

A RESPONSE (I) TO GERALD McCOOL

About thirty years ago Bernard Lonergan wrote:

Plainly, there was only one real Aquinas; plainly there can be many Thomistic developments. And though there are many, still there never will be any difficulty in distinguishing the genuine from the counterfeit. "Ex operibus eorum cognoscetis eos." A completely genuine development of the thought of St. Thomas will command in all the universities of the modern world the same admiration and respect that St. Thomas himself commanded in the medieval university of Paris. If the labors of Catholic scholars during the past seventy years have been great and their fruits already palpable, it remains that so sanguine an expectation has not yet been brought to birth.¹

I would like to begin my remarks by saying that Professor McCool's paper has communicated to me the sense of his having been inspired not by a nostalgia—a futile longing for a noble past incapable of realization in the present—but rather by a sanguine expectation about the possibility for a genuine development of the thought of Aquinas to command admiration and respect in the university today.

A sign of that seriousness is Professor McCool's calm assessment of why the children of *Aeterni Patris* have aborted. The *Sitz im Leben* of that document is but a chapter in what Eric Voegelin has called post-Enlightenment dogmatomachy, and so its assumptions are shot through with ahistorical orthodoxy. For this reason, according to McCool, the Maréchal school of Thomism—the only branch that now appears to be of more than historical interest—represents a break from the Thomism of *Aeterni Patris*. For McCool, surely, the only Thomism workable today is one which can synthesize Aristotelico-Thomist epistemology and metaphysics with post-Kantian philosophy. Yet given the understandable suspicion that in every instance of synthesis one or both parties to the combination suffers the loss or at least the dilution of something essential, he does not fail to ask in all honesty about the demise of the neo-Thomist movement.

Applying certain (rather unsystematically stated) criteria for discerning the presence or absence of that *differentia specifica*, Thomism, Professor McCool finds that the greatest proponent of Maréchal Thomism, Karl Rahner, is a Thomist, while the at best marginal Maréchal, Bernard Lonergan, has moved beyond the pale. The kernel of his case here seems to be that Rahner has

¹ See B. Lonergan, *Verbum. Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. by D. B. Burrell, C.S.C. (Notre Dame, 1967), p. 220. This book is an edition of articles appearing in *Theological Studies* from 1946-1949.

elaborated an *Erkenntnismetaphysik* which thematizes (1) the sort of necessity which would seem to be required by the gnoseology and scientific method of Aristotle; and (2) the sort of structured dynamism capable of accommodating both Aristotelian metaphysics and Hegelian dialectic of being. Lonergan, on the other hand, has (1) abandoned a strictly necessitarian criteriology; and (2) worked out "a new metaphysics of potency, form and act quite distinct from Aristotelian metaphysics and a new conception of philosophical and theological method to supersede the Aristotelian scientific method of the Thomist theologians." McCool surmises that although Rahner may after all have "overcome the opposition between Thomism and post-Kantian philosophy which the authors of *Aeterni Patris* considered to be unbridgeable," for Lonergan that opposition is scarcely relevant. And so if Thomism may still be alive and well in Rahner, in Lonergan it seems to be dead and gone.

But the upshot of the question of the actuality of Thomism is really the need for theologians to take philosophy seriously in order to "present the critical grounding for the method which they propose to use in their theology." By way of suggesting the contribution of the neo-Thomist movement to that project, Professor McCool offers the set of questions at the end of his paper.

Perhaps I should insert here that by the time I completed my own three-year bout with the germanic Latin of Joseph Greth, OSB, that had been refreshed by incursions into Maritain and Gilson, I had begun (very much under the influence of McCool's articles in *Thought* and *Theological Studies*) to explore the Maréchal's vein of Thomism. My voyage of discovery took me through Maréchal's fifth *Cahier*, works of Lotz and Coreth, as well as Rahner's *Geist in Welt* and *Hörer des Wortes*, on the one hand, and the works of Lonergan on the other. Reading Rahner brought me quite naturally to a deep involvement with Heidegger, Gadamer, Voegelin, the Frankfurt School. More than ten years of post-graduate work coagulated more or less coherently into a huge dissertation on the unlikely topic of the hermeneutic circle in Gadamer and Lonergan. Out of this background, then, I find myself disagreeing with McCool's evaluation of the discontinuity between Lonergan and Aristotle/Aquinas: but whole heartedly and enthusiastically agreeing with his discrimination of Lonergan from *all* neo-Thomists.

Since I regard my agreement with Professor McCool as far more significant than my disagreement, let me begin with it.

I wonder how much he would be able to go along with my formulation of what may be our common ground. For me, what

crucially separates Lonergan from all representatives of neo-Thomism is that his starting point is neither epistemological nor metaphysical. McCool would probably grant that neo-Thomism (in contradistinction to Thomistic schools of the Baroque period and before) is basically an epistemological and metaphysical reaction to the second Enlightenment extending roughly from Descartes through Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* to the speculative philosophies of Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Still, I could not help but be struck by the omission from McCool's paper of any clear acknowledgement of the difference between cognitional theory in Lonergan's sense and epistemology/metaphysics. (This omission is underscored by his erroneous inclusion of Lonergan among those who "ground the objectivity of judgment through the process of abstraction.") Has McCool realized just how far Lonergan's procedure is from the typical neo-Thomist *démarche* from demonstrating how we know that we know to formulating the basic structures of being?

The hermeneutics of suspicion within the trajectory of the third Enlightenment that extends from Rousseau through Kant's moral philosophy down to Nietzsche and Heidegger has been dismantling the time-honored questions about knowledge of the whole (metaphysics) and about knowledge of how we know we know (epistemology). Because of what Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger have done, foundational thinkers are now required to go behind epistemology and metaphysics to lay bare not the abstract and necessary conditions of knowledge but what is actually going on when we think we are knowing and evaluating. That sort of inquiry is the business of cognitional theory or method in Lonergan's sense. The empirically verifiable results of this kind of investigation are tacitly presupposed (either taken for granted or overlooked) by any epistemology or metaphysics. What *Erkenntnistheorie* does is to speak about faculties or potencies which are not among the data of consciousness but arise from deductions within a presupposed framework of metaphysical terms and relations. But the contemporary exigence is to stick to the data of consciousness by way of scrutinizing operations that are neither merely immanent psychological events nor properly objective attainments. That is why cognitional theory goes directly to the stuff of concrete and momentous human praxis by means of intentionality analysis.

Perhaps the strategic import of getting behind the exclusively epistemological or metaphysical standpoint may be conveyed

through a possibly relevant understanding of the fate of Platonic-Socratic and Aristotelian philosophy.

The combined hermeneutics of suspicion and of recovery on the part of men like Heidegger, Gadamer, Voegelin and Strauss has revealed how once philosophy is no longer identified with epistemology and metaphysics the most significant difference between Plato and Aristotle is not that between the theory of forms of the former and the hylemorphism of the latter. As Leo Strauss once expressed it: "Plato never discusses any subject . . . without keeping in view the elementary Socratic question, 'What is the right way of life?' . . . Aristotle, on the other hand, treats of each of the various levels of beings, and hence especially every level of human life, on its own terms."² In other words, in the course of the movement from the Platonic dialogue and dialectic to the Aristotelian treatise, political philosophy as the core of all philosophy becomes restricted to a specialized field within philosophy, and metaphysics becomes "first philosophy."³ In Strauss's words, "Aristotle's cosmology as distinguished from Plato's, is unqualifiedly separable from the quest for the best political order. Aristotelian philosophizing has no longer in the same degree and in the same way as Socratic philosophizing the character of ascent."⁴ Coordinate with this subtle shift in priorities noted by Strauss is Voegelin's indication of the way the residual cosmological climate of thought within Aristotle tended to blunt his portrayal of the existential virtue, *phronesis* or political science.⁵ According to Voegelin, Aristotle could not articulate as sharply as had Plato before him the actuation of *phronesis* by an experience of transcendence; and similarly, his characterization of the *bios theoretikos* oscillated "between primal experience of the cosmos, transcendent orientation, and immanent positing of ends."⁶

Now the subtle shift by which non-dogmatic metaphysics began to displace political philosophy as first philosophy set the stage for more drastic developments. Philosophy has passed over to radical doctrinization under the auspices of the late medieval philosophic and theological schools. In this process it became more possible for Aristotelian definitions to be torn from their analytic context and so to degenerate into definitions in the

²See L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, 1953), p. 156.

³See L. Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago, 1964), pp. 20-1.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵See E. Voegelin, *Anamnesis. Zur Theorie der Geschichte und Politik* (München, 1966), p. 129.

⁶*Ibid.* See also Voegelin's *Order and History, III: Plato and Aristotle* (Baton Rouge, 1957), pp. 271-372.

nominalist sense.⁷ Eventually the second and third Enlightenments have engendered dogmatic ideologies in reaction to dogmatic theology and dogmatic metaphysics.

It may be the case that to the extent that they lack roots in the predogmatic genuineness of the classic experience of reason, liberal, neo-orthodox, and post-conciliar Roman Catholic theologies hover in the vicinity of the reactionary dogmatic ideologies. However, the current trend towards political theology may be symptomatic of a fresh desire among theologians to personally and collectively recover that character of ascent spoken of by Strauss, the experiential tension towards a transcendent ground spoken of by Voegelin. Maybe, too, this is why Johannes B. Metz has moved from strictly Rahnerian moorings to experiment with those of the so-called critical theorists, Bloch, Marcuse, Adorno, and Habermas. Critical theory would at least promise an alternative to the dogmatism of metaphysics, theology, and ideology from the standpoint of a sociological imagination. Whatever may be true of Metz, the deepest and most hopeful undercurrent in the present turbulence experienced by philosophers and theologians is what Lonergan yesterday called "the restoration of the search for the meaning of life."

The chief reason why metaphysics and epistemology in the various styles of neo-Thomism are not immediately relevant to this restoration is that they tend to proceed in the doctrinal mode of a propositional science of principles, universals, and *substantiae a materia separatae*. Even a critical as distinct from a dogmatic metaphysics presupposes a theory of objectivity; and a non-dogmatic epistemology presupposes but does not itself engage one in the meditative exegesis, the radical hermeneutics of interiority, that brings one into direct contact with the concrete dynamisms of vertical finality or self-transcendence—precisely the aim of Lonergan's method. So I would argue that any foundational concern with knowing and being that starts with epistemology or metaphysics is liable to doctrinairism, abstraction, and sets of questions to be endlessly disputed without any hope of their solution. But my own experience with cognitional theory has convinced me that it cannot be dissociated from the question of how one lives one's life.

The set of basic terms and relations determining any foundational articulation is a function of one's basic orientation, or in

⁷See E. Voegelin, *Order and History, IV: The Ecumenic Age* (Baton Rouge, 1974), p. 253; and *Anamnesis*, pp. 325-6.

Voegelin's terms, of the truth of one's existence. The first job of philosophy, then, is to bring to light the fundamental structures in terms of which we are to take our bearings, to exhibit the horizon by which we discern what is most needful and most urgent. Epistemology and metaphysics are taken most seriously to the extent that one first faces fairly and squarely the prior practical or political issue.

Now if Lonergan's method is primarily dialectical and conversion-oriented and only then explanation-oriented, then it is going to both elucidate and depend on decisions as contingent, judgments as attaining no more than the virtually unconditioned, and acts of understanding as so caught up in the interplay of inquiry and imagination as to virtually coincide with the bubbling up from the psyche of the suitable schematic image. But if the decisions are not arbitrary, the judgments absolute, the insights illuminating, then there may still be a continuity with Aristotelian and Thomist metaphysical categories of potency, form, and act. There is some truth in McCool's allegation that Lonergan is "no longer interested in transforming an Aristotelian metaphysics of man." For Lonergan, I believe, the key word is transposition, not transformation. From the vantage of intentionality analysis, Lonergan is in complete agreement with Aristotle about the objective reality of what is known by understanding—"what is known by intellect is a partial constituent of the realities first known by sense."⁸ But he moves beyond Aristotle in respect to the thematization of judgment and its ontological correlative, act. Doctrinal exigences, for example, with respect to the ontological constitution of the Word Incarnate required that he be more clear about *esse* than Aristotle; but in this he would be no less "Aristotelian" than Thomas. How "Thomist" one estimates Lonergan to be would depend on how one conceives the interdependence of ontological causes and cognitive reasons. If one disagrees with Lonergan's apprehension of this relationship then one cannot but dispute his claim that

any genuine development in Aristotelian and Thomist thought . . . will originate in a development in man's understanding of the material universe; from a developed understanding of material things it will proceed to a developed understanding of human understanding and from a developed understanding of human understanding it will reach a clearer or fuller or more methodical account of both cognitive reasons and ontological causes.⁹

⁸See Lonergan, *Verbum*, p. 20.

⁹See B. Lonergan, *Collection*, ed. by F. E. Crowe, S.J. (New York, 1963), p. 155.

The chief continuity between Aquinas and Lonergan lies not simply in their appreciation of the need for moving from religious or theological statements (e.g. "God knows and loves the created universe.") to assign the ontological conditions for the truth of these affirmations in God and in creatures by means of an explicit metaphysics. It lies much more in their common apprehension of the act of understanding as prior to explanatory concepts so that it and not the concept provides the key to their explicit metaphysics. And this centrality of the act of understanding common to both is what in my opinion renders Lonergan's transposition of Thomas' idea of theology as a *scientia subalternata* into the idea of theology as a methodically controlled and functionally specialized praxis a genuine development.

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