via media philosophy

via media philosophy:
Holiness Unto Truth

Intersections between
Wesleyan and Roman Catholic Voices

Edited by

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Via Media Philosophy

Introduction

A Pilgrimage through Holiness Unto Truth

"I steer the middle way"
John Wesley, *A Disavowal of Persecuting Papists*, 18 March 1782

"on us in particular, midway between East and West, there will fall a heavy responsibility"
Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters*, 30 April 1944

Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio* [*Faith and Reason*] offers a number of challenges for philosophy in general and philosophy undertaken by Christians in particular. The success of reason in its role of understanding humanity and our world has seemed to have been at the expense of faith and a devaluation of the transcendent. Reason seems to be disconnected from faith, and truth seems to be a casualty. However, the desire for truth remains a part of what it is to be a human being. John Paul offers a cogent response to this crisis with his encyclical directed at all who seek wisdom. This text will take up the challenge and lead the reader on a pilgrimage through holiness unto truth.

Each chapter of this text will offer a key insight into the discovery of the journey unto truth. Each chapter was first presented at an academic meeting of the Wesleyan Philosophical Society in March, 2007. This historic meeting of Wesleyan and Roman Catholic philosophers allowed these scholars a setting to offer essays on key themes of mutually important thought. The setting itself, now Olivet Nazarene University yet formerly St. Viator's College, augmented the goals of the conference. This conference, like any philosophical conference, was designed to be a pilgrimage of diverse thought unto truth. Wesleyan scholars challenged Catholic scholars and *vice versa*. The divergent opinions expressed during this conference also illustrate a way of

engaging in philosophy: striving for a middle way. Journeying on a middle way between competing pathways has often been defined in theological discourse by its Latin phrase *via media*. The scholarly development of competing philosophical positions such as Wesleyan and Roman Catholic positions will be defined as an example of *via media philosophy*.

Via Media Philosophy

via media philosophy is introduced as a conceptual technique that seeks truth between known truths. The hope of journeying between diverse truths is the potential of additional discoveries of truth. When a truthful tradition meets another truthful but different, if not opposing, tradition, the potential rewards of new truthful insights are often worth the risk of the convergence. However, other consequences are also significant. One's repertoire of truth claims forms an integral part of one's identity and the identity of one's mutually organized communities such as religious groups. Any pilgrim on a journey, including a philosophical journey, through unknown landscape risks testing one's truth claims.

The techniques of *via media philosophy* risk affirmation, alteration, or rejection of any exposed truth claim. A philosophical pilgrim must also be aware that any alteration of a truth claim makes an individual vulnerable within one's communities of truth. An intellectual lag time exists between any individual with a new idea and one's community. A reasonable hypothesis seems to be that the older the community, the greater the intellectual lag time and the longer it will take for the presentation of new truths to be accepted. A scholar always risks being ahead of one's community and must be prepared to deal with the destabilization of introducing a new idea to a community. How a scholar signifies an idea may aid in its understanding. New ideas can be presented with awareness of the capitalization of the name itself

The lowercase letters forming the title *via media philosophy* are meant to define the broader use of a concept from the usual definitions of the term. For example, many scholars use "C"atholic to indicate the Roman Catholic Church; they then use "c"atholic to define the Church Universal. The capitalized name indicates an identity, in this case a defined Christian institution, while the lowercase name indicates a broader structure that encompasses the first term while helping to define key characteristics that are more universal that the original term: all Christians who incorporate the universal church.

This mechanism is used by Dennis Doyle in his chapter "Wesley's Methodist Movement" as he offers a prescription for Roman Catholics to consider Methodist practices, practices that become methodist for a broader community. This text will develop a conceptual framework of the broader community of philosophers working to negotiate between the dominant, often conflicting, intellectual currents. The paths that result are entitled *via media*.

Within theological circles, the concept of *Via Media* is firmly attached to the theological tradition centering on John Wesley, informed by his Church of England heritage, and John Henry Newman, informed by his transition to and work within Roman Catholicism. Wesley and Newman are noted for negotiating between the major theological ideas of their day. Timothy Crutcher in his chapter entitled "Sin, Irrationality and the Role of Reason in Sanctification" will introduce these seminal figures. In a later chapter, Scott Crothers and Joe Cunningham will use the term *via media* as they develop "Wesley's Epistemology in Contemporary Perspective." *via media* in this text will be defined as the desire to integrate new concepts productively while negotiating between the dominant currents of scholarly thought. This is a routine practice for seekers of wisdom; a practice that resides under a variety of conceptual definitions such as Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean and dialectic thought.

The distinctiveness of this rendition of philosophic thought will be in the commitments proposed for the participant: a commitment to understand the often conflicting and sometimes polar ideas that frame many truthful philosophical or theological conversations; a commitment to value truthful ideas regardless of one's dogmatic presuppositions; a commitment to seek a holistic range of all truth regardless of one's dogmatic presuppositions; and a commitment to transmit prudently appropriate truths into new contexts that would benefit from new understanding even if it creates dissonance with one's dogmatic presuppositions. While the concept of *via media* has been well conceived within theological circles, the concept will benefit from accentuation in additional philosophical contexts, as the attached chapters will help us explore.

The individual chapters of this book become resources for development of the editor's concept of *via media philosophy*. Although each chapter is coherent within its own scope of understanding, each also serves as a fruitful example of the central themes of *via media philosophy*. The editor makes no claim that any individual author supports the overall thesis of the book. Each chapter will be followed by a Postscript that seeks to offer a threading of the thesis, positions that remain the opinion of the editor.

Chapter Introductions

The overall task of first chapter is to summarize the main themes of Pope John Paul II's encyclicals *Fides et Ratio* and *Veritatis Splendor*, drawing out their implications for the contemporary practice of philosophy. To this end, Professor Anadale will perform three specific tasks. The first is to enumerate and detail the philosophical schools and movements rejected or problematized by John Paul II's view, as well as those recommended. The second task is to describe the foundations of a possible Christian philosophical consensus emerging from this vision. Finally, this chapter will explore the implications of this view for pluralism in the profession, and will conclude by asking whether this vision for philosophy is a viable consensus for Christian philosophers today.

The second chapter will focus on Jean-Luc Nancy's and Gianni Vattimo's work on Christianity. Professor Smerick explores how Vattimo is sympathetic to Christianity's claims and hopes for a postmodern world, and how this sympathy manifests itself in Catholic-Christian images, ideas, and tropes. Vattimo's hermeneutic approach is contrasted to Nancy's argument that "Christianity is deconstruction." Professor Smerick sketches out the basics of Nancy's proposal and compares the two approaches, recognizing that each philosopher works from a European-Catholic perspective. Finally, she argues that while Vattimo's "belief in belief" seems a more fruitful path for the Christian scholar, his resistance to the notion of transcendence places his reading of the Incarnation in danger of becoming merely a proposal of efficacy—"Christianity brings peace to the world"—rather than an articulation of a transformative faith.

The third chapter offers an historical analysis of John Wesley, the spiritual father of Wesleyans, in eighteenth century riots that were directed against Roman Catholics in the Gordon Riots. The question of accountability for the riots arises. Professor Truesdale asks the question, "Against whom should the blame be lodged?" Should it go to George Gordon and his close associates alone? Or should some of the blame go directly to the Reverend John Wesley, the irenic author of "a Letter to a Catholic Christian," and the preacher of love made perfect? Did John Wesley in some significant way inspire the sectarian carnage? Professor Truesdale guides readers between the questions arising from a heated event in the history of Wesleyans and Roman Catholics.

The fourth chapter analyzes the link between rationality and sin through the writings of John Wesley and John Henry Newman. Though coming from

very different philosophical schools, each figure affirms that right reasoning plays an important part in right Christian living. Professor Crutcher notes that, for Wesley, this results in a focus on manner or method of reasoning and a very high appreciation of logic. For Newman, the concern is expressed in grounding our reasoning upon the proper premises and assumptions, which Newman finds in a properly faithful view of the world. After highlighting these concerns for the validity and soundness of our reason, the article concludes with some applications of these thoughts for contemporary thinking about the problem of "original sin."

The fifth chapter offers an area of possible dialogue between Catholic thinkers and Wesleyan thinkers: the question of Christian philosophy, much discussed in the 20th century largely by Catholic and Reformed thinkers. However, further contributions to the debates and its ongoing commentary can emerge from setting Wesleyan and Catholic thought in productive dialogue with each other. Professor Sadler explores how Wesley neither overvalues nor undervalues reason, and resists the temptation of cutting reason off from affectivity, habits, and practices that nourish and support reason properly employed. This opens the possibility for Christian philosophy of a specifically Wesleyan spirituality. As a Catholic philosopher, Professor Sadler will leave that project to others, discussing the thought of two Catholic philosophers: Maurice Blondel and Adriaan Peperzak. Both articulate positions giving affectivity, habits, and practices their rightful places in relation to reason, neither devaluing reason or philosophy, nor allowing unaided human reason on its own to attain the supernatural, but indicating how Christian philosophy is possible.

The sixth chapter examines how John Wesley was known to be both a defender of prevenient grace and free will and hence a criticizer of strongly Calvinistic views of predestination. In this regard, his position is remarkably similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church as presented in the Council of Trent. The first part of Professor Vincelette's chapter will thus compare the views of John Wesley with Catholics on grace and the freedom of the will. Next, he discusses Wesleyan versus Catholic views of justification. Here Wesley defended a view of justification by faith alone whereas Catholics argued for a view of justification by faith and works; nonetheless, if we examine the views of Wesley and Catholics, we find that the difference is not as great as might be imagined. This point was exemplified recently as Methodists joined Catholics and Lutherans in affirming a common statement on justification. The chapter ends by showing where the ecumenical discussions of justifica-

tion can be further developed.

The seventh chapter seeks to put the Roman Catholic and Wesleyan traditions in conversation by dealing with a key question: "What does it mean to be human?" Since an analysis of the whole of both traditions is impossible, Professor Crawford deals with the thought of Karl Rahner and John Wesley. First, the chapter examines Rahner's transcendental anthropology, specifically looking to how he places humanity within a transcendental structure that leads to a "graced nature." Second, the chapter examines the thought of John Wesley, looking at how Wesley sees humanity growing in grace so as to become the image of God. The chapter then concludes by drawing points of agreement and disagreement between the two, while also pointing to beginning points of dialogue between the two traditions.

The eighth chapter investigates how the question of whether God has freewill might be answered when considering the various concepts that are regularly brought to bear in the analysis of human freewill. Professor Montgomery develops how applying these concepts to God is informative for understanding the constraints upon, and objects of, God's will. Attributing agency and personhood to God allows one to ask questions about second-order mental functions within the mind of God, and thus to discover new connections to classic debates about Divine Command Theory. To this end, the chapter first notes differences in assessing freewill for a human and for God. Second, it identifies constraints of God's will as regarding good acts. Third, the chapter analyzes the notions of the good toward which God wills. After this, attention is given toward what it means to claim that God is an agent. Fifth, and finally, the chapter considers how second-order mental functions might operate in the mind of God, and therein argues, as a corollary, that a certain perennial defense of Divine Command Theory is weakened as a result of considerations regarding God's higher-order desires.

The ninth chapter explores how in Book Fourteen of the *City of God*, Augustine of Hippo begins to break away from classical, Stoic psychology by critiquing the Stoic view of emotion. Grief is not as useless as the Stoics had thought, he argues, and he adduces several classical examples of salutary grief or penitence. Professor Cullum notes that Augustine then offers a curious conclusion. Instead of concluding that human emotions are therefore altogether noble, he backtracks and admits that the passivity of emotion—the fact that we often experience them involuntarily—stands out as a clear sign of their inferiority. Augustine's interpretation of the Passion of Christ indicates clearly his notion of unfallen emotions. The emotions of Christ in the

Garden and on the cross were genuine, Augustine asserts, but they were not experienced passively. Augustine appears to believe that the primordial "fall" of mankind was a fall into psychological passivity.

The tenth chapter develops how our holiness, traditionally, shows itself in how we treat others; it then asks whether holiness should not now define how we treat nature? Professor Harvey recognizes that Catholic thought has led the way in emphasizing environmental responsibility in conjunction with its faith. Protestant commitments, by contrast, have had difficulty developing environmental responsibility within its theology. A pivotal religious influence stemming from the thought of the mystic, Meister Eckhart, a Dominican friar from the 14th century, is the notion of *Gelassenheit*, or "letting-be." *Gelassenheit* as a theological concept made its way into Martin Heidegger's philosophical work in the 20th century, and beyond, in the postmodern thought of John D. Caputo. An analysis of *Gelassenheit's* evolution indicates a vital comportment for how we are to treat nature. Eckhart's *Gelassenheit* corresponds well with a Wesleyan concept of holiness, and can be a viable notion for generating dialogue in the intersection of sustainability and the holy life.

In the eleventh chapter, Pope John Paul II's statement "We are all responsible for all" summarizes a shared Roman Catholic and Wesleyan vision of restorative justice. Professor Henning emphasizes one of three major theories of criminal justice, restorative justice. This theory offers healing for victims, for lawbreakers, and for society injured by crime. The restorative perspective stresses a more holistic responsibility than retributive responsibility to punish or utilitarian responsibility for "the greatest good." This matches Roman Catholic and Wesleyan emphases on collective responsibility for the community, individual responsibility by and to offenders, and Christian responsibility to believe in the power of the gospel. Sources for this chapter include a 2000 statement by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, United Methodist Social Principles, and references to John Wesley's practice and teaching. A specific expression of shared vision is found in the official public statements by Roman Catholics and United Methodists opposing the death penalty as they advocate a culture of life against a culture of death.

The twelfth chapter seeks to answer the question of how an eighteenth century movement by an Anglican priest, John Wesley, might assist contemporary Roman Catholics. Professor Doyle notes how John Wesley could be considered a catholic but not a Roman Catholic. The locution of a capital letter helps to define Wesley and the Methodist movement. This movement was designed for reforming the Church and not dividing it. By comparing the

movement to Alcoholics Anonymous, the strengths of each disciplined community become clear. As someone can hold dual identities in the Church and A.A., Doyle recommends membership in the two communities of methodism and catholicism. This joint affiliation aids in the unity sought by Christians and the Church.

The thirteenth chapter develops how, in the past few decades, important work has been done in the area of religious epistemology. At the same time, debate has arisen between philosophers working the Reformed tradition and those in the Roman Catholic tradition regarding the relative importance of individual religious experience and the revelation of God through the Christian community for justifying religious belief. Reformed thinkers tend to emphasize the former while those in the Roman Catholic tradition emphasize the latter. In this chapter, Professors Crothers and Cunningham analyze the epistemology of John Wesley and place his theory in the current debate. Drawing on the affinities between Wesley's notion of the spiritual senses and Plantinga's (borrowed from Calvin) *sensus divinitatis* as well as the affinities between the normative role of tradition present in both Wesleyan theology and Catholic responses to Reformed epistemology, they argue that Wesley provides a fruitful *via media* that deserves further consideration and development.

The fourteenth chapter explores the similarity among Roman Catholics and Wesleyans in the connection between truth and holiness. Professor Long closes our conversations with an awareness that truth is not determined by getting the right propositions to apply to the right objects, but by the holiness that makes "Truth" present in the world. These are themes that John Paul II, Hans urs von Balthasar, and John Wesley share in common. Truth is an "active passivity" where we receive Christ's righteousness and in turn perform it. The reception assumes a "nature" that can be perfected, and this is where philosophy and the *via media* are important. Roman Catholic theology recognizes the connection of this to the divine economy in that Mary's nature becomes the source for the performance of the Truth who is Christ. Wesleyans can benefit from this for they too recognize the intimate association between holiness and truth.

Chapter One

Christian Philosophy after *Fides et Ratio*

Christopher Anadale, Conception Seminary College.

Pope John Paul II's encyclicals *Fides et Ratio* and *Veritatis Splendor* demand a response from philosophers. John Paul clearly recognizes the importance of the contemporary practice of philosophy; however, he also is acutely aware of contemporary philosophy's defects. His writing seeks to accomplish three tasks. The first is to enumerate and detail the philosophical schools and movements rejected or problematized by John Paul's view, as well as those recommended. The second task is to describe the foundations of a possible Christian philosophical consensus emerging from this vision. Finally, this chapter will explore the implications of this view for pluralism in the profession, and will conclude by asking whether this vision for philosophy is a viable consensus for Christian philosophers today.

I undertake this task in the Socratic spirit of the quest for truth, and with a profound interest in maintaining space for pluralism in scholarly opinion. My position as a non-Thomist philosopher at a Catholic seminary informs my concern on this front. What I propose below is not the only possible Christian philosophy, but a starting point for discussion and debate. I hope to advance the conversation and set up a framework for further dialogue between Christian philosophers of different faith traditions.

Problems in Contemporary Philosophy

My texts for uncovering John Paul's vision for philosophy are two encyclical letters: *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), and *Fides et Ratio* (1998). The former is primarily concerned with moral theology, clarifying Church teaching and correcting systematic errors present in the work of some Catholic theologians. The latter addresses philosophy, theology, and the relationship between them.

Veritatis Splendor is primarily a disciplinary document, setting out the boundaries of dissent and legitimate pluralism in Catholic moral theology. In performing this task, it also addresses the presuppositions behind the dis-

sent, that is, the contemporary philosophical influences animating it. Below I enumerate these philosophical positions, along with John Paul's reasons for rejecting them.

The general purpose of *Veritatis Splendor* is to address the Church's entire moral teaching, in response to a crisis of dissent with its

> overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine, on the basis of certain anthropological and ethical presuppositions. At the root of these presuppositions is the more or less obvious influence of currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth.[1]

Three significant errors follow from these contemporary philosophical influences. The first is the rejection of the natural law, and the denial of its universality and permanence. The second is the reduction of the Church's moral teaching to an advisory role, exhorting consciences only, and unable to speak with authority on ethical questions. The third is the questioning of the bond between faith and morals, reducing church membership to faith alone, with unlimited pluralism in morals, based on individual subjective conscience.

The specific purpose of *Veritatis Splendor* is "to set forth…the principles of a moral teaching based upon Sacred Scripture and the living Apostolic Tradition, and at the same time to shed light on the presuppositions and consequences of the dissent which that teaching has met."[2] The philosophy behind the theological controversy is the main focus of this chapter.

The encyclical begins by observing: "No one can escape from the fundamental questions: What must I do? How do I distinguish good from evil?"[3] These are theological questions, to which the answer for each ultimately is Christ, but both also have philosophical dimensions. The philosophical content of this encyclical is primarily ethical, insofar as philosophical ethics influences moral theology.

The first chapter is a meditation on the story of the rich young man from the Gospel of Matthew. The young man's question, "What good must I do to

1 Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth* [*Veritas Splendor*]: *Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching*, Vatican translation (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 1993), paragraph 4. Hereafter cited as *VS*, by paragraph.

2 *VS* 5.

3 *VS* 2.

have eternal life?" is shot through with existential significance, both religious and philosophical. In its implication of eternal life, the question is clearly a religious one, but in its focus on the moral life and the difficulty of choosing the good, the young man's question is philosophical. It is a question, John Paul observes, "about the full meaning of life," which is "at the heart of every human decision and action."[4] This question is "an essential and unavoidable question for the life of every man."[5]

A key assertion of the first chapter of *Veritatis Splendor* is the sovereignty of God over the moral order. This means that the philosophical question of the good ultimately is continuous with the religious question of the good. John Paul notes, "To ask about the good, in fact, ultimately means to turn towards God, the fullness of goodness."[6] A Christian ethical philosophy following this teaching would need to be oriented to God as the source of goodness. One religious-historical source of revelation regarding the good is the Commandments. A nonreligious source is the natural law.

In correcting unsound trends in Catholic moral theology, says John Paul, the Church

> does not intend to impose upon the faithful any particular theological system, still less a philosophical one. Nevertheless, in order to "reverently preserve and faithfully expound" the word of God, the Magisterium has the duty to state that some trends of theological thinking and certain philosophical affirmations are incompatible with revealed truth.[7]

The central philosophical question of *Veritatis Splendor* asks what is freedom, and how is it related to the moral law?[8] Morality and freedom cannot be separated "for there can be no morality without freedom.... But what sort of freedom?" Genuine freedom depends upon "a prior moral obligation...to seek the truth and to adhere to it once it is known." The objectionable tendencies John Paul identifies in moral theology are united in denying the dependence of freedom on truth. [9]

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4 *VS* 7.

5 *VS* 8.

6 *VS* 9.

7 *VS* 29.

8 *VS* 31.

9 *VS* 34.

Freedom is not limited by the moral law, so much as fulfilled in it. "Human freedom finds its authentic and complete fulfillment precisely in the acceptance" of God's moral law. The moral law has its origin in God, yet is properly a human law, because it comes to us through natural reason. Neither human freedom nor human reason can be the ultimate foundation for values and moral norms.[10] Philosophical ethics must recognize the ultimately transcendent origin of the moral law.

Human freedom is not negated by obedience to divine law; rather, this obedience allows freedom to "abide in the truth and conform to human dignity."[11] The law is the fulfillment of human freedom: "God's plan poses no threat to man's genuine freedom; on the contrary, the acceptance of God's plan is the only way to affirm that freedom."[12]

Conscience makes manifest the link between freedom and truth by searching for truth and allowing the truth to guide its actions.[13] Each person has an obligation to form his conscience. The Church helps in this by declaring the truth of Christ and the truths found in human nature. John Paul states, "It follows that the authority of the Church, when she pronounces on moral questions, in no way undermines the freedom of conscience of Christians."[14]

In the second chapter of *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul singles out several teachings for criticism. Some of these positions, most notably the fundamental option, are theological in character, but many others are primarily philosophical. The encyclical strongly rejects these positions as incompatible with Christian truth.

Among the teachings condemned are errors about human freedom. These often spring from a concern for the integrity of conscience, but a concern expressed in "ways that diverge from the truth about man and the image of God and thus need to be purified in the light of faith."[15]

One contemporary error about freedom is expressed in views that "exalt freedom to such an extent that it becomes an absolute, which would then be

10 *VS* 35, 40.

11 *VS* 42.

12 *VS* 45.

13 *VS* 61.

14 *VS* 64.

15 *VS* 31.

the source of all values."[16] These doctrines, having lost a sense of the transcendent dimension of human existence, enthrone the individual conscience as the "supreme tribunal of moral judgment which hands down categorical and infallible decisions about good and evil."[17] Philosophers espousing these views err in assuming that the judgment of conscience is *ipso facto* correct. This assumption leads away from the claims of truth towards a standard of sincerity and authenticity and ultimately a radical subjectivism with respect to moral judgment. John Paul's criticism calls into question some versions of existentialism, and any philosophy that denies the very idea of a human nature. Ethical philosophies grounded in radical individualism are also ruled out, along the same lines.

John Paul also condemns modern views that "question or even deny the very reality of human freedom."[18] These views spring from discoveries in the behavioral sciences, but go beyond the legitimate boundaries of what can be concluded from these disciplines. They end in moral relativism or the denial of universal values. Also problematic are theories that define freedom as opposed to and in conflict with humanity's material and biological nature, which they classify as something to be overcome or dominated.[19]

Another erroneous view of freedom is the modern idea of autonomy, or "the complete sovereignty of reason in the domain of moral norms."[20] This may be read as a rebuke to the family of Kantian ethical philosophies. John Paul asserts that although practical reason possesses a "rightful autonomy" in morals, "the autonomy of reason cannot mean that reason itself creates values or moral norms."[21]

Furthermore, Kantian perspectives are mistaken insofar as they classify revealed moral law as heteronomous, for "obedience to God is not … heteronomy, as if the moral life were subject to the will of something all-powerful, absolute, extraneous to man and intolerant of his freedom."[22] If the moral law were totally unrelated to man's ultimate good, then such heteronomy would

16 *VS* 32.

17 Ibid.

18 *VS* 33.

19 *VS* 46.

20 *VS* 30, emphasis in original.

21 *VS* 40.

22 *VS* 41.

be a source of profound alienation. But again the moral law, while divine in origin, "is properly a human law."[23]

Some contemporary philosophers grant human freedom "absolute sovereignty," thereby subordinating truth to freedom. John Paul condemns

> currents of thought in ethics which center upon an alleged conflict between freedom and law. These doctrines would grant to individuals or social groups the right to determine what is good or evil. Human freedom would thus be able to "create values" and would enjoy a primacy over truth, to the point that truth itself would be considered a creation of freedom.[24]

Philosophers espousing these views misread the nature of Christian obedience to divine law.

John Paul also rejects ethical theories, such as consequentialism, that deny the possibility of absolute moral prohibitions or intrinsically evil acts.[25] Related to this is the view that one must always consider intentions and consequences of an act before being able to describe the act as morally evil.[26] This condemnation problematizes contemporary utilitarianisms and related consequentialist views.

More generally, the Pope counsels moral theologians to be cautious in a culture characterized by relativism, positivism, and pragmatism. These are obviously intellectual hazards to be avoided by Christian philosophers as well.

Veritatis Splendor was followed five years later by John Paul's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, a document explicitly addressed to philosophy and philosophers. *Fides et Ratio* [*Faith and Reason*] is a long document, dedicated to exploring the relation between natural reason and Christian faith. It is impossible to summarize the entire encyclical, so I will limit myself to detailing some of the philosophical principles condemned and praised in it.

The philosophical trends condemned in *Fides et Ratio* fall into five categories. The first and fundamental error, and source of the others, is a lack of confidence in the power of human reason to know objective truth. This lack of confidence can amount even to suspicion or distrust of the faculty of reason. Three other errors follow from this distrust: the rejection of metaphysics,

23 *VS* 40.

24 *VS* 35, emphasis in original.

25 *VS* 75, 79.

26 *VS* 103.

the scaling back of philosophy's ambitions, and attempts to replace philosophy with some form of social science.

An "excessive pessimism about the power of natural reason" is the chief obstacle to the realization of John Paul's vision for philosophy. This pessimism leads to agnosticism, relativism, and widespread skepticism. It also generates a cultural assumption that all views are equally valid, terminating in an undifferentiated pluralism of opinion, "which is one of today's most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth."[27]

Contemporary philosophy, in its existential, hermeneutical, and linguistic pursuits, had brought us closer to the truth about humanity, but tends to "ignore the radical question of the truth about personal existence, about being, and about God." This leads to "widespread distrust of the human being's great capacity for knowledge," meaning that "the hope that philosophy might be able to provide definitive answers to these questions has dwindled."[28]

The second philosophical error, a consequence of faltering confidence in human reason's power to know the truth, is the rejection of metaphysics, often conjoined with a rejection of revelation. Philosophy needs faith. John Paul states, "Deprived of what Revelation offers, reason has taken side-tracks which expose it to the danger of losing sight of its final goal.… [R]eason which is unrelated to an adult faith is not prompted to turn its gaze to the newness and radicality of being."[29] Furthermore, a "philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be radically unsuited to the task of mediation in the understanding of Revelation."[30]

Connecting these two problems with a third, the Pope writes of

> the deep-seated distrust of reason which has surfaced in the most recent developments of much of philosophical research, to the point where there is talk at times of "the end of metaphysics." Philosophy is expected to rest content with more modest tasks such as the simple interpretation of facts or an enquiry into restricted fields of human knowing or its structures.[31]

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27 Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio: On the Relationship Between Faith and Reason*, Vatican translation (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 1998), paragraph 5. Hereafter cited as *FR*, by paragraph.

28 Ibid.

29 *FR* 48.

30 *FR* 83.

31 *FR* 55.

In addition to abandoning metaphysical speculation, a contemporary philosophy that doubts the power of reason loses the idea of truth as its goal, instead aiming at lower goals.

> In the wake of these cultural shifts, some philosophers have abandoned the search for truth in itself and made their sole aim the attainment of a subjective certainty or a pragmatic sense of utility. This in turn has obscured the true dignity of reason, which is no longer equipped to know the truth and to seek the absolute.[32]

Giving up truth as a goal of philosophical inquiry also implies abandoning the philosophical search for ultimate meaning in life.

> In consequence, the human spirit is often invaded by a kind of ambiguous thinking which leads it to an ever deepening introversion, locked within the confines of its own immanence without reference of any kind to the transcendent. A philosophy which no longer asks the question of the meaning of life would be in grave danger of reducing reason to merely accessory functions, with no real passion for the search for truth.[33]

The final error generated by pessimism about the power of reason is that of replacing philosophy with some form of science. Philosophy has been culturally marginalized in recent decades. Reasons for this include the distrust of reason and anti-metaphysical stance of much recent philosophy, but also a misunderstanding the human sciences that takes them as substitutes for philosophy. This can be motivated by respect for the inculturation of faith, but, says John Paul, "the study of traditional ways must go hand in hand with philosophical enquiry."[34]

Some Catholic theologians mistakenly deny the central role of the Church's philosophical heritage. But no other discipline can take its place, especially in seminary education, as preparation for theology, and as a means of unifying knowledge.[35] Philosophy is indispensable, for "the human being is by nature a philosopher."[36] Indeed, "the thirst for truth is so rooted in

32 *FR* 47.

33 *FR* 81.

34 *FR* 61.

35 *FR* 69.

36 *FR* 64.

the human heart that to be obliged to ignore it would cast our existence into jeopardy."[37]

One Possible Christian Philosophy

I now turn from summarizing criticisms to outlining John Paul's positive vision for Christian philosophy. The pursuit of truth is the original vocation of philosophy, which needs to be recovered from contemporary intellectual trends. Philosophy, John Paul tells us, "is directly concerned with asking the question of life's meaning and sketching an answer to it." With its genuine love of wisdom, philosophy is "one of noblest of human tasks."[38]

Fides et Ratio recommends three general qualities to Christian philosophy: it should be speculative, social, and open to transcendence. John Paul identifies "the ability to speculate which is proper to the human intellect" as a core philosophical method. Philosophers should respect the speculative method even above their own conclusions, so that "every philosophical system… must still recognize the primacy of philosophical enquiry, from which it stems and which it ought loyally to serve."[39] This emphasis on speculative philosophy means that analytic philosophy, for all its usefulness and truth, cannot serve alone as a wholistic philosophy. It must be supplemented by an ultimately speculative framework.

Christian philosophy must also be social, in several senses. It must enter into dialogue in the Socratic spirit of openness to being questioned. John Paul recommends that philosophers embrace the classical ideal of friendship, recognizing their "situatedness" in a community of belief and mutual trust:

> It must not be forgotten that reason too needs to be sustained in all its searching by trusting dialogue and sincere friendship. A climate of suspicion and distrust, which can beset speculative research, ignores the teaching of the ancient philosophers who proposed friendship as one of the most appropriate contexts for sound philosophical inquiry.[40]

Finally, Christian philosophy should be open to transcendence and re-

37 *FR* 29.

38 *FR* 3.

39 *FR* 4.

40 *FR* 33.

spectful of the legitimate claims of faith. John Paul writes, "The truth of values is to be found not by turning in on oneself but by opening oneself to apprehend that truth even at levels which transcend the person. This is an essential condition for us to become ourselves and to grow as mature, adult persons."[41] Reason must know its limits with respect to faith: it cannot be absolute and ultimate, and must remain open to being questioned.

> The content of Revelation can never debase the discoveries and legitimate autonomy of reason. Yet, conscious that it cannot set itself up as an absolute and exclusive value, reason on its part must never lose its capacity to question and to be questioned.[42]

Philosophy and theology thus "offer to each other a purifying critique and stimulus to pursue the search for deeper understanding."[43]

In addition to these three general qualities, John Paul articulates three specific requirements of a renewed Christian philosophy. We moderns need "a philosophy of genuinely metaphysical range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth."[44] First, renewed Christian philosophy must be metaphysical in character; this is especially needed to respond to the contemporary crisis of meaning.[45] Second, such a philosophy must possess a sapiential dimension, constituting a search for the ultimate meaning of human life.[46] Third, Christian philosophy must verify the human capacity to know the truth, in response to contemporary trends that would deny this capacity. [47]

These three requirements are interrelated, each two suggesting the third. Each may be regarded as primary, when Christian philosophy is examined in a certain way, but none can suffice without the others. The affirmation of human reason's capacity to know the truth seems to respond best to the contemporary philosophical problems identified in *Veritatis Splendor*. Insistence

41 *FR* 25.

42 *FR* 79.

43 *FR* 100.

44 *FR* 83.

45 Ibid.

46 *FR* 81.

47 *FR* 82.

on the ability of philosophy to bring us to truth places Christian philosophy in opposition to some currently popular philosophical schools.

A renewed Christian philosophy will also serve the Church as a preparation for the spread of the faith. Philosophy accomplishes this evangelistic mission by restoring people's lost confidence in their ability to know the truth, and leading them to Truth by degrees. It also affirms the dignity of humanity, which will be more perfectly seen in the light of knowledge of Christ.[48] John Paul offers the following evangelistic charge to Christian philosophers:

> I appeal now to philosophers to explore more comprehensively the dimensions of the true, the good and the beautiful to which the word of God gives access.… This attention to philosophy too should be seen as a fundamental and original contribution in service of the new evangelization.[49]

In our quest to persuade people of the value of this renewed Christian philosophy, John Paul recommends we study and draw on the philosophical tradition of the Church:

> I believe that those philosophers who wish to respond today to the demands which the word of God makes on human thinking should develop their thought on the basis of these postulates and in organic continuity with the great tradition which, beginning with the ancients, passes through the Fathers of the Church and the masters of Scholasticism and includes the fundamental achievements of modern and contemporary thought. If philosophers can take their place within this tradition and draw their inspiration from it, they will certainly not fail to respect philosophy's demand for autonomy.… Precisely by being rooted in the tradition will we be able today to develop for the future an original, new and constructive mode of thinking.[50]

In sum, philosophy aspires to three goals: universality, ultimacy, and autonomy. Philosophy aims to discover objective truths that will hold for all human beings and human cultures (universality), truths that answer the fundamental questions at the heart of human existence (ultimacy). Philosophy also seeks to govern itself solely by its own internal standards (autonomy). John Paul suggests that the best way to preserve the universality and ultimacy of philosophy is to situate its autonomy within the tradition of Christian faith.

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48 *FR* 102.

49 *FR* 103.

50 *FR* 85.

Fides et Ratio is a forceful defense of the value of a philosophy that does exactly this.

John Paul's final address to Christian philosophers is worth quoting in full:

> I appeal also to philosophers, and to all teachers of philosophy, asking them to have the courage to recover, in the flow of an enduringly valid philosophical tradition, the range of authentic wisdom and truth—metaphysical truth included—which is proper to philosophical enquiry. They should be open to the impelling questions which arise from the word of God and they should be strong enough to shape their thought and discussion in response to that challenge. Let them always strive for truth, alert to the good which truth contains. Then they will be able to formulate the genuine ethics which humanity needs so urgently at this particular time. The Church follows the work of philosophers with interest and appreciation; and they should rest assured of her respect for the rightful autonomy of their discipline. I would want especially to encourage believers working in the philosophical field to illumine the range of human activity by the exercise of a reason which grows more penetrating and assured because of the support it receives from faith.[51]

Fides et Ratio concludes with the image of the Mother of God, calling upon Christians to "philosophize in Mary."[52] This implies trying to imitate her humility and companionship with Christ, from the Incarnation to the foot of the cross. Her fiat can serve as a model for embracing God's will without losing our freedom or dignity. John Paul offers her as a model for philosophy's encounter with theology, an encounter that ought to be both fruitful and transformative. For Christian philosophers, Mary may join Socrates as a personal inspiration.

Implications for Pluralism

In any definition of philosophy, there is a danger of violating legitimate pluralism. This is especially the case when starting, as this chapter did, with criticism of views to be rejected. John Paul goes out of his way to emphasize that the Church has no official philosophy and embraces a variety of different approaches to philosophy. In *Fides et Ratio,* he praises language philosophy

51 *FR* 106.

52 *FR* 108.

and hermeneutics for their contributions to knowledge. He even calls for serious engagement with postmodernism: "One thing however is certain: the currents of thought which claim to be postmodern merit appropriate attention."[53] Furthermore,

> closer scrutiny shows that even in the philosophical thinking of those who helped drive faith and reason further apart there are found at times precious and seminal insights which, if pursued and developed with mind and heart rightly tuned, can lead to the discovery of truth's way.[54]

Contemporary philosophy, in its existential, hermeneutical and linguistic pursuits, has brought us closer to the truth about humanity, but tends to "ignore the radical question of the truth about personal existence, about being and about God." This leads to "widespread distrust of the human being's great capacity for knowledge," meaning that "the hope that philosophy might be able to provide definitive answers to these questions has dwindled."[55] Christian philosophy, on John Paul's vision, should seek to appropriate the truths of these philosophies while avoiding their characteristic errors.

A renewed Christian philosophy obviously will not be immune from error. Even the best philosophy will provide only a partial answer to the questions of human existence, for human reason at its best remains weakened by sin. For this reason, "no historical form of philosophy can legitimately claim to embrace the totality of truth, nor to be the complete explanation of the human being, of the world and of the human being's relationship with God."[56]

Christian philosophy's engagement with its rivals should always be governed by the principle of duty to the truth. "The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others." But "we Bishops have the duty to be 'witnesses to the truth,' fulfilling a humble but tenacious ministry of service which every philosopher should appreciate, a service in favour… of reason reflecting rightly upon what is true."[57]

John Paul maintains that dedication to the truth is not intolerant, but rather

53 *FR* 91.

54 *FR* 48.

55 *FR* 5.

56 *FR* 51.

57 *FR* 49, 50.

a necessary precondition for meaningful discourse. "To believe it possible to know a universally valid truth is in no way to encourage intolerance; on the contrary, it is the essential condition for sincere and authentic dialogue between persons."[58] In part for this reason, the Catholic Church's devotion to truth is accompanied by a respect for intellectual pluralism. "From different quarters, then, modes of philosophical speculation have continued to emerge and have sought to keep alive the great tradition of Christian thought which unites faith and reason."[59]

QUESTIONS

John Paul's vision is a challenge to philosophy to recover its vocation and its historical role as a unifier of knowledge, ancillary to theology, and preparation for evangelization. It is a challenge to teachers and researchers in philosophy today. As a means of sharpening this challenge, I close with a series of questions.

Can we commit to speculative philosophy? That is, are we willing to interpret our teaching and research in a manner consistent with the view of philosophy outlined above? Do Christian philosophers in the analytic and postmodern idioms find this vision too confining?

Do John Paul's justifications convince Christians from denominations traditionally suspicious of metaphysics to accept it as the core of their philosophy? What greater refinement, philosophically or rhetorically, might be required to answer the legitimate concerns of Protestant Christians on this score?

Can the renewed Christian philosophy advocated in these encyclicals serve as the basis for a new Christian intellectual community? Are there any doctrinal difficulties in the way of pursuing "philosophical ecumenism" along the lines set out above?

These questions and others may occupy Christian philosophers of good will for some time to come. I look forward to many such conversations.

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58 *FR* 92.

59 *FR* 59.

POSTSCRIPT TO CHAPTER ONE: SEEKING TRUTH AFTER *FIDES ET RATIO*

Professor Christopher Anadale's questions set the context for our development of *via media philosophy*. With a helpful exposition of Pope John Paul's encyclical *Fides et Ratio [Faith and Reason],* Anadale challenges philosophers to seek truth after exploring the propositions of this papal letter. The title of the encyclical causes the reader to explore a methodological dynamic of *via media philosophy*. By placing what are commonly considered to be antithetical pairs in conversation, one hopes to explore an holistic environment that may allow significant truth-claims to emerge in this new or renewed setting. In this case, faith is often defined using Hebrews 11:1, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Reason, with its "concern to investigate human subjectivity," (*FR*, 5) seems to be the antithesis of this form of faith. However, the title of the encyclical places these seemingly disparate ideas together and then develops a thesis showing that both are needed for an holistic understanding of the person. This technique is crucial for developing a *via media philosophy.* One truth is placed against a seemingly divergent truth and an holistic truth is nurtured into understanding.

John Paul's goal in *Fides et Ratio* is to help define a consensus of materials from which a common Christian philosophy might emerge, by a *via media* method or otherwise. His negative project of rejecting certain philosophical schools and attitudes is not finally dogmatic, but rather geared towards ensuring that the philosophies that might emerge from what remains are distinctively Christian. Dogmatic claims have often been constructed on a narrowed scope of truth-claims that serve the interests of a particular center of power such as a denomination. To put Jean Paul's goals another way, he is proposing a broad body of Christian truth-claims between which we might legitimately seek a *via media* for all Christians.

Chapter Two

The "Catholic" Continental Philosophers: Nancy and Vattimo on Incarnation and Christianity

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"Today the silence of philosophy with respect to God has no basis in any philosophically relevant principle." Gianni Vattimo[1]

"What we took to be an *Uberwindung* (overcoming, realization and thus a setting aside) is no more than a *Verwindung*, a long convalescence… ." Gianni Vattimo[2]

Gianni Vattimo and Jean-Luc Nancy engage in precisely the sort of philosophical questioning that Pope John Paul II warns his Church about: they pursue hermeneutics and deconstruction, respectively, and bracket the question of metaphysics and universal truth in favor of a more modest, linguistic approach to questions of meaning. Thus, their works involve an exploration of the kind of philosophy that, according to John Paul, we should avoid or at least approach with suspicion. However, even if the Church Catholic may not accept in full force their projects, these presumptively Catholic philosophers do bring to the forefront a topic that most of Continental Philosophy (and, frankly, Modern Philosophy) seeks to avoid: the Incarnation of Christ.

The discussion of the religious that has taken place so far in continental philosophy has largely contented itself with a/theology, which consists of discourse on a "God" that is a-metaphysical and "beyond Being." Nancy and Vattimo, however, direct our attention to the elephant in the room: Christianity. Of course, Emmanuel Levinas helped set us on this course through his introduction of "Jew" to "Greek." But, as Nancy points out, perhaps what we should mean by "Jew" is not the diasporic and persecuted minority religion, but the dominant Christianity that has ruled for centuries.[3] Or, alternative-

1 Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 86. Henceforth abbreviated as *AC*.

2 Ibid., 79.

3 Nancy asks, in "The Deconstruction of Christianity," if this "'Jew-Greek' that is our history, is not, in fact, Christian?" Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Deconstruction of Christianity," *Religion and Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 113.