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The Church Does Have a Philosophy of Her Own: Ruminations on *Fides et Ratio* and the First Principles of Catholic Philosophy

Abstract: John Paul II stipulates in his encyclical *Fides et ratio* that the Church »has no philosophy of her own«. This statement has caused several commentators to proclaim the encyclical's support for philosophical pluralism. Though there is some truth to this – indeed both *Aeterni Patris* and *Fides et ratio* sanction distinct approaches to philosophy such as Augustinianism and Thomism, as well as stress the autonomy of philosophy – the encyclical's support for philosophical pluralism should not be exaggerated. For *Fides et ratio* also condemns illegitimate philosophical approaches and advocates specific philosophical viewpoints. Indeed based on a reading of *Fides et ratio*, other magisterial pronouncements, and the work of canonized philosophers, twelve focal principles of Catholic philosophy can be found. That is to say, just as there is a *consensus fidei* or theological canon based on principles held in common in Church tradition among believers and theologians, there is a *consensus rationis* or philosophical canon, namely twelve first principles of philosophy that are in deep agreement with the Catholic tradition. So in a way it can also be said that the Church has a philosophy of her own. This paper sets these twelve principles forth and engages in a brief defense of them.

Key words: *Fides et ratio*, philosophical pluralism, Catholic philosophy, first principles, philosophical canon, *consensus rationis*

Povzetek: **Cerkev ima svojo filozofijo: razmišljanja o okrožnici *Fides et ratio* in o prvih načelih katoliške filozofije**

Papež Janez Pavel II. je v okrožnici *Fides et ratio* odprl misel, da Cerkev »nima svoje lastne filozofije«. To stališče je sprožilo več komentarjev, ki so v okrožnici našli podporo filozofskemu pluralizmu. Čeprav je v tem nekaj resnice – tako *Aeterni patris* kakor *Fides et ratio* odobravata različne pristope k filozofiji, kakor sta avguštinizem in tomizem, in poudarjata avtonomijo filozofije –, tega stališča ne smemo jemati preširoko. Okrožnica *Fides et ratio* namreč tudi obsoja neperimerne filozofske pristope in zahteva specifična filozofska stališča. Če izhajamo iz okrožnice *Fides et ratio*, iz drugih naukov cerkvenega učiteljstva in iz dela filozofov, ki imajo kanonično veljavo, je mogoče izluščiti dvanajst osrednjih načel katoliške filozofije. Kakor obstaja *consensus fidei* ali teološko veljavni kanon, ki

temelji na načelih, skupnih izročilu Cerkve med vernimi in teologi, tako obstaja tudi consensus rationis ali filozofsko veljavni kanon, namreč dvanajst prvih načel filozofije, ki so v globoki skladnosti z izročilom Cerkve. V tem smislu lahko trdimo, da ima Cerkev svojo lastno filozofijo. Razprava prikazuje teh dvanajst načel in jih skuša na kratko utemeljiti.

Ključne besede: *Fides et ratio*, filozofski pluralizem, katoliška filozofija, prva načela, filozofski kanon, *consensus rationis*

In the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (September 14, 1998) John Paul II strikingly asserts: »The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others« (*Suam ipsius philosophiam non exhibit Ecclesia, neque quamlibet praelegit peculiarem philosophiam aliarum damno*) (no. 49; see also no. 4, 50–51, 72).¹

On account of this, several Catholic thinkers have interpreted the encyclical as advocating, or at least tolerating, a philosophical pluralism. For instance Avery Dulles (2003, 202) highlights the new positive attitude toward »philosophical pluralism« found in the encyclical. Thomas Guarino speaks, as well, of its »wide berth afforded to theological and philosophical pluralism«². And he goes on to elaborate:

What is clear is that the great Catholic philosophical tradition of the past, as well as the one envisaged for the future by *Fides et ratio*, is hardly identical with Thomism or Scholasticism. At the same time, the encyclical leaves no doubt that the pluralism envisioned is one which, like Thomism, is revelationally appropriate and capable of fulfilling the *officium congruum*. This kind of pluralism may be termed »commensurable pluralism«. Commensurable pluralism allows for a diversity of philosophical systems, frameworks, and perspectives, all of which, however, must be fundamentally commensurable with the *depositum fidei*. Just as Augustine, the Cappadocians, Aquinas, and Bonaventure used varying philosophical approaches while protecting the unity of faith, so this type of unity in multiplicity, similarity in diversity, sameness in otherness, must be present in revelationally appropriate contemporary thought as well. Different conceptual systems will be perennially adequate as possible mediations and expressions of the Christian faith. They will not be, however, given various limiting factors such as human historicity and finitude, exhaustive of either

¹ A more literal translation would be »The Church does not put forth her own philosophy, nor does she subscribe to any particular philosophy over others.«

² Thomas Guarino, *Fides et ratio: Theology and Contemporary Pluralism*, *Theological Studies* 62, no. 4 (December, 2001): 688, no. 26. See also Harold E. Ernst, *New Horizons in Catholic Philosophical Theology: Fides et ratio and the Changed Status of Thomism*, *Heythrop Journal* 47, no. 1 (January, 2006): 26–37 which speaks of a »constrained philosophical pluralism«; Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Reason, Holiness, and Diversity: Fides et Ratio through the Lens of Religious Pluralism*, *Philosophy and Theology* 12, no. 1 (2000): 33–42; Walter Kasper, *The Magisterium's Interventions in Philosophical Matters*, *L'Osservatore Romano* (April 28, 1999), 5–6; Peter Phan, *Fides et Ratio and Asian Philosophies: Sharing the Banquet of Truth*, *Science et esprit* 51 (1999): 333–349 who states that the encyclical »repeatedly assures that the Church does not have an official philosophy« (no. 5); and idem *Inculturation of the Christian Faith in Asia through Philosophy: A Dialogue with John Paul II's Fides et Ratio*, In: Paschal Ting, Marian Gao, and Bernard Li, eds., *Dialogue between Christian Philosophy and Chinese Culture* (Taipei: Fu Jen University Press, 2002), 119–152.

philosophical or theological truth ... If the abstracted concept is never a moment of pure presence, without an admixture of absence, if it affords a real but limited dimension of intelligibility, then the Church can never be wedded to one conceptual system as if one alone truly mediates the Christian faith. Varying conceptual systems may be incommensurable among themselves, Augustine's and Aquinas's for example, but equally commensurable with the fundamentals of Christian belief. Each conceptual system is adequate; neither is exhaustive ... This, taken together with the earlier claim that the Church does not »canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others« (no. 49), indicates that the »magisterium sanctions no specific conceptual system, and that several may indeed be *congruens verbo Dei*, commensurable with the deposit of faith« (Guarino 2001, 688–690).

Dulles and Guarino are correct up to a point. The encyclical *Fides et ratio* does take a somewhat wider course than past encyclicals in pointing out various philosophical systems consistent with Christianity, and the limitations of philosophy due to human finitude.³ As Guarino notes (2001, 688) *Fides et ratio* singles out several thinkers, of diverse schools of thought, who displayed a »fruitful relationship between philosophy and the word of God« (no. 74). The list includes Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Newman, Rosmini, Maritain, Gilson, Stein, Soloviev, Florensky, Chaadaev and Lossky (no. 74; see as well no. 38–44). A more disparate listing, comprising Augustinians, Thomists, Integralists, Ontologists, Phenomenologists, and Orthodox, would not be easy to find.⁴

³ Although it should not be forgotten that even the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) of Leo XIII, which upheld Aquinas as the model for philosophy and theology (no. 17–19, 31), speaks of the importance and insights of other thinkers including Justin Martyr, Aristides, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Boethius, John Damascene, Anselm, and Bonaventure (no. 10–14). Additionally, *Aeterni Patris* recognizes potential limitations to the thought of Aquinas: »We exhort you, venerable brethren, in all earnestness to restore the golden wisdom of St. Thomas, and to spread it far and wide for the defense and beauty of the Catholic faith, for the good of society, and for the advantage of all the sciences. The wisdom of St. Thomas, We say; for if anything is taken up with too great subtlety by the Scholastic doctors, or too carelessly stated – if there be anything that ill agrees with the discoveries of a later age, or, in a word, improbable in whatever way – it does not enter Our mind to propose that for imitation to Our age.« (31) *Humanis generis* (1950) of Pius XII also states: »Of course this philosophy deals with much that neither directly nor indirectly touches faith or morals, and which consequently the Church leaves to the free discussion of experts. But this does not hold for many other things, especially those principles and fundamental tenets to which We have just referred. However, even in these fundamental questions, we may clothe our philosophy in a more convenient and richer dress, make it more vigorous with a more effective terminology, divest it of certain scholastic aids found less useful, prudently enrich it with the fruits of progress of the human mind. But never may we overthrow it, or contaminate it with false principles, or regard it as a great, but obsolete, relic. For truth and its philosophic expression cannot change from day to day, least of all where there is question of self-evident principles of the human mind or of those propositions which are supported by the wisdom of the ages and by divine revelation. Whatever new truth the sincere human mind is able to find, certainly cannot be opposed to truth already acquired, since God, the highest Truth, has created and guides the human intellect, not that it may daily oppose new truths to rightly established ones, but rather that, having eliminated errors which may have crept in, it may build truth upon truth in the same order and structure that exist in reality, the source of truth. Let no Christian therefore, whether philosopher or theologian, embrace eagerly and lightly whatever novelty happens to be thought up from day to day, but rather let him weigh it with painstaking care and a balanced judgment, lest he lose or corrupt the truth he already has, with grave danger and damage to his faith.« (no. 30; see also no. 32)

⁴ More explicitly, *Fides et ratio* makes note of the diverse methodologies found among Christian philo-

Guarino then is correct in maintaining that *Fides et ratio* recognizes several philosophical approaches consistent with the Catholic tradition. And how could it be otherwise, for thinkers embracing the diverse philosophical methodologies of Augustinianism, Thomism, Scotism, Phenomenology, Existentialism, Analytical Philosophy, and Hermeneutics have all framed insights supportive of the Catholic faith.⁵ Indeed arguably an over-focus on Thomism in the past left the important work of members of other schools underappreciated.

It is also true that *Fides et ratio* conscientizes the limitations of human reason. It recognizes that philosophical formulations »are shaped by history and produced by human reason wounded and weakened by sin« and so »no historical form of philosophy can legitimately claim to embrace the totality of truth, nor to be the complete explanation of the human being, of the world and of the human being's relationship with God« (no. 51).

One could add that the Catholic Church has at times intentionally avoided getting dragged into philosophical disputes, such as those pitting the Augustinians, Dominicans, and Jesuits in the Renaissance *De auxilio* controversy, and the recent disputes between Neo-Thomists and Transcendental Thomists. For as John Paul II asserts, the Catholic Church allows for philosophical pluralism as long as »the basic tenets of these different schools are compatible with the demands of the word of God and theological enquiry« (n. 50).

In fact if we isolate the philosophical claims found in the *Enchiridion Symbolorum* of Heinrich Denzinger we find a fairly meager collection. In contrast with the thousand or so theological propositions put forward prior to 1550, we find roughly thirty philosophical ones, or around three percent of all propositions. These comprise mainly condemnations of pantheism, determinism, laxism, and rigorism found in Abelard, Eckhart, Nicholas of Autrecourt, John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, and others, as well as rejections of proofs of the immortality of the soul with the Fifth Lateran Council (December 19, 1513) and rejections of freedom of the will with the Council of Trent (January 13, 1547).⁶

sophers: »The Thomistic and neo-Thomistic revival was not the only sign of a resurgence of philosophical thought in culture of Christian inspiration. Earlier still, and parallel to Pope Leo's call, there had emerged a number of Catholic philosophers who, adopting more recent currents of thought and according to a specific method, produced philosophical works of great influence and lasting value. Some devised syntheses so remarkable that they stood comparison with the great systems of idealism. Others established the epistemological foundations for a new consideration of faith in the light of a renewed understanding of moral consciousness; others again produced a philosophy which, starting with an analysis of immanence, opened the way to the transcendent; and there were finally those who sought to combine the demands of faith with the perspective of phenomenological method. From different quarters, then, modes of philosophical speculation have continued to emerge and have sought to keep alive the great tradition of Christian thought which unites faith and reason.« (no. 59)

⁵ See my own books *Recent Catholic Philosophy: The Nineteenth Century* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009) and *Recent Catholic Philosophy: The Twentieth Century* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2011) which trace the achievements and stumblings of Catholic thinkers of diverse schools of thought.

⁶ See in particular the following condemnations: DS 191, 201 (»the human soul is a part of God or the substance of God«), 403, 739, 952, 957–959, 977–978, 1028–1030, 1034–1035, 1043–1045, 1177 (»All things occur from absolute necessity«), 1394–1395, 1440, 1486 (»Free choice after [original sin] is a

All the same even Dulles and Guarino recognize that *Fides et ratio* is not advocating a pluralistic free-for-all, but rather a pluralism »within certain limits« (Guarino 2001, 697; Dulles 2003, 203–205.) And indeed it limits pluralism in ways of which they and other commentators seem a bit unappreciative.

In the first place *Fides et ratio* upholds not just the theology of Aquinas, but also the »incomparable value« of his philosophy, as well as that of the Patristic and medieval tradition (no. 43–44, 57, 61, 72, 96).⁷ That is why John Paul II's specific recommendation is that philosophers »should develop their thought on the basis of these postulates and in organic continuity with the great tradition which, beginning with the ancients, passes through the Fathers of the Church and the masters of Scholasticism and includes the fundamental achievements of modern and contemporary thought« (no. 85).

In the second place John Paul II warns against certain forms of pluralism: »A legitimate pluralism of positions has yielded to an undifferentiated pluralism, based upon the assumption that all positions are equally valid, which is one of today's most widespread symptoms of the lack of confidence in truth« (no. 5; see also no. 69): which is why he criticizes a pseudo-philosophical eclecticism or those who »use individual ideas drawn from different philosophies, without concern for their internal coherence, their place within a system or their historical context. They therefore run the risk of being unable to distinguish the part of truth of a given doctrine from elements of it which may be erroneous or ill-suited to the task at hand« (no. 86).

Moreover, the very context of the above quote clearly shows John Paul II's reasons for maintaining that the Church »has no philosophy of her own« (no. 49), namely the autonomy of philosophy. For if we trace out the passage we read:

The Church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others. The underlying reason for this reluctance is that, even when it engages theology, philosophy must remain faithful to its own principles and methods. Otherwise there would be no guarantee that it would remain oriented to truth and that it was moving towards truth by way of a process governed by reason. A philosophy which did not proceed in the light of reason according to its own principles and methods would serve little purpose. At the deepest level, the autonomy which philosophy enjoys is rooted in the fact that reason is by its nature oriented to truth and is equipped moreover with the means necessary to arrive at truth. A philosophy conscious of this as its »constitutive status« cannot but respect the demands and the data of revealed truth (see as well no. 13, 45).

matter of name only«), 1554–1557, 1576–1581 (»A justified person sins when he performs good works with a view to eternal reward«).

⁷ For support of this view that stresses limits on the pluralism advocated by the encyclical *Fides et ratio* see: John F.X. Knasas, Does the Catholic Church Teach that There is No One True Philosophy, *American Catholic Philosophical Association Proceedings* 77 (2003): 83–99; Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 169, which asserts there should be »certain fundamental underlying agreements« among Catholic philosophers; Aidan Nichols, *Conversations of Faith and Reason: Modern Catholic Thought from Hermes to Benedict XVI* (Chicago: Hillenbrand, 2009), 185–189.

That is to say for John Paul II, the Catholic Church cannot put forward a philosophy of her own because philosophy is a task for autonomous human reason, not for authoritative magisterial pronouncement. Philosophical claims arise as truths of the natural domain are grasped and defended with reason and logical argumentation, unlike theological claims founded on supernatural revelation and magisterial tradition. So philosophy must remain independent of doctrinal matters to the degree possible.⁸ In a similar vein one might assert with Étienne Gilson (1939, 3) that the business of salvation and the business of philosophical speculation are quite distinct, which explains why Christ sent twelve simple Apostles rather than twelve professors of philosophy to evangelize the world.

Conversely, the Magisterium only enters into philosophical discussions when absolutely necessary (no. 50–51, 63). To quote from the same section (no. 49) of *Fides et ratio*: »It is neither the task nor the competence of the Magisterium to intervene in order to make good the lacunas of deficient philosophical discourse. Rather, it is the Magisterium's duty to respond clearly and strongly when controversial philosophical opinions threaten right understanding of what has been revealed, and when false and partial theories which sow the seed of serious error, confusing the pure and simple faith of the People of God, begin to spread more widely.« (*Fides et ratio*, 49).

So meager they may have been, but the very fact that some philosophical condemnations have been issued by the Magisterium over the years, shows that the Church does have philosophical interests and ideas to a degree. Indeed after 1550, philosophical condemnations grow more and more common, albeit being still of limited quantity.⁹ And theology would hardly be the same today if not for the ex-

⁸ We find this same idea of the necessary continuity of the Catholic intellectual tradition if we examine the immediate reference for section 49 of the encyclical (found in note 112), namely Pius XII's *Humani generis* (1950, 566). At least if we presume, reasonably, that it means to refer to the following lines: »Everyone is aware that the terminology employed in the schools and even that used by the Teaching Authority of the Church itself is capable of being perfected and polished; and we know also that the Church itself has not always used the same terms in the same way. It is also manifest that the Church cannot be bound to every system of philosophy that has existed for a short space of time (*Liquet etiam Ecclesiam non cuilibet systemati philosophico, brevi temporis spatio vigenti, devinciri posse*). Nevertheless, the things that have been composed through common effort by Catholic teachers over the course of the centuries to bring about some understanding of dogma are certainly not based on any such weak foundation.« (no. 16) Though admittedly this passage does not wholly illuminate the meaning of the disputed claim that the church has no philosophy of her own.

⁹ Thus we find the condemnations of Jansenism, Laxism, Rigorism, Quietism, Fideism, Semi-rationalism, and Ontologism (see DS 1901–1980 (against the ideas of Baius), 2001–2007 (against the ideas of Jansen), 2021–2065, 2101–2177, 2201–2280, 2351–2374 (contra ideas of the Quietist Fénelon), 2400–2502 (contra ideas of the Jansenist Quesnel), 2571–2575, 2600–2699 (against the Synod of Pistoia), 2730–2732, 2738–2740 (contra the semi-rationalism of Hermes), 2157–2757 (contra the fideism of Bautain), 2765–2769, 2775–2786 (encyclical *Qui pluribus*), the unnumbered *Singulari quadam* of 1854 (against the ideas of Lamennais), 2811–2814 (contra fideistic ideas of Bonnetty), 2828–2831 (contra the semi-rationalism of Günther), 2841–2847, 2850–2880 (contra the semi-rationalism of Frohschammer), 2890–2980 (including the *Syllabus of Errors*), 3201–3241 (against errors attributed to Rosmini, who has since been cleared), 3130–3133, 3150–3152, 3340–3346, 3538, 3665–3667, 3771–3776, and the unnumbered *Vehementernos* of 1908 and *Communium rerum* of 1909. All of this reached a peak with the First Vatican Council of 1869–1870 (see DS 3004, 3014, 3021–3025). Additionally quite a number of philosophical works were placed on the Index of Forbidden Books.

tensive philosophical incursions of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century popes: *Aeterni Patris* (August 4, 1879) of Leo XIII (DS 3135–3140); *Libertas* (June 20, 1888) of Leo XIII (DS 3245–3255); *Rerum novarum* (May 15, 1891) of Leo XIII (DS 3265–3271); *Lamentabili* (1907) of Pius X (DS 3401–3466); *Pascendi dominici gregis* (September 8, 1907) of Pius X (DS 3475–3500; see also the Anti-Modernist Oath, DS 3537–3550); *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) of Pius XI (DS 3725–2747); *Summi pontificatus* (October 20, 1939) of Pius XII (DS 3780–3786); *Humani generis* (August 12, 1950) of Pius XII (DS 3875–3899).

In our own day Pope John Paul II has dramatically expanded the »philosophical teachings« of the Catholic Church through his encyclicals *Veritatis Splendor* (August 6, 1993) and *Fides et Ratio* (September 14, 1998); to which we can add the *Deus caritas est* (December 25, 2005) of Benedict XVI, to say nothing of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (August 15, 1997).¹⁰

Furthermore, I will argue that if we examine Catholic intellectual history, and the writings of the Magisterium, we can isolate a bedrock of positive philosophical principles. For while there are numerous differences between the various Catholic thinkers, there are also similarities. In fact, this is just what John Paul II argues in his *Fides et ratio*: »Although times change and knowledge increases, it is possible to discern a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought as a whole. Consider, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality, as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject, with the capacity to know God, truth and goodness. Consider as well certain fundamental moral norms which are shared by all. These are among the indications that, beyond different schools of thought, there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity« (n. 4). Or as I would put it, a heritage of Catholic philosophy.

In this paper then I wish to further develop a position argued for in my book *Recent Catholic Philosophy: The Twentieth Century* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2011): 245–248. That is to say, I wish to set forth twelve focal or first principles of Catholic philosophy, and develop, as it were, a *canon philosophicus* (philosophical canon), *sensus rationis* (sense of reason), or *consensus rationis* (rational consensus). This will parallel the theological Canon of St. Vincent of Lerins (c. 380–445) who argued that the safest determination of the one true Catholic faith is to seek out that which is universal, antique, and based on a consent (*universitatem, antiquitatem, consensionem*), or in his famous words that which has been believed »everywhere, always, and by all« (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*) (*Commonitorium*, 4).¹¹ It will also echo the notion of a *sensus fideium* (*sensus fidei; consensus fidei*), or sense of the faithful designating the doc-

¹⁰ See also the *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II (1965) and the »Instruction on Certain Aspects of the Theology of Liberation« (*Libertatis Nuntius* (August 6, 1984), *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 76 (1984): 890–903).

¹¹ More specifically, for Vincent of Lerins that which is universal is what has been confessed by everyone throughout the whole world (*tota per orbem terrarum*), that which is antique is what has been held by the holy ancestors and fathers (*sanctos majores ac patres*), and that which is based on consent are those definitions and positions held by all or at least almost all of the priests and doctors (*omnium vel certe pene omnium sacerdotum pariter et magistrorum definitiones sententiasque*).

trinal beliefs held by the whole body of the faithful (DS, 1367; *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12, 25; CCC, no. 904; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Veritatis*, no. 35), as well as notion of probabilism from moral theology.¹² I will then go a bit further in defending them than I did in my book by invoking historical (*consensus philosophorum*), magisterial (*consensus auctoritatis*), and philosophical considerations (*consensus argumentorum*).¹³ My endeavor can only be brief and partial here, but it should give the flavor of what I have in mind.

It should be born in mind that while these focal principles represent philosophical positions which a Catholic philosopher would be wise to support, and indeed should form the substructure of their endeavors, there may be legitimate divergences of thought on the peripheries. With John Paul II one can say that recognition of the points of convergence do not blind one to the points of divergence (no. 41). In other words several philosophical positions are arguably compatible with these first principles of Catholic philosophy such as Augustinianism, Thomism, Romanticism, Spiritualism, Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Personalism. So ultimately in a way the Church does have a philosophy of her own, i.e. the following twelve first principles of Catholic philosophy:

1. Foundational Empiricism – Experience is the foundation of philosophical knowledge.

The classic expression of this position occurs in Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) who argued that human knowledge primarily originates from the senses (*Summa theologiae*, I q. 1 a. 9; I q. 84 a. 7). Hence his famous assertion that there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses (*De Veritate*, q. 2 a. 3). A phenomenologist like Edith Stein (1891–1942) also accepted that humans must turn to a description of mental phenomena to ground knowledge (Stein 1929). They are correct in this. For most philosophers (following Kant) recognize that ideas are empty without some content, and that this content comes from experience. Of course experience must be understood in a broad sense, and not limited to the corporeal sensations, so that intuitive awareness of morality and aesthetics, and Augustinian self-awareness (*Si fallor sum*) are included (see Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, II, 3, 7; Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II q. 91 a. 3 and q. 94 a. 2).

¹² The notion of probabilism (and variants of aequiprobabilism and probabiliorism) developed in the Renaissance as a way of dealing with disputed issues in moral theology with Thomas Cajetan (1469–1534), Bartolome de Medina, O.P. (1527–1581), Luis Molina, S.J. (1528–1581), Domingo Bañez, O.P. (1528–1604), Francisco Suarez, S.J. (1548–1617), Leonard Lessius, S.J. (1554–1623), Thyrus Gonzalez, S.J. (1624–1705), Alphonsus de Liguori (1696–1787), and others. These moral theologians argued that when faced with a moral dilemma one could follow one's conscience and act contrary to a law (or according to the »unsafe« option) if one's view was shared by a consensus of moral theologians. This was so for probabilism even if one's opinion was less probable than the alternative, for aequiprobabilism if one's opinion was as probable as the alternative, and for probabiliorism if one's opinion was more probable than the alternative.

¹³ Here I will make use of the ideas of the Magisterium, and of philosophers who have been beatified or canonized, but I believe a similar conclusion follows if we look at the predominant Catholic figures in the Patristic, medieval, modern, and contemporary periods, up to and including the oft-honored Charles Taylor, Nicholas Rescher, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Haldane, William Desmond, Robert Spaemann, and Josef Siefert. This is not to say that some of the twelve principles will not be disputed by some contemporaries.

2. Elaborative Rationalism – While knowledge begins in experience, the intellect is actively involved in the cognitive process.

Though knowledge begins with experience, for knowledge to occur the mind cannot be a merely passive receiver. Instead the experiential data must be processed by the mind in some manner. Philosophical opinions vary as to the exact nature of this intellectual operation. Yet whether we take the abstractive intellect of Aquinas (*Summa theologiae*, I q. 85 a. 1), the illative sense of John Henry Newman (1801–1890), or the eidetic reduction of the phenomenologists Edith Stein (1891–1942) and John Paul II (1920–2005) (Newman 1870, 330–372 [ch. 9]; Stein 1929; John Paul II 1979, 3–22.), there is some supervening cognitive act going beyond mere sensation, or combining of sensations, that allows for knowledge to occur.

3. Epistemological Realism (Correspondence Theory of the Truth) – The intellect is able to grasp the nature of reality to a degree.

Classically Aquinas defined truth as the conformity of thought and thing (*adaequatio intellectus et rei*) (*Summa Theologiae*, I q. 16 a. 2), and ever since this has been the predominant position of Catholic philosophers. Indeed the Magisterium explicitly rejected the medieval skepticism of Nicholas of Autrecourt, i.e. »That through natural appearances no certainty can be had regarding things« (DS 1028) and affirmed the possibility of knowledge. For the human mind, from the moment it awakens, is immersed in a world it grasps. It is aware of itself and also various objects with distinct natures, all of which forms the foundation of science and philosophy. This is brought out most strongly in the encyclical *Fides et ratio*: »Everyday life shows how concerned each of us is to discover for ourselves, beyond mere opinions, how things really are. Within visible creation, man is the only creature who not only is capable of knowing but who knows that he knows, and is therefore interested in the real truth of what he perceives« (no. 25). Hence John Paul II's explicit mandate for philosophy, that it »verify the human capacity to know the truth, to come to a knowledge which can reach objective truth by means of that *adaequatio rei et intellectus* to which the Scholastic Doctors referred« (no. 82; see also *Fides et ratio*, no. 5, 27–29, 56; *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 15). The point here is not that humans are capable of a perfect and exhaustive knowledge of things, but that they do know that things exist and a bit about their nature. Moreover, this knowing of ours is grasped as we go about our lives and is the foundation of all science and philosophy; even studies of illusions and cognitive errors presuppose it. For a study of human cognitional limitations would be worthless if we did not know at some level that there are humans, with certain faculties, who make certain mistakes, etc.

4. Metaphysical Libertarianism – Humans possess a free will, which is a power to choose one action or another in a given set of circumstances.

Justin Martyr (100–165) and Augustine (354–430) defend free will in their works, as in order for there to be moral praise and blame, humans must at least have the

power to refrain from evil (Justin Martyr, *Apologia*, ch. 43; Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, I, 11, 21; *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, 2, 2). John Damascene (676–749) also argues that humans are not determined by the forces of nature or stars, for human deliberation presupposes that the choice of what we do lies in our own hands (Damascene, *De fide*, II, 25–30). And though Aquinas (c. 1225–1274) at times comes close to a compatibilism, in the end he clearly retains a notion of the will as a power of choice: »the human can will and not will, act and not act ... will this or that, and do this or that« (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II q. 13 a. 6). In the twentieth-century Edith Stein (1891–1942) and John Paul II (1920–2005) presented nuanced understandings of what it means to be free, noting that although there are often various desires and motives present that may incline humans in a given direction, in the end humans have a somewhat robust power of choice to act as they do. So in an important manner the final arbitrator of how we act is ourselves.¹⁴

This freedom of the will is brought out in many magisterial statements. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) asserts that the will must cooperate with grace: »If anyone says that a human's free will, moved and awakened by God, does in no manner cooperate when it assents to God, who excites and calls it, thereby disposing and preparing itself to receive the grace of justification; and if anyone says that it cannot dissent if it wishes, but that, like some inanimate thing, it does nothing whatever, and only remains passive, let him be anathema« (Decree on Justification, Canon 5, DS 1554; see also DS 622, 1177, 1486, 1555). This is why Baius (1576) and Jansen (1653) were condemned for asserting the will is necessitated to act: »In order to merit or demerit in the state of fallen nature, freedom from necessity is not required, but freedom from external compulsion is sufficient (*Ad merendum et demerendum in statu naturae lapsae non requiritur in homine libertas a necessitate, sed sufficit libertas a coactione*)« (DS 2003; see also DS 1939).¹⁵ And the *Catechism* in no uncertain terms proclaims: »God created man a rational being, conferring on him the dignity of a person who can initiate and control his own actions ... Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility ... As long as freedom has not bound itself definitively to its ultimate good which is God, there is the possibility of choosing between good and evil, and thus of growing in perfection or of failing and sinning. This freedom characterizes properly human acts. It is the basis of praise or blame, merit or reproach.« (no. 1730–1732; see also no. 1705, 1733–1748, 1861)

For humans have an awareness of being in control of their actions, that is, of being able to initiate the movement of their members in one manner or another.

¹⁴ See Edith Stein, *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* (Washington: ICS Publications, 2000), 49–62, and John Paul II, *The Acting Person* (New York: Springer, 1979), 105–148. We can also mention Rom 7:15–19; Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), *De gratia et libero arbitrio*; Bonaventure (1221–1275), *Commentary on the Sentences*, I d. 38 a. 2; II d. 24 p. 1 a. 1–2 and d. 25 p. 2 a. 1; John Duns Scotus (1265–1308), *Ordinatio* II d. 6 q. 2 and d. 39 q. 2; III d. 17 a. 1 and d. 26 q. 1; and Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), *De gratia et libero arbitrio*.

¹⁵ Translations from Denzinger from Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* (Fitzwilliam: Lo-reto, 2002). See also Leo XIII, *Libertas* (1888), no. 1–6.

Nor is there any conclusive scientific evidence to contravene this. Sociologists, psychologists, and neuroscientists have shown various habitual and physiological influences on human action, but none of their studies have given us conclusive reasons to distrust our evident experience of freedom. Indeed as has been pointed out by Lequier, C.S. Lewis, Grisez, and others, all knowledge presupposes human freedom. For one would have no reason to trust one's cognitive faculties, to countenance their deliverings as accurate or true, unless one had a certain freedom to marshal evidence, reject biases, and adjudicate between competing claims. So in fact if the sciences ever succeeded in eliminating human freedom, at the same stroke, they would destroy themselves and undo their work.¹⁶

5. *Mental Dualism (Non-materialism)* – While the mind is deeply integrated into the body (and brain), it goes beyond and escapes its physical embodiment to a degree.

Such is the view of Aquinas who notes both a dependence and independence of the mind on the body. On the one hand for Aquinas the human mind functions best when united with the body, on the other hand the very fact that it knows material realities (and we can add displays freedom of the will) shows it cannot be material (*Summa theologiae*, I q. 72 a 2; I q. 75–76; see also Leo XIII, *Libertas*, no. 4; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 362–368).

6. *Concordism of Faith and Reason* – Faith and reason harmoniously work together in the development of philosophical and theological truths.

This view has an ancient history whether we think of the »Credo ut intelligas« of Augustine (*De libero arbitrio*, II, 2, 5–6), the »Fides quaerens intellectum« of Anselm (*Proslogion*, 1), the »philosophia ancilla theologiae est« of Peter Damian (*Letter on Divine Omnipotence*) and Aquinas (*Summa theologiae*, I q. 1 a. 5 ad 2) or the »two wings [of faith and reason]« of John Paul II (*Fides et ratio*, Prologue). For as Aquinas famously notes »grace does not destroy nature but perfects it« (*Summa theologiae*, I q. 1 a. 8 ad 2).

Hence the Catholic Church's strong disdain for fideism: »[Some] boldly prate it [faith] is repugnant to human reason. Certainly, nothing more insane, nothing more impious, nothing more repugnant to reason itself can be imagined or thought of than this. For, even if faith is above reason, nevertheless, no true dissension or disagreement can ever be found between them, since both have their origin from one and the same font of immutable, eternal truth, the excellent and great God, and they mutually help one another so much that right reason demonstrates the truth of faith, protects it, defends it; but faith frees reason from all errors and, by a knowledge of divine things, wonderfully elucidates it, confirms, and perfects it«

¹⁶ See Vincelette (2009): 80–87 on Lequier; C.S. Lewis, *Miracles* (London: Collins, 1947), ch. 3 (revised edition in 1960); Joseph Boyle, Germain Grisez, and Olaf Tollafsens, *Free Choice: A Self-Referential Argument* (Notre Dame; Notre Dame University Press, 1976).

(Pius IX, *Qui Pluribus*, 1846; DS 2776; see also DS 3004). So, in the words of Vatican Council I (1869–1870): »The Catholic Church has always held that there is a twofold order of knowledge ... in one we know by natural reason, in the other by Divine faith; the object of the one is truth attainable by natural reason, the object of the other is mysteries hidden in God, but which we have to believe and which can only be known to us by Divine revelation ... And not only can faith and reason never be at variance with one another, but they also bring mutual help to each other, since right reason demonstrates the basis of faith and, illumined by its light, perfects the knowledge of divine things, while faith frees and protects reason from errors and provides it with manifold knowledge« (DS 3015–3019; *Fides et ratio*, n. 9, 34, 52–53; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 35, 156–159).

7. Natural Theology (Metaphysics is Prior to Science) – Reason can show God exists and determine His nature to some degree.

The notion that God can be known by human reason is found in numerous Church Fathers and medieval theologians. The five ways of Aquinas are one such famous attempt to summarize the key cosmological and teleological arguments for God.¹⁷ And there is the more recent moral argument in Newman and others.¹⁸ For humans grasp a world that need not exist and wonder what it's ultimate cause is, sense a beauty and order, that 'something good is going on here,' and seek its explanation, and intuit moral values and a call to love suggestive of a transcendent Good. Even evil, bad as it may be, betokens the fact that there is a fundamental goodness to reality.

Nor is there any doubt that it has been a continual assertion of the Magisterium that these philosophers were not foolish to attempt such proofs: »If anyone shall have said that the one true God, our Creator and our Lord, cannot be known with certitude by those things which have been made, by the natural light of human reason let him be anathema« (DS 3026; see also DS 3022, 3026; 3538; *Pascendi Domini gregis*, no. 26; *Humani generis*, n. 29; *Fides et ratio*, nn. 8, 19, 22, 53, 67; *Dei Verbum*, no 6).¹⁹ For in the words of the *Catechism*: »Created in God's image and called to know and love him, the person who seeks God discovers certain ways

¹⁷ See Rom 1:19–23 and 2:14–16; Athanasius (293–373), *Oratio contra gentes*, 35–46; Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–390), *Oration XXVIII*, 5–6, 16; Augustine (354–430), *De libero arbitrio*, II, 16–17 and *Confessions*, XI, 4, 6; John Damascene (c. 676–749), *De fide*, I, 1–3; Anselm, *Proslogion*, 3; Bonaventure (1221–1274), *Sententiarum*, II d. 1 p. 1 a. 1 q. 2 and *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*; Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 2 a. 3, and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 13; Duns Scotus (1265–1308), *Ordinatio* 1, d. 2, q. 1.

¹⁸ »Conscience is ever forcing on us by threats and by promises that we must follow the right and avoid the wrong ... but conscience does not repose on itself, but vaguely reaches forward to something beyond self, and dimly discerns a sanction higher than self for its decisions, as evidenced in that keen sense of obligation and responsibility which informs them. And hence it is that we are accustomed to speak of conscience as a voice, a term which we should never think of applying to the sense of the beautiful; and moreover a voice, or the echo of a voice, imperative and constraining, like no other dictate in the whole of our experience.« (Newman 1870, Part One, V, 1. [98–102; 103; 107].

¹⁹ As *Fides et ratio* states: »This is to concede to human reason a capacity which seems almost to surpass its natural limitations. Not only is it not restricted to sensory knowledge, from the moment that it can reflect critically upon the data of the senses, but, by discoursing on the data provided by the senses, reason can reach the cause which lies at the origin of all perceptible reality.« (no. 22)

of coming to know him. These are also called proofs for the existence of God, not in the sense of proofs in the natural sciences, but rather in the sense of ‘converging and convincing arguments’, which allow us to attain certainty about the truth. These ‘ways’ of approaching God from creation have a twofold point of departure: the physical world, and the human person. ... Man’s faculties make him capable of coming to a knowledge of the existence of a personal God. But for man to be able to enter into real intimacy with him, God willed both to reveal himself to man and to give him the grace of being able to welcome this revelation in faith. The proofs of God’s existence, however, can predispose one to faith and help one to see that faith is not opposed to reason» (CCC, 31, 35; see also no. 22–49).

8. Spiritual Immortality: The human soul can be shown to be immortal.

Numerous Catholic thinkers have held that reason can show the soul is immortal, based on such properties as its simplicity, freedom, ability to know an external world, self-consciousness, natural desire for immortality, or the requirements of divine justice.²⁰

Already by the Fifth Lateran Council, Session 8 (1513) there is a magisterial assertion that the immortality of the soul can be known to reason, or at least that reason cannot disprove its immortality (DS 1440–1441); and the magisterium later takes issue with the view of Bautain that reason cannot demonstrate the spirituality and immortality of the soul (DS 2766; see also DS 3771; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 366).

9. Moral Objectivism (Natural Law): Moral values are part of the fabric of reality and know by all humans in part.

Ethics was a major part of Christianity from the beginning, and so it is no surprise to find many Christians stressing the importance of the virtues and that there is a moral law known in part to all humans. In this regard one can examine the work of Ambrose, *De officiis*; Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, I-II; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* V, 1–13; and Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II q. 94 and II-II q. 47–170 (see also Rom 2:15).

The language of natural law has accordingly been taken over by many magisterial documents including: *Libertas* (June 20, 1888) of Leo XIII, no. 8–9; *Summi pontificatus* (October 20, 1939) of Pius XII (DS 3780–3786); *Veritatis splendor* (August 6, 1993) of John Paul II, no. 40–53 – which speaks of humankind’s »proper and primordial nature« given by God; *Fides et ratio*, no. 36; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1950–1974 – which defines the natural law as »the original moral sense which enables man to discern by reason the good and the evil« (no.

²⁰ See in this regard Athanasius (c. 298–373), *Against the Heathen*, ch. 30–34; Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395), *On the Soul*; Augustine (354–430), *De immortalitate animae*; Bonaventure, O.F.M. (1221–1275), *Sententiarum*, II d. 19 a. 1 q. 1; Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), *Summa theologiae*, I q. 75 a. 6; John Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308), *Ordinatio* IV d. 43 q. 2, who allows only probable force to the argument, however.

1954).²¹ For the human race is aware of a call to be good and follow the law of love, or what Augustine called the »weight of love«.

10. Three-Font Principilism – Human acts are to be judged right or wrong based on the act itself (object), the circumstances and consequences of the act, and the intentions (motives) of the agent, and there are some acts that are intrinsically evil and never to be done.

This is a key teaching of Romans 3:8 and Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II q. 18, that is repeated in the strongest possible terms by *Veritatis Splendor*, nn. 75–82, 94–97 and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1749–1761. For example, in the *Catechism* we read (no. 1761): »There are concrete acts that it is always wrong to choose, because their choice entails a disorder of the will, i.e. a moral evil. One may not do evil so that good may result from it.« And in so doing it is following in the path of John Paul II who had stated unequivocally »with the authority of the Successor of Peter« that there is a »universality and immutability of the moral commandments, particularly those which prohibit always and without exception intrinsically evil acts,« even in dire circumstances (*Veritatis splendor*, no. 115); for »the negative precepts of the natural law are universally valid. They oblige each and every individual, always and in every circumstance ...without exception, because the choice of this kind of behavior is in no case compatible with the goodness of the will of the acting person, with his vocation to life with God and to communion with his neighbor« (no. 52).²²

11. Agapic Harmonism – Love requires self-sacrifice and other-regard and yet yields the happiness of the lover.

This assertion is found in the writings of Augustine (354–430) – *De doctrina christiana*, I, c. 28, 32 and I c. 32, 35; III, c. 10, 16 – where we are called to love others for themselves and yet find happiness in doing so, and also in those of Aquinas for whom an ideal love combines both love of desire (*amor concupiscentiae*) and love of friendship (*amor amicitiae*) (II d. 3 q. 4 a. 1; III d. 29 a. 3–4; I-II q. 26 a. 4 ad 1; II-II q. 17 a. 8, q. 23 a. 5 ad 2, q. 26 a. 3 ad 2–3, q. 26 a. 13 ad 3, q. 27 a. 3, and q. 44 a. 7).²³ This viewpoint is evident when Augustine defines charity as »the motion of the mind toward enjoyment of God for His own sake and onself and

²¹ Quotes of the *Catechism* from www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/catechism. One may also consult the *Pacem in terris* (1963) of John XXIII, no. 28–30; *Humanae vitae* (1968) of Paul VI, no. 4–11; and *Evangelium vitae* (1995) of John Paul II, no. 62–72.

²² Translation from www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul-ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html.

²³ See also Basil, *Long Rules*, Preface, 3; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40, 3; Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 15, 461–465; Maximus the Confessor, *Centuries on Charity*, II, 9 and III, 77; Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), *On Loving God*, I, 1; VII, 17; VIII–IX, 23–29; XII, 34; Bonaventure (c. 1218–1274), *Sententiarum* III d. 27 a. 2 q. 2; Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), *Summa theologiae*, I-II q. 26 a. 4 and q. 28 a. 1; II-II q. 23 a. 1, q. 23 a. 5 ad 2, q. 26 a. 3 ad 3, and q. 27 a. 3; Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, 37 (60); Francis de Sales, *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* (1616), II, 17; XI, 11–18; Wojtyła 1993, 74–100.

one's neighbor for God's sake» (*De doctrina christiana*, III, c. 10, 16) and when Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) recognized four degrees of love: loving oneself for one's sake, loving God for one's sake, loving God for God's sake, loving oneself for God's sake (*De diligendo Deo*, 8–10).

In fact, the magisterium has unrelentingly condemned any overly-harsh rejection of self-love. For though the motive of love must in part be disinterested, all the same one finds one's goodness and happiness in love; or in Scriptural terms, those who lose their lives will save them.²⁴ This is why the Council of Trent recognized that it is not a sin to consider one's eternal reward in love if one's primary aim is that God be glorified (DS 1539). And perhaps this is also why the *Catechism* notes that love is »aroused by the attraction of the good. Love causes a desire for the absent good and the hope of obtaining it; this movement finds completion in the pleasure and joy of the good possessed« (no. 1765; cf. no. 1822–1829). It is likely that the strongest defense of this harmonism of self-interest and other-regard though is by Benedict XVI, who recently asserted that »eros and agape-ascenting love and descending love-can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. Even if eros is at first mainly covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to 'be there' for the other. The element of agape thus enters into this love, for otherwise eros is impoverished and even loses its own nature. On the other hand, man cannot live by oblation, descending love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift« (*Deus caritas est*, no. 7; see also no. 3–6).²⁵

12. *Axiological Personalism* – The human person is a being that possesses intrinsic value and must be loved for its own sake.²⁶

This position was definitely elaborated by John Paul II in his *Love and Responsibility* (12–42), but is also found in various encyclicals including *Rerum novarum* (no. 20, 36–40), *Gaudium et spes* (no. 14–15, 20–21, 24), *Veritatis splendor* (no. 87–89), *Evangelium vitae*, and *Deus caritas est* (no. 18, 31–34).

It is my hope that by having stated these twelve first principles of Catholic philosophy, their importance and truth and need for defense in light of modern challenges become all the more apparent.

²⁴ See DS 957–959, 1456, 1558, 1576, 1581, 2207, 2213, 2214, 2351–2357, 2444 – especially the rejection of the claim that the purest love has »no hope regarding its own interest, even an eternal one« (DS 2357).

²⁵ Translation from http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html.

²⁶ One might also argue that there are a few key Catholic social principles such as respect for human dignity, solidaritism, charity and charitable actions, subsidiarism, distributism to the poor/social justice, and stewardism of the environment.

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