

# ON THE RELATION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION\*

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The problem from which these reflections begin is fairly straightforward: Although philosophy came into the world by separating itself off from religion, in modern times, it seems to be trying to incorporate within itself what, in my opinion, properly belongs to religion. The representatives of modern philosophy I have in mind are chiefly Nietzsche and Heidegger.<sup>1</sup> In order to understand better how and why this change came about I will sketch out a very general history of the relation between philosophy and religion, for ancient, medieval and modern philosophy. (It is, incidentally, clear from this that I am speaking of what some call Western Philosophy.)

First, a preliminary distinction: The title of this paper is not "On the Relation between Philosophy and Theology," because there are traditionally two kinds of theology, of discourse about God, natural theology, discourse about God or gods based on natural reason and naturally acquired evidence, and revealed theology, theology based on special and supernatural divine revelation. The two kinds of theology are not always kept separate, as the famous saying of Heraclitus illustrates: "The only wise thing is one, it does not wish and it does wish to be called by the name of Zeus."<sup>2</sup>

An illustration might be useful. The Declaration of Independence of the United States asserts that the laws of nature and of Nature's God entitle all men to certain natural rights, among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. What is the basis in nature of these natural rights? The traditional and correct answer, I believe, is the natural superiority of the rational animal, man, to non-rational animals, beasts. But that may be only half the story. We notice that God is referred to in the Declaration at least four times in the following order, once as legislator of the laws of nature, once as Creator<sup>3</sup>, again as Supreme Judge of the World and finally as the executor of Divine Providence. In the divine Governor of the world legislative, executive and judicial powers are united. The Founders of the United States, like intelligent men of all times, disagreed about many things, but if there is anything they all seemed to agree about it is the necessity to separate the powers of government. Humanly speaking, the uniting of legislative, executive and judicial powers in the same hands, they declared, is the very definition of tyranny. Only a divine being with supreme wisdom and goodness, with no truth-obscuring and excessively self-regarding passions could rightly possess such powers. The natural

theology of the Declaration is then an extrapolation from the idea of good government to the idea of perfect government, and the perfect governor. No human being can measure up to such a standard. No human being is sufficiently godlike to be entrusted with such despotic power over other human beings. The natural rights of the Declaration then stem from human superiority with relation to the beasts and human defect with relation to God. All men are equal in that they are neither beasts nor gods. Does such a God exist? That might require faith to believe. But the natural theology of the Declaration, the idea of such a God, clarifies what it is meant to clarify whether one conceives of such a God as existing or not. By its reference to the Creator and His Providence, however, the Declaration brings both traditions together, it combines its natural<sup>4</sup> theology with the revealed theology of the Biblical tradition.

## I

### THE SEPARATION OF ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY FROM RELIGION--THE INCORPORATION OF RELIGION INTO MODERN PHILOSOPHY

The lovers of myth, Aristotle says, like the philosophers, wonder about the first things, the things whose characters and actions govern all the rest. The first philosophers distinguished themselves from the lovers of myth by no longer speaking of the first things as gods, but as nature. Science and philosophy come into the world, Aristotle suggests, with the discovery of nature<sup>5</sup>. There were and still are people who have no distinct idea of nature. The words nature and natural do not occur in the Hebrew Bible or in the Gospels<sup>6</sup>. The prephilosophic equivalents of the word nature seem to be the words way or custom. Before the discovery of nature men spoke about the gods ordering and commanding things to go in their customary ways. The way or custom of fire is to go up and burn, for the earth to bring forth plants, for human beings to speak, for one tribe to bury its dead, for another to burn its dead. At some point a curious and thoughtful person must have noticed that some ways are always the same no matter what anyone does about them, and others vary from time to time, and still others would vary from time to time more if men did not make them happen the same way. Such a person begins to become aware of the distinctions between the necessary and the accidental or contingent, the necessary and the customary and the necessary and the artificial. The ways that vary from place to place, from city to city, from tribe to tribe, must have been most striking at first because they most contradict "our way". Herodotus tells how horror-struck Greeks and Indians were on learning of each other's diverse burial customs. (III. 38) These divergencies extend to differences about the nature of the gods themselves.

The suspicion begins to arise that the ways that are

everywhere the same are primary, permanent and fundamental and those that differ from town to town and from tribe to tribe are secondary, transient and derivative. The man-made things owe their existence to forethought, the ways which are everywhere the same seem to occur by themselves automatically inside the things characterized by them. Way or custom splits up into nature, on the one hand, and convention or law, on the other<sup>7</sup>. That human beings can speak is natural, that this tribe speaks its particular language, that tribe its particular language, is conventional. Impersonal nature replaces divine ordination. The good life is no longer determined by divine law but by the quest for what is right by nature. In Plato's *Republic* the torch race in honor of the goddess, which they were supposed to watch, is forgotten in favor of the discussion in quest of the life that is good according to nature. Philosophy and science come into the world by separating themselves from religion.

To illustrate the other pole of our initial problem, the incorporation of religion into philosophy, we turn now to the man whom many regard as the greatest philosophic thinker of recent times, Martin Heidegger. For Heidegger, philosophy, or what he would rather call Thinking, cannot be academic or isolated from the spirit of society, from the spirit of one's own times, from history. The deepest sense of what things are, he argues, depends on History, and History, in German *Geschichte*, he connects with the word *Geschick*, that which has been sent. The sender, this mysterious ground of existence, or ground of the relation between being and human thought, of human fate (*Schicksal*), he sometimes calls gods, sometimes god.

The great danger of our time, Heidegger argues, is that we are so overwhelmed by the power of scientific, mathematical, technological thinking that we have begun to think of human beings as just one more product of scientific laws to be serviced, used and conveniently disposed of. In contrast to the focus on the depersonalized, the dehumanized, the cybernetic, he argues that the deepest truths about the world reveal themselves to thought and to thinkers that are caring, committed, concerned with what they regard as "mine" and ours, with home and homeland. Even the standard for human conduct that he erects as a replacement for ethical virtue, authenticity, reflects this emphasis on the personal and particular. The German word *Eigentlichkeit* has no direct English equivalent, it means "one's-ownness". In working out what amounts to his replacement for ethics the notions of conscience, anxiety, guilt and "fallenness" play central roles.

That our particularity, our individuality, like that of the fallen sparrow, should have ultimate significance makes sense, it seems, if we and our world are the creations of a loving, caring omnipotent God. Heidegger, an extraordinarily learned and thoughtful heir of the philosophic tradition has incorporated

Christian religious ideas and sentiments into his thinking without articulating the theological presuppositions that could establish their plausibility. Through a sketch of the history of the relation between philosophy and religion I hope to show that in so doing Heidegger is fulfilling one of the deepest tendencies of modern philosophy.

In fairness to Heidegger, however, it should be said that he emphatically rejects the account of the origin of philosophy out of religion and myth as a Platonic-Aristotelian prejudice. "The fall of thinking into the sciences, on the one hand, and faith, on the other, is the evil, fateful sending of Being."<sup>8</sup> Religious *mythos* and philosophic *logos* "became separated and opposed only there where neither *mythos* nor *logos* could maintain their original essential presence. This happened already with Plato." He denies that *logos* could destroy *mythos*. "Nothing religious is ever destroyed by logic; it is destroyed only by the god's withdrawing himself."<sup>9</sup>

## II

### THE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL AND MODERN PHILOSOPHY

For our sketch of the history of the relation between philosophy and religion we distinguish three positions, ancient, medieval and modern in terms of what each takes to be the ultimate source of meaningfulness in the world: ancient philosophy as nature-centered, or physiocentric; medieval philosophy as God-centered, or theocentric and modern philosophy as man(human)-centered, or anthropocentric. I do not imply that each is only valid for its time. They arose at different times and each later position presupposed the existence of the earlier positions, but they are accounted for here as permanent alternatives.

To illustrate these differences we consider how representatives of each position deal with a fairly common phenomenon, the appearance of purposiveness or end-directed activity in nature.

The primary prescientific or prephilosophic meaning of the Greek word for nature, *physis*, is growth, which includes that into which a thing grows, the end or term of growth, the state in which the thing is most capable of doing the work, or, as we say, the function, characteristic of that thing. End-directed activity is most characteristic of living things. The acorn becomes intelligible as a possible oak. The structure of the eye becomes intelligible with a view to its function of seeing. Aristotle speaks of such an end as the cause "for the sake of which," or in the later latinized form, final cause. (In this discussion of ancient philosophy I will concentrate on Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy, the most influential ancient philosophy.) Aristotle



defines nature as a principle or cause of motion and rest in that to which it belongs primarily and not by accident. The end of natural growth is a potentiality inherent in the living thing from the beginning, in its constitution, so to speak, in its very matter. He frequently compares natural end-directed activity to the end-directed activity of human making. The crucial differences are that in artifacts the final form of the work of art exists primarily in the mind of the artisan, both the end and the formative action have their source in the artisan, external to the thing produced<sup>10</sup>. The unapprehended ends of natural activities like respiration, metabolism, animal instinct, etc., do not require an external mind intending them as purposes. They are simply inherent in natural things as potentialities.

For Thomas Aquinas as representative of the theocentric view there is no end or final cause that is not intended as such by some intelligence, as the artist intends the completed work of art. If the being in which the end is being actualized does not have the intelligence to apprehend it, it is apprehended by the intelligence of another, namely the intelligence of God. We quote from his discussion of natural instinct:

"the sensitive appetite of dumb animals, and likewise the natural appetite of insensible things result from the apprehension of an intellect, just as the appetite of the intellectual nature...called the will. But there is a difference, in that the will is moved by an apprehension of the intellect in the same subject; whereas the movement of the natural appetite results from the apprehension of the separate Intellect, Who is the Author of Nature; as does also the sensitive appetite of dumb animals who act from a certain natural instinct .... in the actions of irrational animals and of other natural things we observe a procedure which is similar to...the actions of art."<sup>11</sup>

According to Immanuel Kant as representative of the modern anthropocentric view the necessary and universal laws which constitute objective knowledge of nature are not found in the things themselves, but, in his language, they are prescribed to nature by the human understanding. When we come across phenomena like the phenomena of living organized beings for which the laws of mechanical cause and effect do not seem adequate, the reflective judgment of the investigator should supply the phenomena with purposive laws that make sense of them as if some intelligent cause, a God, had produced them. Like Thomas, Kant argues that ends in nature only make sense when they are thought of as intended by some intelligence, namely God. Teleology, he argues, finds its consummation in theology. But this God cannot be assumed to have objective reality. We produce and supply the idea of such a being to ourselves in order to satisfy the subjective needs of our cognitive faculties.<sup>12</sup>

The ultimate source of the appearance of end-directed

activity in irrational nature for the ancients is the inherent nature of things in themselves, for the medievals the mind of God, for the moderns the human understanding itself.

### III ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

The Platonic-Aristotelian, or Socratic, way of seeking the primary, permanent and fundamental things that are nature (among other things, by thinking through the implications of human speech) culminates in a doctrine that the truly fundamental is the intelligible. For Plato it seems to be the eternal ideas, or forms, or species; for Aristotle the thinking, or active intellection that is the life or energy constitutive of those forms or ideas, or as he sometimes calls them, the universals. If there is to be genuine knowledge, or even true opinion, of things in themselves, these intelligibles must be able to exist at one and the same time both in the things they characterize and in the mind knowing them, in the things as enmattered, in the mind as thought.<sup>13</sup> Corresponding to the intelligibility in things, then, is the power in all rational beings to apprehend it, the power called *nous*, intellectual intuition.

There is another way to put this: for the classical philosophers the intelligible is the divine, and the concern for the truly divine is philosophy. The self-sufficiency of the intelligible is the standard for both theoretical and practical life; in this respect there is a harmony between theory and practice. But the intelligible is manifested in universal or general principles, or as we often say, in general laws, and every practical action is a particular action, an action of one's own. It is true that every human action is more or less permeated by the intelligible, by understanding, but it is always a particular action mixed with the accidental and the contingent, the inherently unintelligible.<sup>14</sup> According to this philosophy then, it is impossible for any particular or contingent event to be absolutely sacred. There seems to be a tension in our souls between the love of the good recognized by intelligence and the love of one's own that guides our spirited part. It is the natural favoritism of parents for their own children and its conflict with pure justice that leads to the unnatural family arrangements of Plato's *Republic*.

Since both poles, the love of one's own stemming from our particularity and the love of the good stemming from our intelligence are rooted in human nature, the tension can assume tragic proportions. We have no choice about the genetic make-up with which we are endowed, the family and country in which we are born. Yet to be bereft of pride of ancestry is barely tolerable, a deficiency which, furthermore, usually deprives its sufferers

of sufficient energy to pursue the goods that intelligence might discern. As individuals also, with regard to those basic goals, virtue and knowledge, it is clear that virtue is not virtue, knowledge is not knowledge, until it becomes one's own. Both poles are ineradicable or equally primordial. On the highest level, according to what Socrates says in the *Symposium*, the love of one's own and the love of the good are reconciled, the true object of love is "to have the good be one's own forever." (206a)

But for most of us most of the time the words of Plato's Athenian Stranger seem appropriate:

"In truth the cause of every failure comes to each person each time through excessive love of oneself. For the one who loves is blinded about the beloved, so that he judges the just and the good and the noble things badly, believing that he is bound always to honor what is his own before the truth."<sup>15</sup>

This consequence of our particular needs, this tendency to sacrifice the truth to the love of one's own, points to moderation as a key virtue in moral and political life, even the moderation of our highest hopes.

The sublime *Alenu* prayer sung at the close of almost every Jewish religious service calls out:

"We therefore hope in thee, O Lord our God, that we may speedily behold the glory of thy might, when the abominations will be removed from the earth ... when the world will be perfected under the kingdom of the Almighty, and all the children of flesh will call upon thy name and all the wicked of the earth will be turned to thee."

Compare this with Socrates in the *Theaetetus* answering an enthusiastic Theodorus: "But it is not possible for evils to be done away with, Theodorus, for it is necessary that there always be something contrary to the good." The moderate Socrates, however, does not silence the voice of his heart; he goes on to add that of course evils cannot be established among gods, just that necessity forces the evils "to haunt mortal nature and this region here." Flight from these evils, he says, partial assimilation to the divine as far as possible in justice, holiness and intelligence, may be possible for some individuals but not for society as a whole.<sup>16</sup>

That moderation is the virtue of the philosopher's action, but not his thoughts is exhibited by this statement of the 10th century Arabic philosopher Alfarabi on the relation of classical philosophy to religion.

"There are two ways of making a thing comprehensible: first by causing its essence to be perceived by the intellect, and second by causing it to be imagined through the similitude that imitates it. Assent, too, is brought about by one of two

methods, either the method of ... demonstration or the method of persuasion .... when one acquires knowledge of the beings or receives instruction in them, if he perceives their ideas ... with his intellect, and his assent ... is by means of ... demonstration, then the science that comprises these cognitions is philosophy .... if they are known by imagining them through similitudes that imitate them, and assent to what is imagined ... is caused by persuasive methods then the ancients call what comprises these cognitions religion .... Therefore, according to the ancients, religion is an imitation of philosophy .... Religion sets forth images [of the ultimate principles] by ...similitudes ... taken from corporeal principles and imitates them by their likenesses among political offices ..."<sup>17</sup>

Further, to enable us to overcome the passions bred by radical selfishness and the love of one's own, counteracting law-abiding passions must be bred by the sanctification of norms, in order to enable us to live decently in society with a modicum of freedom. Such sanctifications require divinities that can address us passionately, individually and collectively, here and now. Classical philosophy never considered itself able to become a substitute for public religion.

If Aristotle's treatment of religion is to<sup>18</sup> be found anywhere, I believe it is most of all in his *Poetics*, and in scattered remarks in the *Ethics*, *Politics*, *Rhetoric* and the *Metaphysics*. For Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, it is much clearer: religion is classified in the *Summa Theologica* as a part of the moral virtue of justice, religion is the worship which is properly due and paid to God.

#### IV MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

Medieval philosophy is characterized by the attempt to reconcile classical philosophy with revealed or scriptural religion, with the religions of the Bible and the Koran. For the most influential medieval philosophers the natural world, as far as natural reason unaided by supernatural revelation could comprehend it, was to be understood through the philosophy of Aristotle. The fundamental presupposition for medieval philosophy is belief in the truth of the revealed word and in the God that is its supernatural source. This assumption entails important modifications of and deviations from Aristotelian doctrine. Aristotle evidently held that the visible universe is eternal, at least, in agreement with Plato, that its intelligible underpinnings, the forms, are eternal.

All philosophers seem to have accepted what has been called



the principle of causality, namely, that nothing comes into being out of nothing. The positive consequence of the principle is not: Everything comes into being out of something. It is rather that: Everything that comes into being comes into being out of something. Those "somethings out of which" have either themselves come into being or have not come into being, that is, are unchanging. The task for scientific and philosophic knowledge then is to discover the permanent or unchanging somethings, or principles, underlying change. As Thomas Aquinas says, "that the world did not always exist is held by faith alone, and cannot be proved by demonstration."<sup>19</sup>

The Bible tells us that in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. If the ultimate principles are unchanging or eternal, philosophy tells us, there was no ultimate beginning. To meet the challenge of ancient philosophy, religious or scriptural philosophers declare that Almighty God supernaturally, miraculously, created everything out of nothing. The Platonic and Aristotelian forms are thoughts in the divine mind in accordance with which He creates the laws of nature. Unlike any human artisan He is not bound by the limitations of his materials, for all material limits also are grounded in his will. There is no eternal order independent of divine will, no source of principles for human guidance apart from that will. If the God of the Bible is omnipotent, He is also omniscient. Not the least action of the least of his creatures escapes his notice.

In practice He is a caring God, a just and loving God. There is no necessary conflict between the love of one's own and the good, if the love of one's own is sanctified by the ultimate principle of the universe. Particularity is not disparaged: the ultimate principle of the universe reveals itself in personal address to particular men, particular families and nations, on particular occasions. If their souls are immortal, each individual is of everlasting importance. One can be fully at home in the world when the world is one's Father's house.

On the other hand, one might say that the gulf between man and the God of the Bible is unbridgeable. In the Hebrew Bible the mutuality of the Covenant and the gift of the Law bridge the gulf. In Christianity the gulf itself, one is tempted to say, is overcome by the mystery of God's becoming a particular man, by the very notion that full divinity can exist in a particular man. The pain of the moral gulf between man and God is relieved by Jesus's assumption of the world's sin, for all those who are justified by believing in that sacrifice.

Morality for the Bible as a whole takes on heightened importance when error and perversion become sin, an ungrateful personal affront to the loving all-powerful source of all goodness. In explaining why divine law was needed in addition to natural and human law Thomas Aquinas says that because "of the

uncertainty of human judgment ... on contingent and particular matters ... that man may know without doubt what he ought to do and what he ought to avoid, it was necessary for man to be directed ... by a law given by God, for ... such a law cannot err."<sup>20</sup> This, however, is moderated by the arguments of philosophers like Thomas that the great bulk of morality is given to men through the natural law, the law of reason. Virtues are habits that perfect natural powers in a world so designed as to allow reason to discover the ends implicit in most of nature. Something like classical moderation, the moderating of unreasonable expectations, is also preserved in the medieval distinction between this world and the kingdom of heaven, the world to come, the "other" world.

How can classical and medieval philosophy deal with each other's fundamental assumptions? Thomas's harmonizing formula is that revelation goes beyond, but cannot contradict, reason. Because revelation is superior, philosophy is the handmaid of theology. That is not acceptable to Alfarabi's ancient philosopher: religion is an imitation of and therefore subordinate to philosophy. The possibility of Creation, Revelation and miracles seem to rest on the assumption that God is omnipotent and his will is unfathomable. Can reason refute that assumption? Is it self-contradictory? Can revelation refute reason? Can they even agree about what would constitute a refutation, what would constitute evidence? A rational proof demands suspension of belief, or doubt, until all the evidence is in. Revelation claims that its truth requires faith in the revealed and revealing God in order to be accepted and to be understood. From the point of view of rational philosophy, faith or belief is simply insufficient knowledge. Each can refute the other only by begging the question in dispute, presupposing its own canons for understanding. It appears that they are mutually irrefutable.

Faith, Thomas Aquinas tells us, is an act of the intellect wherein the intellect is moved to assent, not by the clarity and evidence of the intellect's proper object, but by the command of the will, the practical faculty.<sup>21</sup> This subordination of the theoretical to the practical faculty is another fundamental difference between ancient and medieval philosophy.

## V

### MODERN PHILOSOPHY

The mutual irrefutability of philosophy and revelation, Leo Strauss has suggested, has created a tension that is perhaps the secret of the vitality of Western Civilization, a civilization that will not allow the mind to silence the voice of the heart, nor the heart to drown out the voice of the mind. This tension must trouble philosophy more than faith. If faith in the

omnipotent God of Creation, Revelation and miracles cannot be refuted, does philosophy itself rest on indemonstrable premises, just a different kind of faith, or at best, disputable opinion?<sup>22</sup>

To free itself from this unresolvable tension and uncertainty, Strauss suggests, a new kind of philosophy, modern philosophy, comes into the world, rejecting both the idea of nature of classical philosophy and the omnipotent God of medieval philosophy - a new philosophy with a new basis, that is, man: the ultimate source of meaning for humanity's understanding of the world is the human understanding itself.

"If one wished to refute Orthodoxy, no other way remained than to attempt to demonstrate that the world and life are fully understandable without the assumption of an unfathomable God. That means that the refutation of Orthodoxy depended on the success of a system. Man had to prove himself theoretically and practically the lord of the world and the lord of his life. The world he created had to make the world that was merely 'given' to him disappear. Then Orthodoxy was more than refuted, it was 'outlived.'"<sup>23</sup>

In the introduction to his *Logic*, Kant says that the basic questions determining the basic divisions of philosophy, "What can I know?" (Nature), "What ought I to do?" (Morality), "What may I hope?" (Religion), could all be referred to the single question, "What is man?"

The classical understanding of nature is opposed by the modern idea of the conquest of nature and its practical goal, in Descartes' words, of making men "the masters and possessors of nature." The classical and medieval standard for morality, virtue, seen as natural fulfillments of natural powers, is replaced by freedom, or more precisely, autonomy. And last in our sketch of modern thought, the idea of history as a determinate process rather than a certain kind of study, becomes a secular substitute for Divine Providence.

a.

Nature, Bacon declares, cannot be conquered except by being obeyed.<sup>24</sup> The nature to be conquered must be different from the nature to be obeyed. The nature to be conquered is nature as it presents itself to ordinary prescientific experience with its apparent purposivity and unpredictability due to chance. The nature to be obeyed, through which the conquest is to take place, is the nature to be discovered by methodical experimentation keyed to (following Galileo and Descartes) mathematical laws. Final causes are to be excluded from physics. To prepare the way for the new science the classical reliance on, or "idolization" of, natural experience and natural speech is to be refuted by a critique or refutation of the natural human understanding. This critique culminates in Kant's assumption that there is no intellectual intuition that permits us to gain access to the

nature of things in themselves. There is no natural harmony between the natural human understanding and the natural world. Nature is not a kind mother, she must be tortured by methodical experimentation and forced to reveal her secrets. Furthermore, the ideas of chance or fortune and the subordination of art to nature must be rejected as breeding a "premature despair in human enterprises." The Aristotelian notion of unstable matter, pure potency, underlying the notion of fortune is altogether to be rejected. Matter is to be understood as acting in accordance with fixed and unwavering laws. Above all, Bacon insisted in opposition to medieval philosophy, physics must be separated from theology in order to avoid fabulous philosophy and heretical religion. With Bacon clearing the way, Descartes' "I think" becomes the exemplar of finding a beginning for thought that in no way depends upon anything outside of man.

b.

The new philosophy was obliged to find a new moral standard that would be compatible with a non-teleological physics. That standard, again, is freedom, autonomy, self-legislation.<sup>25</sup> Rousseau was the first to define freedom as self-legislation, but it is already implicit in Hobbes's theory of sovereignty and the social contract. According to Hobbes, we must obey the sovereign because each of us through the social contract has agreed to allow his will to represent each of our wills. His legislation, because of the social contract, is, legally considered, our own self-legislation. He is our representative. Hobbes also formulated the more fundamental principle underlying this conception: there is "no Obligation on any man, which ariseth not from some Act of his own."<sup>26</sup>

This is all made even more explicit in Rousseau's doctrine of the general will. Freedom in society consists in uniting oneself with all the rest under the general will that declares the law, while at the same time remaining free in so far as one has contributed to the making of that law. The process that makes the will general also makes it moral. Being compelled to express one's will in such form that it can become a general law, so that it can coincide with the wills of all the others, moralizes the will. If I generalize my desire not to pay taxes in a law that no one ought to pay taxes, I am compelled to see that then the police, public schools, courts, and so on, would disappear, and the irrationality of my original desire becomes manifest.

The idea is fully developed as a moral principle in Kant's doctrine of the categorical imperative: So act that the maxim of your action can become a universal law. The truly free or moral person, according to Kant, bows only to the moral will or practical reason within him or her self, and not to any standard imposed from without, either by nature or by God.



Hegel extends the notion of freedom as self-legislation beyond politics and morality to make it a logical and metaphysical principle. The life of the concept, the life of that Spirit or Mind that forms and informs the human mind, human History and the objects of human knowledge -the mind of God- proceeds in accordance with the principle of freedom, self-legislation. Hegel begins his "Doctrine of the Concept" with these words: "The Concept is the principle of freedom, the power of substance self-realized." And later:

"... the concept is the genuine first; and things are what they are through the action of the concept dwelling in them and revealing itself in them. In our religious consciousness this comes forth in such a way that we say God created the world out of nothing, or, in other words, the world and finite things have issued from the fullness of the divine thoughts and divine decrees. Thus religion recognizes thought, more exactly the concept, to be the infinite form, or the free creative activity which can realize<sup>27</sup> itself without the help of a matter that exists outside it."

At the same time modern ethical and especially political thought is said to be characterized by a certain Realism associated with the name of Machiavelli. Classical and medieval political thought, they argue, failed because it aimed too high. Because they based their political doctrines on exalted notions of virtue and societies devoted to the formation of virtue, they made themselves ineffective. As Bacon put it, their discourses are beautiful like the stars, which give little light because they are so high. Effectiveness can be secured by lowering one's goals, by accepting and exploiting those lower motives that move most men most of the time: pleasure, comfort, acquisitiveness, and especially that all powerful negative motive fear, fear for the loss of one's life and fear for the possible loss of what one already possesses.<sup>28</sup>

c.

We turn next briefly to that secular substitute for divine providence, History, the meeting place of modern morality with modern realism. One of the first signposts on the way to the idea was Machiavelli's observation that the conflicts between nobles and plebians in Rome, the vicious civil strife universally deplored by the philosophers, actually led to the greater good of Rome as a whole. Adam Smith extends the notion: private vice, public benefit, to the economic sphere. Merchants intending only their own gain increase the annual income and well-being of society as a whole; led by an invisible hand they promote beneficial ends which are no part of their intentions.

Kant calls for a history that will show how the antagonism of men in society, their ambition, lust for power and greed cause them to develop their talents and, consequently, their moral

discrimination so as to prepare them for citizenship in the perfectly free and moral societies of the future.<sup>29</sup> Hegel, as it were, takes up Kant's call, finding Kantian freedom and reason, linked up with his own doctrine of logical opposites, operative everywhere in History, making Smith's invisible hand visible as the self-unfolding of the human spirit and Spirit in general. This self-unfolding culminates in the self-consciousness that all spiritual goods are produced not by any external source, but by Spirit itself. The idea of History and the modern idea of freedom seem to be inextricably linked, history allegedly showing that man's freedom is basically limited only by the ideas of those limits that human consciousness has imposed on itself; man's freedom is limited by his earlier use of that inchoate freedom, and not<sup>30</sup> by his nature or by the whole order of nature and creation.

## VI PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

If to want to be fully at home in the world is a religious motive, perfectly appropriate for a world governed by an omnipotent, beneficent and loving God, then perhaps we can speak of a religious motive permeating modern philosophy from its beginning, even in its anti-theological stances. If this is correct, one can say that this motive begins to become explicit with the formal acceptance of philosophy of religion as an accepted branch of philosophy.

The modern scientific conception of nature, according to Kant, is incapable of supplying ethical and political standards. Morality is traced to a source independent of nature, namely, practical reason. The realm of nature and the realm of freedom or morality, according to Kant, do not contradict one another, but like parallel lines simply do not meet. This thorough-going separation becomes a special problem for Kantian philosophy. How can natural man and moral man coexist in one and the same man? How can the two realms be brought together in systematic unity?

Kant experimented with a philosophy of history, but finally settled on a philosophy of religion. *The Critique of Pure Reason* established, according to Kant, that we have no knowledge, positive or negative, concerning the existence of God. Religion within the limits of reason alone establishes what in the absence of knowledge we are obliged to believe in order to strengthen our capacities to obey the moral law. Religion is unambiguously subordinated to morality, moral reason:

"pure moral legislation, through which the will of God is primordially engraved in our hearts, is not only the unavoidable condition of all true religion whatsoever, but is also that which really constitutes such religion."<sup>31</sup>  
True religion, he argues, "is a purely rational affair."

His position is brought out dramatically by his interpretation of what he calls the myth of Abraham's sacrifice: Abraham should have replied to this supposedly divine voice that even if your voice rings down from heaven, if you order me to kill my good son, contrary to the moral law, you cannot be the voice of God.<sup>32</sup> Some might regard this as superficially rational; but would the story of Abraham's sacrifice have had the influence it has had if Abraham had indeed sacrificed Isaac?

Hegel's thought aims at absolute comprehensiveness. It aims not only at comprehending and superseding all previous philosophies and theories, but also the truth not only about but within practical life and reality as a whole. It's all-comprehensiveness will allow it to supersede all finite standpoints. One most important part of that reality is religious life and religious thought.<sup>33</sup> The incorporation of religion into philosophy reaches its culmination in Hegel. "Culture has," he declares:

"raised this latest era so far above the ancient antithesis of reason and faith, of philosophy and positive religion, that this opposition of faith and knowledge has acquired quite a different sense and has now been transferred into the field of philosophy itself. In earlier times philosophy was said to be the handmaid of faith. Ideas and expressions of this sort have vanished and philosophy has irresistibly affirmed its absolute autonomy."<sup>34</sup>

Kant too, he argues, tried to accomplish this synthesis, but his notion of reason was too narrow. Alongside the narrowly intellectual and rational "religion has its sublime aspect as feeling, the love filled with eternal longing ... it yearns for eternal beauty and bliss ... it seeks ... the Absolute and the eternal."<sup>35</sup> Hegel's philosophy must encompass the full range of religious experience. For Kant, Jesus was a representation of "the Idea of Humanity in its full moral perfection." For Hegel, Jesus was the epoch-making revelation that the universal divine Spirit, God, that permeates and enlivens the universe dwells in and comes to full self-consciousness in man, in the human spirit. This consciousness goes through stages, the highest of which is the conceptual. "Every philosophy sets forth nothing else but the construction of highest bliss as Idea." "The sins of him who lies against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven, and the lie against the Spirit is that he is not a universal...."<sup>36</sup>

The expected transformation of human life, including political life, Hegel's rational kingdom of heaven on earth, according to his schedule, is long overdue. Kierkegaard, revolted by Hegelian rationalism, turned to revelation as intrinsically irrational. Nietzsche continued the modern project of finding the source of meaning in, rather than outside of, man, however no longer as reason, but as will. Heidegger urges us to be resolute without clarifying what the ends of that resolution are to be.

The classical and medieval dependence of morality on nature and natural law is replaced by an exaltation of human "creativity" coupled with despair of finding a rational source of ends to guide that creativity.

However, even if modern thought should have proved an inadequate candidate for articulating the meaning of human life, there is one area in which its success seems indubitable. I refer to the natural sciences. The question for those who lean toward the classical or medieval alternatives is: Can modern natural science be integrated into those allegedly more comprehensive frameworks? One indication, certainly no proof, of this possibility is Werner Heisenberg's turning to Aristotle's concept of potency and Plato's *Timaeus* when he tries to make philosophic sense out of quantum theory.<sup>37</sup>

The unanswered questions raised by this broad survey might seem overwhelming, but it does seem to be clear that we are faced by three fundamental alternatives, and that the attempt to dispense with or transcend the ancient and medieval alternatives is highly questionable. If, as Heidegger says, questioning is the piety of thoughtfulness, the piety of thoughtfulness requires that we do justice both to philosophy open to the claims of faith and to faith open to the claims of philosophy.

#### NOTES

\*A revised version of a lecture delivered at St. John's College, October 28, 1988.

1. Heidegger has been discussed in greater detail with a brief discussion of the relation of modern scientific philosophy (Husserl) to religion in my "The Prescientific World and Historicism: Some Reflections on Strauss, Heidegger and Husserl," forthcoming in *The Humanistic Legacy of Leo Strauss*, ed. Alan Udoff, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

2. Diels, 32.

3. The reference to God as Creator follows closely on the reference to "the laws of nature and of nature's God", suggesting that the Creation is carried on in accordance with those natural laws.

4. Cf. Harry V. Jaffa, "What is Equality? The Declaration of Independence Revisited," *The Conditions of Freedom: Essays in*



*Political Philosophy*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 149-160; and George Anastaplo, "The Declaration of Independence," *St. Louis University Law Journal* (Spring, 1965), 390.

5. *Metaphysics*, 981b 27-29, 982b 11-983a 11, 983b 7-984a 2, 1014b 16-1015a 19, 1074b 1-14, 1091a 29-1091b 20.

6. In Homer the word nature occurs only once, in the *Odyssey*. (X. 303) The first and only man to use the word is Odysseus who had seen the cities and learned the minds of many men, who had learned how men's thoughts differ from place to place and from tribe to tribe. He uses the divinely given gift of natural knowledge to defeat the baneful magic of a goddess.

7. Aristotle, *Physics*, II; Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 78-97; John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1892), Introduction.

8. Holzwege, (Ff. am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), 325.

9. *Was Heisst Denken?*, (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1954), 6-7.

10. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a 1-23; *Metaphysics*, 1032a 12 ff.

11. *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q. 40, A.3. Cf. also Q. 1, A.2.

12. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Einleitung. IV, §§ 75 and 76.

13. Plato, *Meno*, 72c 6-d 1.

14. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1027a 14, 1036a 9.

15. *Laws*, 731e-732a.

16. *Theaetetus*, 176a-b.

17. Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, translated and edited by Muhsin Mahdi, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), Part I, sec. 55. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b 24-27.

18. Laurence Berns, "Aristotle's *Poetics*", *Ancients and Moderns: Essays on the Tradition of Political Philosophy in Honor of Leo Strauss*, ed. Joseph Cropsey, (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 74-78, and 81. (The last section, p. 82, should be marked "Epilogue".)

19. Aristotle, *De caelo*, 298b 14-25; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 46, A.2.

20. *Ibid.*, I-II, Q. 91, A.4.

21. *Ibid.*, II-II, Q. 1, AA.4 and 5; Q. 2, AA.1, 2 and 9; Q. 4, AA.1 and 8. The will, in turn, is moved by hope and charity: hope of attaining the ultimate happiness of a supernatural vision of God, and charity (friendship for God) in the desire to honor God by the acceptance of his authority. *Ibid.* Q. 2, A.3, A.9 ad 2, A.10; Q. 4, AA.3 and 7; Q. 23, AA.1 and 6.

22. Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization," *Modern Judaism* I, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 17-45; "The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy", *The Independent Journal of Philosophy*, ed. George Elliott Tucker, (Vienna: 1979), 111-118. (Those lectures [in 1952] provided a most important impetus and inspiration for these reflections.) Aristotle, *Topics*, 100a 30-100b 23 and especially 101a 36-101b 4.

23. Leo Strauss, *Philosophie und Gesetz: Beiträge zum Verständnis Maimunis und Seiner Vorläufer*, (Berlin: Schocken, 1935), Einleitung, and especially 21; translation by Fred Baumann, *Philosophy and Law: Essays toward the Understanding of Maimonides and his Predecessors*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1987), Introduction and especially 13; *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, (New York: Schocken, 1965), Preface to the English Translation, 28-31; *History of Political Philosophy*, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 296 and 297. Note that on 297 Strauss does not say modern political philosophy.

24. *Novum Organum*, I, aphorism 3 (Spedding mistranslates "conquered" as "commanded".); Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part VI.

25. Cf. Sophocles, *Antigone*, l. 821.

26. *Leviathan*, chap. 21.

27. *Enzyklopädie*, I, ## 160 and 163; translation by W. Wallace, *The Logic of Hegel*, (Oxford: 1892), ## 160 and 163.

28. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 178-183; Laurence Berns, "Aristotle and the Moderns on Freedom and Equality", *The Crisis of Liberal Democracy: A Straussian Perspective*, eds. Kenneth L. Deutsch and Walter Soffer, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), Corrected Edition, 148-151.

29. *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht, Idea of a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent*

30. Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return?", n. 22, above, 32-33.

31. *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft*, Akademie-Textausgabe, VI, 104; *Religion within the Limits of*

*Reason Alone*, translation by T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson, (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), 95; *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, Akademie-Textausgabe, VII, 67; *The Conflict of the Faculties*, translation by Mary J. Gregor, (dual language), (New York: Abaris Books, 1979), 123.

32. *Ibid.*, note, 63 (German); 115 (English). Cf. Emil L. Fackenheim, *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, (New York: Schocken, 1980), chap. 2, "Abraham and the Kantians: Moral Duties and Divine Commandments."

33. Cf. Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 15-23.

34. *Glauben und Wissen*, (Jenaer Schriften), (Ff. am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), beginning; *Faith and Knowledge*, translation by Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1977), 55.

35. *Ibid.*, 290-291 (German); 58 (English).

36. *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, 39; *The Conflict of the Faculties*, 67; *Glauben und Wissen*, 292; *Faith and Knowledge*, 59; *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, (Ff. am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), I, 95; *The History of Philosophy*, Introduction.

37. "Planck's Discovery and the Philosophical Problems of Atomic Physics," Lecture, Sept. 4, 1958, *On Modern Physics*, W. Heisenberg, M. Born, E. Schrödinger, and P. Auger, (New York: Collier Books, 1962).