does for humanity,' to which he adds, 'God comes to us in the things we know best and can verify most easily, the things of our everyday life, apart from which we cannot understand ourselves'(12).

32. Cf 10-15, which can be read to imply the need for radical questioning of systems of reasoning that exclude the existential historical dimension of Revelation. For example, '... we return to the sacramental character of Revelation and especially to the sign of the Eucharist, in which the indissoluble unity between the signifier and the signified makes it possible to grasp the depths of the mystery,'(13) and where John Paul uses the martyrs as giving evidence through their love rather than through argument (32). Also cf. (26) where Socrates is mentioned.

33. Alternatively, radical questioning can be read in secular terms as a call to respond to the abundance of worldly and spiritual presences that flourish in the common lives of ordinary people, a call echoed by John Paul II in the words just quoted. Philosophy of this kind makes a wager with history that human life and society are seeded with emergent novelty and charged with the mystery of transformation, development, and renewal.

34. This is also the message of Readings (1995).