

- Topic: Cultural Critique and Spiritual Renewal:  
The Writings of Louis Dupré
- Convener: George P. Schner, Regis College, Toronto
- Presenters: Stephen Fields, Georgetown University  
William O'Neill, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley  
George P. Schner, Regis College, Toronto
- Respondent: Cyril O'Regan, University of Notre Dame

Fields began the presentations with a review of the importance of representation in the spiritual life, as explored by Dupré. The possibility for *natura* to be an apt symbol for *gratia*, as evidenced in the Baroque period, for example, was realized in the entire range of cultural invention. Dupré's concern is to discover what accounts for the dissolution of this unity, a loss which "results from a restricting of the mind's dialectical drive toward its transcendent term" (Fields). This invention of secularity and the concomitant loss of the sacred must be addressed by an inward turn, such that the reconciliation of nature and grace can be fostered by "the personal cultivation of religious experience" (Fields). Thus, some would suggest, we are closer to the world of Augustine than that of Aquinas. Fields ended with a query as to how Dupré's analysis might be strengthened by "a better integration of personal piety with the culture of ecclesial, even ecclesiastical, religion" (Fields).

O'Neill addressed the importance of Dupré's thought for religious ethics in public life. In a series of brief remarks, he first traced the history of the emergence of modern "ethics," such that "it is only with the unraveling of traditional natural teleology in late medieval nominalism that our question appears in its quint-essentially modern form, that is, that morality's sanctions turn not upon divining our rational ends . . . but rather upon a suitably constrained willing" (O'Neill). As this history unfolds, we are left with a choice for ethics between a universalism which implies formalism and a "thin" theory (neo-Kantian) or a "thick" (neo-Aristotelian, neo-Hegelian) theory. O'Neill suggested that Dupré offers a "via media" which he detailed in three theses: first, a rhetorical reading of "rights" as rhetorical constraints upon our communicative practices; second, not an individualistic reading of "rights" but a notion of them as the deep grammar of our particular narrative traditions; third, a rapprochement of the politics of rights and of the common good which would require the turn inward to entail a turn outward to prophetic public theology.

Schner chose as a schema for discussing the myriad works by Dupré on philosophy of religion, four themes from the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. He suggested that Dupré offers excellent guidance for the implementation of the intent of the encyclical. First, Dupré's work has been a careful investigation of both *fides* and *ratio*. As to religion, he has always explored it in its actual forms, not as a mere notion, but in its intrasystematic intelligibility, and in its full range of manifestations in cult, conduct, and creed. His study of Western philosophy more lately

extends back from the modern to the ancient period and always deals with careful textual analysis. Second, his study of the "history" of philosophy has searched for its own inner dynamic, explored across a range of thematic loci (representation, feeling, intentionality, truth, experience, and so on). Third, he has searched in that history for a guiding insight into how and why Western culture lost the unity of discourse of *cosmos*, *anthropos*, and *theos*. Finally, quoting from Dupré's Chancellor's Lecture at Regis College, November 1999, Schnier noted that Dupré continues his search for a manner in which to bring a renewal of philosophy into the public realm, a task he set out in the Marquette Lecture, *Metaphysics and Culture*.

Cyril O'Regan responded to each paper, offering two illuminating remarks in particular. He noted that the very nature of the "object" under study (the religious dimension of human existence and its intentionality towards God) requires an inner dialectic in Dupré's work, a movement between Kierkegaard and Hegel, between symbols and inner experience, between the Greek and the Augustinian church. Second, he raised questions about the continuing work on the origins of modernity, whether Dupré proposes a radical rift requiring radical criticism and whether he has fully explored the ontological grounds for the history of origins he proposes in *Passage to Modernity*. O'Regan's insightful remarks led to questions about the meaning of "symbol" in Dupré's work, further discussion of our stance toward modernity (pro or con), and requests for details about Dupré's corpus of scholarship.

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