

PHILOSOPHICAL NOTES

The nature and state of philosophy. An instructive distinction between two approaches to philosophy has been made by Maritain in his book *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*.^{*} This distinction is between what Maritain calls the *nature* of philosophy and the *state* of philosophy. For him it is necessary to distinguish between these, and yet they are both essential components of any philosophy.

Concerning the nature of philosophy Maritain says:

"In the teaching of St. Thomas, substances are specified absolutely and by virtue of themselves; their powers of operation, by virtue of their acts; and these latter, by virtue of their objects. If a particular development and dynamic organization of the spirit, which we know as philosophy, takes form in us, it will be—as in the case of every act of knowing, searching and judging—essentially related to an object to which it makes our intelligence adapted and co-natured; and it will be exclusively specified by this object. Hence it is uniquely in function of the object that philosophy is specified, and it is the object toward which it tends by virtue of itself (by no means the subject in which it resides) that determines its nature.

... "From these considerations it follows that since the specification of philosophy hinges entirely on its formal object, and since this object is wholly of the rational order, philosophy considered in itself—whether in a pagan or Christian mind—depends on the same strictly natural or rational intrinsic criteria."

The term "object" in the above quotations is not to be understood in its usual philosophical sense, that is, as the thing of which the mind is aware. The object, for the dualist, is the mental image of the real object in the world; for the monist, these two objects would be the same. As Parmenides said: "The thing that can be thought, and that for the sake of which the thought exists, is the same."

To grasp Maritain's meaning one must realize that, after all, the scientist, the historian, the artist, etc., have minds as well as the philosopher, and that their minds also deal with objects. What special object does the philosopher's mind deal with? Maritain says: "Philosophy hinges entirely on its formal object." The best known example of a formal object is logic. The logical philosopher is concerned mainly with the logical structure of his arguments.

^{*} Philosophical Library, N. Y., 1955, \$2.75.

As to the *nature* of philosophy, such a philosopher would be entirely concerned with this formal aspect of his philosophy and not at all with its results. Other examples of formal objects in philosophy are the Pythagorean doctrine of numbers, the Cartesian demand for the clearness and distinctness of geometry applied to philosophy and modern symbolic logic.

Not all that goes by the name of philosophy follows the strict rationalistic pattern of a formal logic or of a mathematical science applied through reason alone. For instance, the term "methodology" has come into use more and more in recent times. Thus the case of some modern philosophy which is an outgrowth of the experimental science physics can be given as an illustration. We read, for example :

"If we dare to enter philosophical territory, we take warning from many a misadventure of purposeless philosophical debate, and seek for a leading thread, a methodological principle. We take physics as our model and try, as in physics, to stick to phenomena. . . . In most cases, philosophy cannot absolve the thinking person of the choice of his own point of view; it can only show him what he is doing when he resolves to take this or that point of view." (*The World View of Physics*, p. 106, Weizsäcker.)

Thus the meaning of "object" in this case, as Weizsäcker says, is as follows :

"The object of our investigation is what the physicist calls experience." (*Ibid.*)

Of the state of philosophy Maritain says :

"As soon as it no longer is a question of philosophy considered in itself but of the manner in which men philosophize, and of the divers philosophies which the concrete course of history has brought into existence, the consideration of the essence of philosophy no longer suffices; that of its state must be undertaken."

To illustrate the contrast, an application of what he means by the nature of philosophy to Thomistic philosophy is given as follows :

"Viewed as a formally constructed philosophy, Thomistic philosophy—I do not say Thomistic theology—is wholly rational: no reasoning issuing from faith finds its way into its inner fabric; it derives intrinsically from reason and rational criticism alone; and its soundness as a philosophy is based entirely on experimental or intellectual evidence and on logical proof."

And again :

" . . . whereas philosophy by its nature and essence exacts neither faith as in the one nor the movements of grace and the heart as in the other, but only reason in the one who searches."

Whereas he says about the state of philosophy :

"From this viewpoint of the state, or the conditions of exercise, it is manifest that before philosophy can attain its full, normal development in the mind it will exact of the individual many emendations and purifications, a disciplining not only of the reason but of the heart as well. To philosophize man must put his whole soul into play, in much the same manner that to run he must use his heart and lungs."

If, then, the Christian philosopher brings to his study of philosophy things from revelation, what, for Maritain, is the difference between theology and philosophy? He says of theology :

"In real fact, theology possesses an object, a light, and a method that differ entirely from those of philosophy. Rooted in faith, it conducts its reasoning on the authority of the revealed work and proceeds *ex causa prima*; its object is the revealed datum itself, which it seeks to elucidate rationally."

And of philosophy he says :

"But in itself, or when engaged in its own pursuits, philosophy is not a handmaid; it is free, it enjoys the freedom to which as a form of wisdom it is entitled. I am fully aware that revelation teaches it certain truths, including philosophic. Even so, God alone is not subject to being taught, the angels themselves enlighten one another; being taught does not stifle the freedom of the mind, but merely attests that it is a created freedom. And for every created spirit truth holds primacy even over the quest for knowledge, however noble this quest may be."

While he was interested to develop and apply philosophy as to its nature, Swedenborg never brought to his studies anything that could be isolated from the state of philosophy. Swedenborg's discussion of the difference between analytical and synthetic sciences, of the use of philosophy and mathematics, his appeal to experience, his distinction between the part played by imagination, thought and reason, even his reference to such doctrines as series and degrees, order, etc.—all these have to do with the formal part of philosophy, that is, its nature. As to the *state* of Swedenborg's philosophy—over and above the fact that it was developed during the early part of the Eighteenth Century, and hence was influenced

in many particulars by the thought and experiences of that time—we have but to consider any one of Swedenborg's major works (*Principia*, *Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, etc.), and ask ourselves what these would be if God the Creator did not exist implicitly in all of Swedenborg's thought? That is to say, what would Swedenborg's philosophy be if we removed from it the essential that defines its state.

To give a particular instance, consider the first chapter of the *Principia*. The title of this chapter is usually referred to as "The Means Which Conduce to True Philosophy." It is true that the first twenty-four pages contain a formal consideration of these means, namely "science," "geometry," and "reason."

However, on the twenty-fifth page (Clissold edition), Swedenborg says:

"But though the world is constituted in a mechanical manner, and is composed of a series of finite things which have their origin by means of the most various contingents; and though the world, being of such a nature, may, with the aid of geometry, be explored by means of experiment and the phenomena that exist in it; it does not therefore follow that all things whatsoever that are in the world are subject to the empire of geometry. For there are innumerable things which are not mechanical, nor even geometrical; such as the Infinite, and whatsoever is in the Infinite."

And so, when we look at the complete title of the first chapter of the *Principia*, we see that it is "On the Means Which Conduce to True Philosophy, and on the True Philosopher." What of this true philosopher? Who is he? Swedenborg says:

"The reason why man in a state of integrity was made a complete philosopher, was that he might the better know how to venerate the Deity—the Origin of things—that Being who is all in all. For without the utmost devotion to the Supreme Being, no one can be a complete and truly learned philosopher. True philosophy and contempt of the Deity are two opposites."

The dependence of philosophy upon science, geometry and reason has to do with the nature of philosophy. But when Swedenborg begins the *Principia* proper, the state which he brings to philosophy is clearly illustrated. The opening sentence in Chap. II is:

"No rational and intelligent philosopher can deny that the first *ens* was produced from the Infinite, as well as the rest in succession, or all the parts of which the world is composed." (No. 1.)

The dependence of this state upon revelation is explicitly acknowledged:

"The Holy Scriptures themselves also give us plain information on this subject, and teach us that the world was created by God, or by the Infinite. . . . And whatever is confirmed by Holy Scripture, is in no need of confirmation from reason, from rational philosophy, or from geometry, this being already sufficiently implied in the fact of confirmation by the Infinite Himself." (No. 3.)

For most of the readers of the NEW PHILOSOPHY there is a special meaning to the distinction between the nature of philosophy and the state of philosophy. There was a time when some people were interested only in the scientific and philosophical works of Swedenborg. Few, if any, fall into this class today. Today interest in these works is secondary to that in the Theological Works. Most people become interested in the scientific and philosophical works through interest in Swedenborg's preparation for the writing of the Theological Works.

It is difficult, if not impossible, for such people to be interested solely in the nature of philosophy; for, having been instructed in the Writings, they bring to the study of philosophy a certain state. The average reader of these pages can easily test the validity of this statement with respect to himself by asking himself what his own interest in the scientific and philosophical works would be without instruction from the Writings.

It might seem from these remarks that they had their origin in Maritain. This is not the case, because for many years the followers of Swedenborg have distinguished between the things of reason and experience and the things which have their origin in Revelation. In the one case the authority rests in reason and upon experience, and in the other the authority rests within Revelation itself. What was taken from Maritain in these remarks was the special use which he makes of "nature" and "state" in order to distinguish between two different approaches to philosophy.

E. F. A.