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Let your speech be, "Yes, yes," "No, no"; whatever is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37)

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St. Pius X and the Duel Between Modern Thought and Catholic Theology

P R O F E S S O R M A T T E O D ' A M I C O

I thank you for your invitation to speak about an undoubtedly very important subject: the relation, or rather I should say the inevitable conflict, between modern thought, its essential nihilism, and the eminent magisterium of Saint Pius X. I shall devote the second part of this study to a brief analysis of *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, but I shall begin with a short historical overview of the evolution of classical, medieval, and modern philosophy in order to enable us to understand how we could have arrived at the forms of thought that St. Pius X with great firmness and severity justly condemns in *Pascendi*.

René Descartes
Isaac Newton
Johannes Kepler

Pope St. Pius X
St. Thomas Aquinas
St. Augustine

certain sense stated the essence of modernism, which can be broadly defined as the endeavor to suppress every supernatural element from the Christian religion.

Introduction

A short preamble is in order. From a supernatural, Catholic viewpoint, history cannot but be the history of a single, immense conflict which incorporates all others: the conflict between the Church and the world. St. John Bosco used to say that history comes down to the battle for or against the Church of Christ. Thus all events, all facts, all cultural forms are as the backdrop before which unfolds the history of the Church, constantly attacked on the material and practical level—we think of the major persecutions—but also relentlessly attacked on the intellectual, cultural, and philosophical levels as well. When we study history, we are used to assigning major importance to the periods when the Church sustained an open, frontal attack: for instance, the major Roman persecutions of the early centuries, Elizabethan England, the French Revolution, the Mexican Cristeros. Indeed, she was physically attacked, assailed, and persecuted in her identity by force, terror, physical violence. But we must not forget that it is perhaps even more important to know the periods when the Church suffered attacks against her identity on the cultural, spiritual, and philosophical planes, for these attacks were perhaps the most insidious. Today we do not see, at least in the Western world, and at least for the time being, direct or declared persecution of the Church, but we know that, in fact, the cultural and theological slaughter which we have, alas, witnessed has inflicted a deeper wound than totalitarian violence; that it poses the more dangerous and subtle threat.

The importance of a vigilant defense of the philosophical dimension of the Faith therefore is evident. Once the faith had grown strong with the Church during the first centuries, the attempt to think through and understand the certainties of the Faith emerged, and this was done by using reason, the *logos*, by using the equipment which the philosophy of the time supplied. We all know that St. Augustine was an attentive, studious reader of Plotinus, for example. But in the relation between faith and reason, clearly there are risks. The greatest risk is that the deposit of the Faith might be bent and deformed by the exigencies of reason, and that the interpretation and clarification of the certainties of the Faith might lack a sufficiently attentive and prudent exercise, an exercise which must nevertheless preserve the distinction between what must remain a mystery and what lends itself to a process of elaboration by means of rational argument. Everyone knows that the majority of heresies that have afflicted the Church throughout history have been, among other things, the result of erroneous rationalization of the teachings of the Faith, the reduction of the deposit of the Faith to the measure of what reason can comprehend. So saying, we have in a

Greek Thought

In order to understand the importance for the Catholic world of vigilance over the evolution of philosophy in the intellectual and cultural domains, we must briefly consider Greek thought. We must do so because, in a certain way, philosophy speaks Greek. Though today we use different languages, the philosophical framework is Greek. And medieval Christian thought, for example, is without doubt based on the acceptance of all the fundamental aspects of Greek thought.

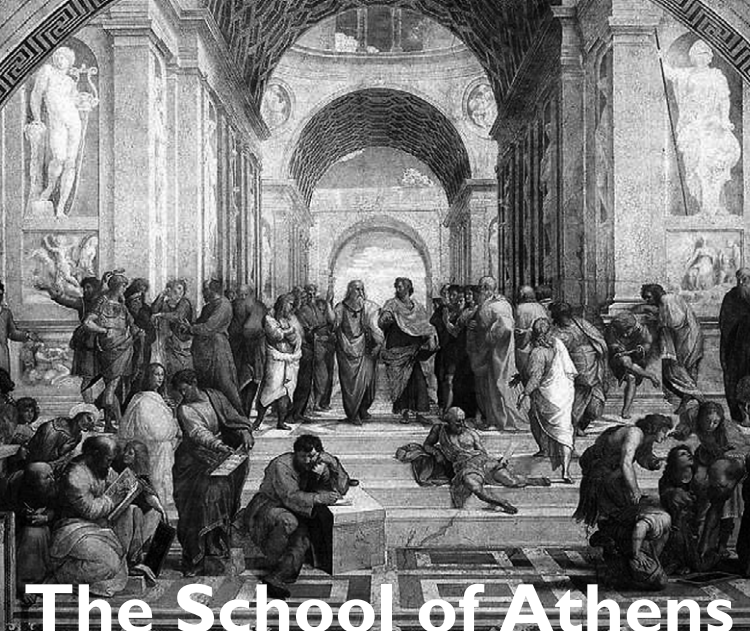
Classical Realism

Greek thought was born as realist thought. The great Greek metaphysics, and the majority of great thinkers—Plato, Aristotle—can certainly be characterized as realist.¹ This is true of Aristotle in particular, the thinker upon whom Scholastic thought, the thought of St. Thomas, is founded.

Now, to speak of realism signifies from the very first that for Greek thought—if we take as the ideal point of reference the metaphysics of Aristotle—it would have been simply absurd to express doubts about the actual existence of being outside the mind, doubts which are, on the contrary, as we shall see, typical of modern thought. For Greek thought the problem of epistemological doubt, that is to say, the problem of doubt about the capacity of man to know being, does not even arise. Being is self-evident as the original given which precedes and establishes our cognitive act.

Some pages of Greek thought are sublime; they constitute a veritable contemplation of what we could call the triumph of truth and of being. Being is, in its broadest sense, wide open to the mind of man wishing to know it, for, as the Greeks grandly discovered: it can be known. In fact, the mind of man is made to open on being, to grasp its truth, and comprehend its meaning.

To define Greek philosophy as a realist philosophy² means that it is a philosophy open to the *transcendence of being*, to the transcendence of truth over the subject: The foundation, the absolute, and, ultimately, God, transcend me, exist before me, and are *other*. To think means to open oneself to the original luminosity of being.³ It is not the mind that creates being, it is being that is grasped in its truth by the mind. We can never forget this starting point, for that would amount to abandoning the foundation of that which, we shall see, constitutes medieval thought.



The School of Athens

Natural Theology

A second observation will close this evocation of classical thought: Greek thought as it is found in its most glorious and profound representatives—and I emphasize once again that these are Plato and Aristotle, but also Plotinus, a theist thinker. Without the power and help of Revelation, by using reason alone according to the principles of logic, which, the Greeks themselves discovered, are inherent to thinking (and at the same time are *categories* of being)—the principle of non-contradiction, of identity—the Greeks attained to the knowledge of God, they succeeded in proving, starting from the observation of the world, of nature, of reality, and of man’s soul,⁴ that God exists and that He cannot not exist.

Simplifying quite a bit, this notion of *theism* in Greek thought can be expressed thus: Since our first impression is that *reality is meaningful*, that reality is the splendor of truth, the splendor of the meaning that presents itself to my gaze and to my understanding, *there cannot not be a basis* to this meaningfulness, to this *truth of being*; there cannot not be an *absolute*, and this absolute, this first cause of all meaning and of all truth cannot not be God. Since my mind or reason grasps the truth of being, then *Truth* must be the original condition of the possibility of being itself (just as it is not possible to conceive of an individual being without reference to the All or the Whole which is at its basis and from which it proceeds). In short, there must be an ultimate foundation to explain this extraordinary luminosity of being which precedes the look that I cast on it.

The Greeks, then, by the use of reason alone, succeeded in affirming the existence of God. They did not have Revelation; they did not know the God who speaks to man by His prophets, who, from the height of His majesty bends towards man in order to reveal to him a Creator’s heart, the heart of a Father full of mercy for His creatures. They could not possess the plenitude of truth which would only be possible

in Jesus Christ, *true God and true man*. Such is the fundamental deficiency of Greek thought, yet which did all that was possible to be done in the effort to conceive of God without the aid of Revelation, which is very much indeed.

Christian Thought

From the beginning, the great Christian philosophers, principally St. Augustine, remark that to some measure Greek thought played a providential role, that it was not by chance that Christianity, when it encountered the Roman Empire with its law and order, its extraordinary system of communication by means of which Christianity was able to spread, also encountered Greek ratiocination and philosophy.

The Classical Lacuna

But in Greek thought, as we have seen, there is a fundamental problem: the Greeks were incapable of conceiving the idea of *nothing*, and this because they could not conceive the universe as created. It is an idea that is radically absent from Greek thought. The universe is not created, thus it cannot come from nothing.⁵ Even in the most elevated representatives of Greek philosophy, there is always a fundamental equivocation, there is always a grey zone that must also be well understood in the perspective of what modern thought will be: *if the world is not created, then there is no radical difference between God—the origin, the foundation—and the world itself*. But then the distinction between the two dimensions—the world and the origin, the absolute, God—will tend to be lost. The world will be represented in some fashion as *a moment of God’s life*, or even pantheistically as God Himself. But if, in the last analysis, there is but one substance, and if this substance is God—please forgive the oversimplification—then man cannot truly be a *person* in the Christian meaning of the word, but he will be at best something particular having a spark of the divine; but, and this is important for understanding gnostic thought, the goal of human life can only consist in the striving to overcome one’s subjective, personal *individuation* in order to meld with the first principle by means of various techniques and modalities, thereby abandoning this “prison” constituted by our corporeal nature, our unique personal form, which for the Greeks and for Plato himself, for example, is in some measure a “malediction,” absolute “negativity.” In such a philosophical conception, it is not good to have a personal, individual existence, but rather it is necessary to return to union with the principle from which we come and that is manifest in us.

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this, then, lo and behold, we find ourselves slipping albeit imperceptibly into more or less explicit forms of pantheism: God is no longer thought of as truly separate or distinct from the world.

The second risk incurred when thinking about creation is interesting, and it is important to understand it. It is the typical risk of certain forms of Gnosis, in which God is considered to be totally other; He is *the totally other* (*Ganz andere*), totally separated from this fallen, negative world, fruit of a malevolent demiurge and oppressor of man, in whom matter, flesh, all is radically bad, because the world is totally bereft of God. This vision, which is typical of certain forms of ancient Gnosis, is interesting because it is profoundly anti-Christian. For while the Christian God is indeed other in relation to man and to the world, yet He is not the “totally other” taught by some forms of Gnosis.⁶ If we accept this excess of divine remoteness, which reappears in postmodern and nihilistic philosophy and theology, if we think of God as “totally other,” then the entire sacramental dynamic collapses, and with it the ecclesiastical dynamic. The Christian sacraments, based as they are upon the incarnation, passion, death and resurrection of the Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, are the greatest example of the manner by which this God, who is indeed radically other in relation to man and the world, is not thereby the “totally other.”

The Thomistic Insight

This second risk, then, is to posit the total otherness of God. But assisted by the Holy Ghost, the great Christian thinkers in their investigation of being and reality have clearly known how to find the right balance between divine immanence and the total otherness of God. The thinker who was able to find this middle point with exemplary intellectual rigor is none other than St. Thomas Aquinas, with his doctrine of *participation* and his reinterpretation of the Aristotelian doctrine of *the analogy of being*, which St. Thomas examined thoroughly in light of the key category of creation.

The scope of this essay precludes a full treatment of these subtle notions about being and the precise terminology that was developed to express them. Let it suffice to say that the *analogy of being* expresses the idea of “a representation” of the essence of beings and the world for which, though they are separate from God, there exists a relation of analogy or likeness to God, in that beings and things exist only insofar as they participate in the supreme being, that is, God.

God is absolute Being, but [limited] beings also have a participation of this Being. Naturally, one of the results of this concept of participated being is to preclude the risk of falling into pantheism.⁷ If all that we have said so far is sufficiently clear, then we are ready to take a step forward.

Unexpected Consequence

The most important consequence of this metaphysical hypothesis is that a true notion of *liberty* is no longer possible. There can be no liberty in the full meaning of the term, which is uniquely Christian, without the original creative act of God. Liberty is not possible in the Christian sense of the word—personal, spiritual—except where there is actually creation *ex nihilo*—from nothing, and where the Absolute does not coincide with the world, but, on the contrary, where God and the world are separated by the abyss of nothing whence all that exists has been brought forth by the divine creative deed. In other words: liberty is not possible except as *created liberty*.

Concept of Creation

The divide between the Greek vision and the Christian vision, already clearly set forth by St. Augustine, is given by the idea of creation. The idea of creation was precisely something inconceivable to the Greek mind, but perhaps it is inconceivable in general for all who are without Revelation and the life of faith. For the Greeks, the universe—and man in the universe—had a cyclical, circular, eternal life, and all was eternally destined to return and repeat a “great year” from which no escape was possible, and where the possibility of nothing was inconceivable. Greek thought is characterized by an abhorrence of the void, by an entirely understandable refusal of nothingness, which affected everything. This abhorrence even influenced mathematics, for example, which did not develop because they lacked the concept of zero, which came later in the development of mathematics, and which is one of the fruits of monotheistic culture. Now, we know that it is on this fundamental idea that Christian thought is built. The infinite power of the creative act of God opens a new perspective to man, and makes possible a new conception of being and of the absolute.

In speaking of *creation*, it is nevertheless necessary to situate the notion between two essentially non-Christian perspectives. The first one, which constitutes a recurring temptation even for Christian thinkers (one well-known theologian who succumbed to this temptation was Teilhard de Chardin) is an evolutionary conception of the universe. The risk constituted by all evolutionary conceptions of the cosmos, of nature, and of history, which are often combined or overlap in a non-orthodox way, is that they very seriously alter the deposit of Faith. The first risk is a failure to keep a right separation between God and the world, and thus also between God and man, which results from a failure to think with sufficient intellectual vigor about the transcendence of God. For if we fail to do

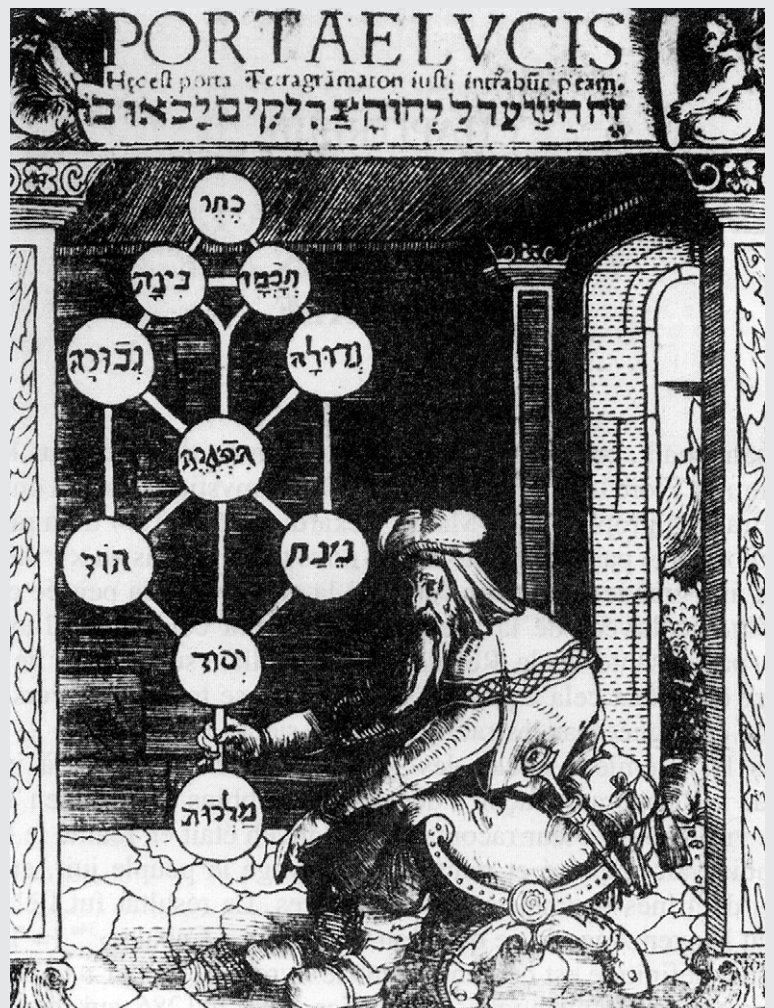
Right Reason Rehabilitated

When we consider the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas, we find ourselves presented with something so great, so complete, so luminous, that it seems incredible that the word *Scholastic* should have come to be synonymous with abstruse, boring, useless, or out-dated. Except for a few brilliant minds like Fabro, whom we just cited, rare is the philosopher today who would have the courage to take St. Thomas and the other great medieval thinkers as the guiding lights of his investigations. Even in the seminaries, no one studies them anymore. On the contrary, all the young priests have read Heidegger and Nietzsche, or else even Freud, with what consequences for their vocations and ministry it is easy to envisage.

And indeed experience would indicate that it is impossible to revive the Scholastic tradition on the theoretical level without first restoring in our own minds the ability to see the glory that envelops our own past, to see the halo that enshrines that which preceded us over the course of centuries. The *Summa* is extraordinary in this: it can be taken as the greatest example of intellectual honesty in the domain of philosophical investigation. Consider that, for 3,000 affirmations, more than 10,000 objections are raised! The Scholastic method—which is especially manifested in St. Thomas’s work—is the only example of philosophical reasoning that requires the extensive incorporation, with detailed citations, of all philosophical or theological objections to what the philosopher wants to posit. It is almost impossible to comprehend the incredible spiritual transparency and holiness of one who would have the courage to philosophize in this manner.

It would be as if today certain sophists—I apologize for using such a strong word, but sometimes we find ourselves confronted by the most vulgar sophists, who dare write philosophical treatises—would not admit any of their own theses without first integrally citing and then refuting all objections; and not just with a cursory refutation, but with a developed argument that takes the adversary’s premises as true and then proceeds to demonstrate that by following them contradictions inevitably result. I hope that I have managed to convey a clear idea of what intellectual vigor, rational method, and moral discipline adoption of the Scholastic method implies.

Now, after the attainment of the immense edifice of the *Summa Theologica*—the only book



Cover of the book *Portae Lucis* [*Doors of Light*] translated into Latin by Paulus Ricius. In the illustration, a man holds the tree of the ten Sephiroth. A *Sephira* can be defined as a divine, creative number: God supposedly made His works by pronouncing certain numbers the sole utterance of which possesses a creative power. But a *Sephira* is also a more or less personalized divine attribute or emanation. The entities comprising the Sephirothic Tree can be, they say, divided into two groups: a masculine group on the right and a feminine group on the left. In this way the Sephirothic Tree is androgynous, having a male side and a female side. It follows that for the Jewish cabalists, the Godhead...is androgynous in the same way as in the pagan myths of antiquity (cf. works by Gershom Scholem). Illustration and caption taken from the work *Masonry and Secret Societies: The Hidden Side of History* (French) (Versailles: Courrier de Rome Publications, 1998), p.34.

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found worthy to be placed upon the altar beside the Gospel—as well as all Scholastic thought, the question we must ask ourselves is how did what happen come to pass, namely, that in the space of a century and a half a sort of intellectual apostasy from the grandeur of Catholic thought commenced.

The Influence of Jewish Cabalistic Thought, Renaissance Magic, Galilean Science: Towards the Genesis of Modern Thought

Some historians and philosophers, like Julio Meinvielle,⁸ for example, an Argentinian priest and indefatigable defender of Tradition, or Francis Secret, author of the book *Cabalist Christians of the Renaissance*, dress an impressive inventory of Christian cabalistic authors, that is to say, thinkers and men of Christian culture who, during the 15th and 16th centuries began to devote themselves to the study of Jewish Cabala, to the study of apocryphal Jewish gnosis. This apocryphal gnosis, according to the historians, in fact existed long before the coming of Christ and the foundation of Christianity. According to one very interesting interpretation, certain passages of the Gospel in which Jesus fulminates against the Pharisees who close the door that leads to salvation and who impose unbearable burdens on others that they themselves do not bear can be reinterpreted as an allusion to this gnosis which even during Jesus' time dominated part of the Jewish clergy, who had secretly conserved some of the idolatrous cults learned during the long years of the Babylonian exile.⁹

The Cabala spread especially to Italy, where it seduced even personages of the highest rank of the clergy, for example, the Roman Curia. Everyone was more or less fascinated by this particular gnostic vision, and the list of the leading men of society who had contacts with the Cabala is impressive: there are dozens and dozens of men of letters and of churchmen (the two categories were, moreover, nearly equivalent) who became involved in this form of Jewish gnosis. The most famous are fairly well-known: Ramon Lull [1236-1315], Pico della Mirandola [1463-94], Marsilio Ficino [1433-99], and, for a certain period of his life, even the Englishman Thomas More [1478-1535], who would die a martyr, but who had studied the writings of Pico della Mirandola. Erasmus of Rotterdam [1469?-1536] also had contact with these writings.

In this we witness the dissemination of a very particular doctrine that influenced modern science. Indeed, it has been demonstrated once and for all, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that modern science owes much to the magic practiced during the Renaissance and to its great cultural influence. But

Renaissance magic is the natural daughter of Jewish Cabala. Let's take a single, somewhat banal, well-known example: Kepler [1571-1630], who developed the great fundamental theorems of astrophysics later used by Newton [1642-1727], was a magician. His work consisted in doing the horoscopes of princes, counts, and dukes; he was even invited to the court of Rudolph of Hapsburg, the emperor who subsequently went insane, who at his court in Prague had created a cénacle of soothsayers and magicians, where Giordano Bruno [1548-1600] was also to put in an appearance. Kepler's mother was tried for witchcraft; that fact may seem secondary, but it is curious that it happened to this man in particular.

As for Sir Isaac Newton, he is above suspicion when it comes to the scientific worth of his endeavors; but perhaps not everyone is aware that his true passion was alchemy and all the esoteric disciplines. For many years, he studied St. John's Apocalypse according to cabalistic, numerological, and magical rules, and, according to a recently studied text of his, he even succeeded in identifying the year 2020 as the end of the world based upon his esoteric calculations.¹⁰ This cannot but surprise us: What? Newton, the founder of the modern scientific method, engrossed by the Cabala and numerology? The fact is that there is practically no philosopher or great scientist of the 16th century that did not have significant connections, organic connections, with magical thought. And the roots of this magical thought are in reality found in the Jewish Cabala, in the *Zohar*, and in a whole series of texts that emerged during that period. The masters of these philosophers were in fact Jewish rabbis who taught Hebrew, and who also taught the secret doctrines tied to their Talmudic, esoteric religion.

In her most well-known study,¹¹ the English historian Frances Yates reconstructs the course of this almost unbelievable diffusion of magical thought in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries.¹²

It is necessary for us to better understand what is the veritable connection between magic and science, for it is a crux of all modern thought. Modern science is, in a certain measure, the only really great cultural novelty, in which Descartes and the other thinkers who followed him until Kant, by the effort which they deployed to think through and to found this science, manipulated classical Greco-Christian ontology on an essential point, which will be identified below.¹³

Science, with its methodological theses, implies, in short, a radical modification of Greco-Christian ontology, a radical change of the medieval gnostical [epistemological] and metaphysical paradigm. It follows that we cannot understand modern thought if we do not think about it in light of the profound rupture provoked by science. But we must clarify more precisely at what level the connection between science and magic occurs. Let us begin by an initial analysis. We know that there would have been no

Italian Renaissance without the great translations of the Platonic and Neoplatonic texts made by Marsilio Ficini for the court of the Medicis, a court, like all the courts of the Renaissance, abounding in magical motifs in the architecture, statues, and buildings.

The fall of Byzantium in 1453 caused a massive flight of Byzantine scholars towards Italy, where, bearing texts of singular importance, they were received at the Italian courts. Now, when Cosimo de' Medici ordered Ficino to translate these texts—among others, all of Plato, all of Plotinus, Proclus, and the magical texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum*—there is one very interesting detail that must be pointed out. We would think instinctively that it would have been opportune to translate the works of Plato first; on the contrary, the order was given to translate first the magical texts attributed to the mythical figure of Hermes Trismegistus.¹⁴ Consequently, the reading of Plato, of Platonic, Neoplatonic and Pythagorean metaphysics, was a reading developed with keys to interpretation of magical, hermetic type. The Renaissance reads the great Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics in a magical sense; thus, in fact, it makes a reading that is intrinsically gnostic, or, if you prefer, “gnosticizing,” tangentially gnostic. What does this “gnosticizing” reading consist in? Or, in other words, how does magic influence metaphysics?

Let us begin by noting that through Iamblichus [d. circa 330, a Syrian philosopher and leading exponent of Neoplatonism] and other thinkers, the other specialists of magic and the magicians of antiquity were rediscovered (and placed beside the cabalistic texts already cited), and the reading of metaphysics was given a Platonic orientation or spin, while St. Thomas's metaphysics definitely has an Aristotelian and thus more realistic barycenter.¹⁵ But this is not all: The Plato that emerges from this rediscovery is a “Pythagorean” Plato, that is to say, a numerologist Plato, a Plato who educates the scientists of this time, who are for the most part also magicians, or at least initiated into hermeticism, to reading reality as if what is true in reality were not what seems, but what is *encrypted*, hidden, buried under the sensible appearance. At its dawn, modern science, in the wake of this magical, numerological, gnosticizing approach, this fundamentally Pythagorean inspiration, reads sensible reality, the testimony of the senses, as a “dead moment” on the level of cognition, a sterile moment incapable of giving access to the *splendor of the truth* of which nonetheless Plato and Aristotle spoke. Reality is hidden beyond the sensible appearance and thus, it goes without saying, only the initiated, only the magician—or, soon, only the scientist—can reach this reality.

On the basis of premises developed to this point, we are now in a position to understand that modern science is profoundly different from classical Greek and Christian thought in this regard: it is radically

anti-intuitive. Classical thought—it suffices to read Aristotle, Seneca, or St. Thomas Aquinas to become aware of it—is such that anyone who makes the effort to take these works in hand feels, so to speak, at ease, for there is a natural correspondence, a homogeneity, between common sense and classical metaphysics. Classical metaphysics, even in its most elevated or abstract points, remains intelligible; it remains communicable, because my common sense feels at home, and understands its fundamental conceptuality. Inversely, modern science is radically anti-intuitive; it is a discourse on man that denies the most immediate experience, and adopts as its fundamental methodological principle this negation. In this way is born the image of the world posited by the new Galilean science, inside of which the senses no longer guarantee us meaningful access to being and truth,¹⁶ and where the problem is no longer the knowledge of the truth of being, but the measurability, the reduction to quantitative proportions of being itself (on the basis of a new gnostic paradigm for which only that which is measurable is true).

Now we are in a position to understand the modern notion of *immanence*, a term that is a little difficult to understand, but which I would like to develop, because the encyclical *Pascendi* frequently refers to this notion. We have labored a bit in order to reach this point in our study, but now we have the groundwork laid for understanding what has been “simmering under the kettle's lid,” what is about to enter onto the scene of philosophy and what is happening now, which I shall try to describe as simply as possible: we shall see that it has a singular importance for theology. ☐

Translated exclusively by Angelus Press from the French edition of *Si Si No No*, *Courrier de Rome* (Dec. 2005). This lecture was presented by Prof. D'Amico at the Eleventh Congress of Catholic Studies held at Rimini, October 25-26, 2003 on the theme: “The Modern World in the Light of the Magisterium of St. Pius X.” *DICI* called this lecture “a masterly synthesis on the philosophic genesis of modernism.”

¹ Plato can and must, with good reason, be classed as a *realist* thinker insofar as his idealism remains solidly anchored in the principle according to which the relation between knowing subject and object known does not modify the entities between which this relation exists [that is, the subject and the object]. Ideas, indeed, are conceived of as objective entities transcending the subject and also existing outside the cognitive relation itself. To refuse Plato the title of realist thinker would be tantamount to crassly confusing metaphysical realism with materialism.

² This definition is very general, and obviously does not imply the denial of the presence, in the very rich panorama of Greek thought, of materialists, skeptics, nihilists, etc. We just mean that the greatest thinkers are all realists.

³ The original relation with what we have called the *luminosity of being* is magisterially defined by Aristotle as *wonder* in the celebrated passage of the *Metaphysics*: “For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the

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greater matters, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe” (Bk. I, §2; W. D. Ross, ed. [Oxford: Clarendon Press]).

⁴ One need only think of the sublime demonstrations of the immortality of the soul developed by Plato in the *Phaedo*, and on a similar theme, of manifestly Socratic influence, treated of in his *Apology*.

⁵ “Indeed, it is necessary that that which comes into being (becomes) be something, and it is necessary that that which comes from it also be something, [and so on,] and that the last of these terms not be engendered, given that an infinite regress is not possible, and since it is impossible that from non-being something be engendered” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*).

⁶ “One must also add that the Greco-Christian tradition affirms the resemblance between God and the world, the non-absolute difference; but from another perspective, within this resemblance it affirms an even greater dissimilarity: between the world and God subsists an analogy that, while excluding total otherness, does not admit total identity either. This is in opposition to the anti-analogy of Gnosis, for which, once the “techniques” of salvation have been put in place, as effectually for the individual as for the mass, there is no reason to doubt that the world will be changed to the point of coinciding with the *Civitas Dei*” (E. Samek Lodovici, *Métamorphoses de la gnose* [Milan: Ed. Ares]).

⁷ Cornelio Fabro has developed some very interesting interpretations of this doctrine of St. Thomas, which we can simplify thus: if created being is created by God, we must—I paraphrase Fabro—employ the word *to be* transitively; we must heed its force as a transitive verb, its dynamic dimension, in such a way that every look at nature, the world, man, things, must be a look that perceives in them the resonance, the echo, so to speak, of God’s creative act. Then there would be no risk of slipping into a positivist or scientist vision of the nature of things, which become, precisely, *pure* things, pure matter. Certainly, matter is matter, but within it there is a metaphysical quiver or vibration that makes of the world, in any case, a world that bears in itself the image of God (cf. Fabro, *Participation and Causality According to St. Thomas Aquinas* [Turin, 1960]; *From Being to the Existent* [Brescia, 1957]; *Introduction to Modern Atheism* [Rome, 1961]).

⁸ Cf. J. Meinvielle, *Influence of Jewish Gnosticism on the Chrétien Milieu* (Rome, 1995). [One noted American historian observes: “...the reason for the decline of philosophy in the late Middle Ages is magic, specifically the Jewish magic known as Cabala. As Marlowe put it for his generation of Elizabethans, “‘Tis magick, magick which hath ravish’d me.”—Translator’s note.]

⁹ Meinvielle, *ibid.*

¹⁰ The latest studies about the esoteric side of Newton, engrossed by Sacred Scriptures, reveal to us the scientist’s hidden face: fascinated by magic and alchemy, he appears as a radical heretic, as an extremist Arian in the religious domain. He denied the Trinity, taxed the Roman Pontiff with being the Antichrist and Catholic rites, idolatrous. He commented on the Apocalypse in a substantially cabalistic manner (cf. www.newtonproject.ic.ac.uk/index.html). The specialist J. Gleick describes for us a Newton occupied by three fundamental, equivalent interests: alchemy, science,

and the anti-Catholic fight against the Trinitarian idea.

¹¹ Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1991). [For a discussion of Elizabethan England, cf. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London; Boston: Ark Paperbacks, 1983, 1979). Cf. also Benjamin Wooley, *The Queen’s Conjurer: The Science and Magic of Dr. John Dee, Adviser to Elizabeth I* (NY: Henry Holt, 2001).—Translator’s note.]

¹² See also Matteo D’Amico, *Giordano Bruno* (Monferrato: Casale, 2000).

¹³ Neither can we forget an important fact: Descartes and many philosophers after him are top-notch scientists. Descartes himself was a mathematical genius, but he also had the dream of revolutionizing medicine—which I find very interesting. Locke was an important philosopher, but he also in turn practised the medical art. The same pattern could be noted for Leibniz, Pascal, Spinoza, etc.

¹⁴ This must be pointed out not only for the esoteric content, but especially because these texts were considered as more ancient than all the others, constituting an ancient, primeval wisdom preceding not only that of Greek philosophy, but also the Christian Bible itself.

¹⁵ [The barycenter (from the Greek ἀνάγκη) is the center of mass of two or more bodies which are orbiting each other, and is the point around which both of them orbit.—Ed.]

¹⁶ The critical analysis of the metaphysical consequences induced by modern science obviously does not mean that the value of science cannot be acknowledged from the viewpoint of the Faith, or that its extraordinary practical efficacy must be depreciated. This is so true that in medieval and modern times the Church, precisely, has been the principal vector capable of favoring the development of science (it is not mere coincidence that the list of scientist-priests of the modern centuries is interminable).

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