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Philosophy, Experience, and the Spiritual Life

Louis Caruana, S.J.

Philosophy is arguably the oldest academic discipline. In spite of this fact, what constitutes the object of its inquiry has been a bone of contention ever since it started to be recorded. In the course of history, various sub-topics of philosophy have become autonomous disciplines and branched off on their own. The most spectacular of these painful separations is probably the one involving natural science, which started to live a life of its own about four hundred years ago. Other separations, no less definitive, have occurred since then, including for instance psychology, linguistics, sociology. Every time there is a schism of this kind, one hears rumours of the death of philosophy. It is said that the mother will not survive the trauma of separation. The ensuing course of events, however, has always proved such rumours false. Philosophy seems to be capable of budding again and again, flowering in various forms. That elder daughter of philosophy, natural science, has had profound effects on the mentality of human beings. Its success in transforming the entire landscape of the globe has suggested to many that what is really needed is for philosophy to learn from her own daughter, relinquishing old ways and adopting the youthful style of observation, experimentation and prediction. The suggestion is that, just as the ancient notion of *scientia* has now been naturalised and re-baptised as natural science, so also *philosophia* as a whole should now become naturalised. A project based on this suggestion was inaugurated in a special way in Vienna in the early 1920s, and the effects of this project are still with us today. While some prominent thinkers are struggling to change philosophy into natural science, others

react strongly against this trend. The contest is significant for much of twentieth-century philosophy. It will be the point of departure for the themes explored in this paper. I will not focus directly on the move towards naturalism. I will focus rather on the philosophical reaction it produced. In the first section of the paper, I will show how this reaction has helped to rediscover the long forgotten spiritual dimension of philosophy. In two further sections, I will then argue that some aspects of this spiritual dimension are especially related to Ignatian spirituality.

I. Overcoming the naturalising tendency

The philosopher who best epitomises the twentieth-century trend towards philosophical naturalism is probably the Harvard philosopher Willard van Orman Quine. As a young man, he spent five months in Vienna and assimilated many of the ideas on naturalism that circulated there. He then settled in Harvard and initiated a systematization of philosophy on the model of natural science. His basic idea was that natural science and philosophy should form a single continuous discipline, the core of which is given by the master science – physics. He introduced therefore a hierarchy of explanations. The most fundamental kind of explanation is that of physics; the less fundamental kinds of explanation are to be considered local generalisations that depend on physics. Hence, for instance, metaphysics and epistemology have nothing more fundamental to add to what we learn from physics. Physics dictates, and metaphysics and epistemology must adjust themselves accordingly.¹ Although Quine himself never showed interest in theology or spirituality, his project of naturalism has been extended to these areas by others following in his footsteps. The result is the same: physics dictates, and theology and spirituality must adjust themselves accordingly. This is the consequence of the original assumption that explanation, in all areas, forms one single continuous whole. Admittedly, this philosophical project does not constitute the only twentieth-century philosophical tradition. It is nevertheless very important in its global impact, especially because of the ever-rising preponderance of natural science and technology. Moreover, this trend somehow satisfies a hidden desire. It satisfies, to some extent, the desire to have science,

¹ Two of his most influential writings are: *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953); *Pursuit of Truth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

philosophy, theology and spirituality engage in some form of dialogue rather than letting them establish separate kingdoms.²

This naturalising tendency has had various reactions ever since it was proposed by Quine and, before that, by his colleagues in Vienna. There are some advantages that cannot be neglected. If philosophers can learn from other disciplines, they can learn from physics as well. The systematic nature of natural science, the rigour of its reasoning that prefers clear concepts to vague ones, and its collaborative approach that involves the coordinated efforts of many researchers working together are all laudatory aspects from which philosophers can learn a lot. Not all aspects of naturalism, however, are commendable. The most serious problem is that, with naturalism, serious constraints are set on philosophical inquiry. The fundamental questions philosophers have been accustomed to face since the dawn of history, like questions on God and on the human person, start falling under suspicion. Questions involving non-measurable aspects start becoming, at best, redundant and, at worst, meaningless. Because of the serious nature of these problems, many philosophers reacted strongly against Quine's trend. They became convinced that some aspects of philosophy as a discipline are radically different from natural science. One of the most interesting fruits of this debate is the recent rediscovery of the *sapiential* element of philosophy that is systematically neglected by naturalism.

As a typical protagonist of this rediscovery, I will consider Pierre Hadot, of the Collège de France, author of *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*.³ His research on major figures and themes of ancient philosophy convinced him that the classic definition of philosophy as the love of wisdom has been somewhat neglected through the centuries, especially since the birth of natural science. Philosophy was not just the search for a true representation of the world. Over and above this project, philosophy used to have another aim. It used to be in the business of helping people live a good life. The figure of Socrates, for instance, has had tremendous pedagogic influence on the entire Western tradition, as Hadot explains, mainly as a kind of mediator between the transcendent ideal of wisdom and

² Other major philosophical movements, like existentialism, hermeneutics and phenomenology, have a different approach towards the rise of the natural sciences. They avoid confrontation by adopting a method that is fundamentally distinct from that of the natural sciences.

³ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited with an Introduction by A.I. Davidson, trans. M. Chase (Oxford/Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1995). This is a translation of Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987).

concrete human reality. The famous Socratic formula: 'I know that I know nothing' had the effect of making it painfully obvious to others that they were even less wise than him. It had the effect of opening their eyes to their own ignorance, and thus of changing their attitude in life. Another example studied in detail by Hadot is the Stoic Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius. In the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, philosophy is essentially an 'exercise'. It isn't an abstract representation of the world or an interpretation of ancient texts. It constitutes rather the art of living. As we all know, people are assailed by suffering and disorder due to unregulated desires and fears. Philosophy is the therapy for these unregulated passions, leading to a transformation of the individual's mode of being. These philosophers were concerned with helping readers undergo a conversion, a total transformation of the way they live and view the world. Their writings were conceived primarily as spiritual exercises exercised by the author himself and then offered to disciples as a way of growing spiritually. Their value was often psycho-gogic, in the sense of leading the soul 'to school'. In this sense, philosophy is not concerned with conveying information but with the transformation of the individual. Hadot explains how ancient philosophy is thus better described as a spiritual exercise: 'a unique act, renewed at each instant' (p. 192). Like so many other aspects of ancient culture, this kind of exercise, highlighting the examination of life, was later on Christianised. In Hadot's view, 'Ignatius of Loyola's *Exercitia spiritualia* are nothing but a Christian version of a Greco-Roman tradition' (p. 82).

Hadot's work is certainly not unique. There have been many philosophers in the course of history who emphasised the existential or sapiential vocation of philosophy. Nevertheless, Hadot still merits special attention. Ever since his work mentioned above appeared in English, he came to represent a challenge to the naturalising tendencies characterised by Quine. The very nature of philosophy is at issue here. If Quine is right, philosophy and natural science form one undivided whole. If Hadot is right, the true vocation of philosophy has nothing whatsoever to do with natural science; it is rather a way of caring for the self. There is therefore a tension between a representational mode versus a sapiential mode of philosophy. These last years, this tension has resurfaced, but is not new. The sapiential mode remained dominant for many centuries after Ancient Greece, and traces of the representational view are clearly evident in various works, especially from Descartes

onwards. It is my contention that traces of this tension are also evident in spirituality, especially in the spirituality specifically associated with the intellectual apostolate.

II. The intellectual's spiritual vocation: two modes

What is the spirituality specifically associated with the intellectual apostolate? I will take this spirituality to refer to the way intellectuals endeavour to encounter God in their intellectual work. The emphasis is on the last clause. We are focusing here on how intellectuals encounter God neither *alongside* their work, nor *in spite of* their work, but precisely *within* their intellectual work. I will try to distinguish two modes or kinds of spirituality understood in this way.

The first kind corresponds to contemplation. Philosophising can be seen as a contemplative awareness. Contemplation here refers to the process of the attainment of truth that elevates the soul towards God. Intellectuals are concerned with a personal journey towards the light. Their life is channelled in a special way so as to facilitate this personal journey. To obtain a clearer idea of what this involves, we may recall one of the most influential proponents of this approach: St. Thomas Aquinas. His famous letter to Brother John on how to study gives a clear idea of the various characteristics of this approach:

Brother John, dearest brother in Christ,

Since you have asked me in what way it is best to enter into the treasure of knowledge, this is my best advice to you: seek to enter via the small rivers and not directly via the ocean, because you reach the difficult things by going through the easy ones first. Here is therefore my advice on your way of life: be slow to speak and wary of frequenting places where people chat. Embrace purity of conscience. Do not neglect dedicating time for prayer. Love to be in your room, your cell, if you want to be introduced to the 'wine-cellar'. Present yourself as amiable to all—or at least try; but don't show yourself as too familiar with anyone; because too much familiarity breeds contempt and will slow you down in your studies; and do not get involved in any way with deeds and sayings of worldly people. Above all, flee all idle talk. Do not neglect following in the steps of holy and approved men. Never mind who says what, but commit to memory the truth that is said. Strive to understand what you read, and clarify any

doubtful points. And stock up in the cupboard of your mind all that you can, as if you want to fill a cup. “Seek not things that are higher than you are.” Follow the steps of Blessed Dominic, who brought forth and produced shoots, flowers and fruit, both useful and marvellous, in the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts for as long as his life allowed. If you follow these things, you will attain what you’re striving for. Farewell!⁴

The overall message here is clear. Brother John must get his priorities right. The privileged locus of intellectual work is the silence of one’s room. All other aspects of life are to be allowed in so far as they are in line with what happens in the silence of one’s room. They are to be discarded in so far as they disturb what happens in the silence of one’s room. For Aquinas, contemplative prayer and intellectual work merge into one another, so much so that they seem to become one and the same activity. This mode of spirituality of the intellectual apostolate has a definite character. First, it situates intellectual work on the same level as contemplative prayer, in both content and requirements of lifestyle. Second, it highlights the need to flee the world so as to allow space for what is described as genuine scholarly endeavour: the attainment of truth. Commentaries on this text have always highlighted these two aspects. For instance, in the work of A.D. Sertillanges, *La vie intellectuel*, we find a sustained emphasis on the preservation of interior silence that ultimately cannot come but from solitude.⁵ To be fair to Sertillanges, we have to recall that he does mention cooperating with one’s intellectual colleagues, and safeguarding a reasonable amount of contact with life. The emphasis of his entire work, however, is clear: intellectual life and contemplation are one.

⁴ This is my translation of the Latin original as found in Victor White, trans. ‘The Letter of Thomas Aquinas to Brother John *De modo studendi*’, *Life of the Spirit* (Oxford: Blackfriars, Dec. 1944), Suppl. pp. 161–80: ‘Quia quaesisti a me, in Christo mihi carissime frater Joannes, quomodo oportet incedere in thesauro scientiae acquirendo, tale a me tibi super hoc traditur consilium; ut per rivulos, et non statim in mare, eligas introire; quia per facilia ad difficilia oportet devenire. Huiusmodi est ergo monitio mea de vita tua: Tardiloquum te esse iubeo, et tarde ad locutorium accendentem; Conscientiae puritatem amplecti; Orationi vacare non desinas; Cellam frequenter diligas, si vis in cellam vinariam introduci; Omnibus amabilem te exhibeas, vel exhibere studias; sed nemini familiarem te multum ostendas; quia nimia familiaritas parit contemptum et retardationis materiam a studio administrat; Et de factis et verbis saecularium nullatenus te intromittas; Discursum super omnia fugias; Sanctorum et proborum virorum imitari vestigia non omittas. Non respicias a quo, sed quod sane dicatur memoriae recommenda: Ea quae legis fac ut intelligas, de dubiis te certificans. Et quidquid poteris, in armariolo mentis reponere satage sicut cupiens vas implere; “Altiora te ne quaeras”. Illius beati Dominici sequere vestigia, qui frondes, flores et fructus, utiles ac mirabiles, in vinea Domini Sabaoth, dum vitam comitem habuit, protulit ac produxit. Haec si secutus fueris, ad id attingere poteris, quidquid affectas. Vale!’

⁵ A.D. Sertillanges, *La vie intellectuelle; son esprit, ses conditions, ses méthodes* (Paris: Éditions de la Revue des jeunes, 1921), URL: <<http://www.inquisition.ca/livre>>; trans. M. Ryan, *The Intellectual Life* (Maryland: The Newman Press, 1960). In what follows, page numbers refer to the English translation.

Even in this brief sketch that I have offered so far, this mode of spirituality starts looking quite similar to the sapiential mode of philosophy I described before. Recall how, as regards philosophy, Hadot emphasised the way of seeing philosophy not as a way of representing the world, but as an art of living. Aquinas is suggesting something similar. Brother John had asked for hints on how to gain access to the treasure of knowledge, and the reply he gets is neither about how to conceive of viable hypotheses nor about how to avoid mistakes. The reply he gets is mainly about his way of life. The resonance with philosophy as an art of living is clear. Moreover, the advice of Aquinas is aimed at achieving an all-round integrity. The hidden assumptions are at least three. He assumes that genuine intellectual achievements and growth in holiness go hand in hand. He assumes that the moral virtues enhance the intellectual virtues. He assumes also that contemplation is the best path to truth. To appreciate this point further, commentators like Sertillanges have linked this discussion to our everyday, normal habits. Sertillanges recalls how it comes naturally to assume that the person of wisdom is also the person of moral integrity. He makes the point by asking the rhetorical question: ‘would there not be something repellent in seeing a great discovery made by an unprincipled rascal?’ (p. 18).

The foregoing points show clearly, I hope, why this mode of spirituality of the intellectual apostolate is being called contemplative. It is one of the two possible modes I want to focus on. The other mode can be called experiential. Just as the first mode was analogous to the sapiential way of philosophising, the second mode will be shown to be analogous to the representational way of philosophising.

This experiential mode is best introduced in contrast with the contemplative mode. Consider for instance the maxim included by Aquinas regarding reaching out to new horizons: ‘seek not things that are higher than you are’. Taken at face value, this maxim gives the impression that, for Aquinas, the risk involved in suggesting new hypotheses and in eventually reaching out towards genuine discovery should be kept to a minimum. Sertillanges unpacks the wisdom of Aquinas here by saying that this maxim wasn’t meant to block our energies, or to temper our intellectual drive. It should rather be seen as referring to a measure of prudence: ‘we must not overestimate ourselves, but we must judge of our capacity’.⁶ One wonders, however, whether this is the last word about spiritual attitudes associated with intellectual work.

⁶ Sertillanges, p. 28.

The *magis* of Ignatius of Loyola, if applied to the spiritual life of the intellectual worker, seems to open the person towards a somewhat larger dose of heuristic risk-taking. The element of risk does not appear in Ignatius as something to be shunned. It appears as something to be accepted and even perhaps enhanced. A contrast is here appearing. The new mode of spirituality starts to become evident precisely in this contrast. The contrast can be made clearer by recalling how Sertillanges expounds this point in Aquinas' letter to Brother John. Sertillanges urges that we must not overestimate ourselves, but we must judge our own capacity. A different mode of spirituality, more in line with the Ignatian *magis*, can be formulated as follows: we must not *underestimate* ourselves, but we must judge our own capacity. The two versions are nearly the same. The different emphasis, however, discloses two distinct modes of spirituality in the intellectual apostolate.

Another maxim from the letter of Aquinas allows us to appreciate this second mode of spirituality from another angle. Aquinas includes various proposals that are in line with a general *fuga mundi* attitude: 'Love to be in your room [...] and do not get involved in any way with deeds and sayings of worldly people [*factis et verbis saecularium*].' This is understandable. Any serious intellectual work needs hours of solitude and silence. Taken at face value, however, these proposals by Aquinas seem to indicate something more. They seem to indicate that any active involvement with the world should be considered something of a loss. To block this rather extreme interpretation, Sertillanges explains how some element of interaction with the world remains inevitable. Otherwise, he says, intellectual work suffers:

The man who is too isolated grows timid, abstracted, a little odd: he stumbles along amid realities like a sailor who has just come off his ship; he has lost the sense of the human lot; he seems to look on you as if you were a 'proposition' to be inserted in a syllogism, or an example to be put down in a notebook.⁷

It is not correct to say, therefore, that Aquinas wanted Brother John to become a loner, fleeing the world at all costs. What he was suggesting was that, when intellectual work requires a break, the intellectual worker should hark to that call and engage in some activity—always in line with the requirements of study understood as a contemplative exercise. Interacting with the world is therefore allowed. Such

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59. Aquinas himself explains elsewhere that abstract thought needs to be founded always on the real. Cf. *Summa Theologiae* Ia Q84 a8.

interaction, however, should always be subordinate to contemplation, which remains our first ‘employer’ who, now and then, grants us some leave of absence.

At this point one may ask: Is there space for another attitude here? The reply, I propose, is yes. Another attitude is to view the contemplative aspect of intellectual work, on one hand, and interaction with the world, on the other hand, as two aspects on the *same* level of importance. By interaction with the world, I mean here experience. With this proposal, I am veering off from Sertillanges, and probably from Aquinas as well. In fact, when weighing up this possibility, Sertillanges backs away. He fears that putting experience on the same level as contemplation would create confusion within the intellectual worker because, as he says, ‘it is impossible to serve two masters’.⁸ My proposal, however, is not as unhealthy as this comment seems to suggest. It is, in fact, in line with, and supported by Ignatian spirituality. The basic motivation for this new mode of spirituality is this. Our master is not an abstract idea. Our master is neither contemplation nor experience. It is Jesus. Consider what Ignatius writes to the Duke of Alba: ‘those things which do not seem to fit in at all with human prudence are perfectly compatible with the divine prudence: for this cannot be bounded by the laws of our reasoning’.⁹

I do acknowledge, of course, the thirty full years of the hidden life of Jesus. I do acknowledge his inclination to spend long hours in solitary prayer, sometimes lasting all night, even during his public life. Yet, it is impossible to miss his clear decision to engage in a very public life, not only as a preacher but also as an itinerant preacher: ‘the Son of Man has nowhere to put his head’. This pattern of life is realised again, in a form that is perhaps more relevant to our reflections here, in the life of Paul. Recognised by all generations as an extraordinary intellectual by any standards, Paul remains the major stumbling block for those who claim that interaction with the world makes intellectual work banal, cheap or outright impossible. The thoughts that Paul put on paper received their power from the way the Spirit of Jesus was leading him. He went through what for most people would be the most destabilizing interactions with the world:

Continually travelling, I have been in danger from rivers and in danger from brigands, in danger from my own people and in danger from the

⁸ Sertillanges, p. 67.

⁹ *Monumenta Ignatiana* vol. I, 11, pp. 184f, quoted in: H. Rahner, *Ignatius the Theologian*, trans. M. Barry (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), p. 225.

gentiles; in danger in the towns, in danger in the open country, in danger at sea and in danger from people masquerading as brothers. I have worked with unsparing energy, for many nights without sleep; I have been hungry and thirsty, and often altogether without food or drink...¹⁰

This hyper-activity of Paul was not a hindrance to his intellectual output. It served rather as the lifeblood that made his writing vibrant with a fire that survives through the centuries. He remains, therefore, the paradigm example of this second mode of spirituality of the intellectual apostolate I am trying to describe.

Why am I calling it experiential? And how is it analogous to the representational way of philosophising described earlier? What I have said so far about this second mode of spirituality is clearly related to the Ignatian insight of contemplation in action. Ignatius, especially as interpreted by Jerome Nadal on this point, wanted his companions to engage in prayer in view of fruitful action, and to engage in action in view of a more intense prayer. Prayer and action merge into one—they come to constitute the unified offering of the self to God. In a similar way, one may engage in the intellectual apostolate in view of fruitful interaction and involvement in the world, and may interact and get involved in the world in view of a more intense intellectual work. There is reciprocity here, and even more. Intellectual work and involvement with secular society merge into one. Experience, therefore, becomes a constitutive element of the intellectual life. It becomes the main source of ideas, the main source of the occasional corrective, and the main source of surprises: encountering the action of the Spirit in unexpected places, in unexpected ways. It is clear, therefore, why this mode of spirituality is being called experiential.

How is this experiential spirituality analogous to the representational way of philosophising described earlier? Let me recall the major features of the representational mode of philosophising. As I sketched it above, this mode of philosophising is concerned primarily with describing what exists. The natural sciences are the paradigm example of this kind of intellectual endeavour. Without accepting the reductive naturalism of people like Quine, we can still approve of the efforts to have science, philosophy, theology, and spirituality engage in some form of dialogue rather than having them establish separate realms. Admittedly, spirituality in all its forms remains, for some, essentially an art of living and never a way of

¹⁰ 2 Cor 11: 26–27 (trans. *New Jerusalem Bible* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1985).

describing. People who argue this way, however, need to recall that disincarnated spirituality has never been supported in the Christian tradition. It is enough to recall the Parable of the Good Samaritan to realise how important having a good description of what's happening around us is essential for the art of living. Faith and works go hand in hand. The analogy, therefore, that I'm drawing between the experiential mode of spirituality and the representational mode of philosophising is not proposed because experience should dominate the intellectual's spiritual life. Saying that would be exaggerating, somewhat like those who insist that science should dominate all philosophising. It is proposed rather because experience merges at some points with the spiritual life of the intellectual just as science merges at some points with the work of the philosopher.¹¹

III. Further characteristics of the experiential mode

If the foregoing reflections are right, this mode of spirituality regarding intellectual work shows clear characteristics that distinguish it from other modes. Among these specific characteristics, one may mention the moments of darkness and the moments of light that are typically associated with it.

Without doubt, spiritual obscurity and the sense of loss can arise from various factors. Here, we are interested in those factors that are specifically linked to intellectual work within one kind of spirituality. There are three main sources of desolation for this particular situation. The first is related to one of the deepest heart-rending questions of religious faith: the pain of experiencing moments of apparent divine injustice. Sertillanges, in the quotation above, asks: 'would there not be something repellent in seeing a great discovery made by an unprincipled rascal?' And the answer he expects, we take it, is yes. It doesn't take much knowledge of history, however, to see how major breakthroughs in science, philosophy and even theology are sometimes made by individuals whose personal lives are certainly not exemplary, and sometimes even diametrically opposed to the ideal described in the Scriptures. In philosophy especially, some brilliant minds write profusely against Christian virtues

¹¹ One may support this point further by recalling the Old Testament image of a scholar. In *Ecclesiasticus* 39:1–15, the scholar is described as holy and as persevering in prayer, and yet 'he travels in foreign countries, and has experienced human good and human evil' (v. 5). In *Job* 12:7–9, we find Job admonishing his friends to go to the beasts and the birds, reptiles and fish to learn the activity of God in all that happens.

and even against God. Their brilliance however is genuine. Their academic fame and influence grow untroubled. Their output is unquestionably outstanding; and they are sometimes applauded precisely because of their opposition to God. This causes pain and deep questioning on the part of believing, faithful intellectual workers, especially if they adopt the experiential mode of spirituality, interacting with the world and trying to learn from how things are then ‘out there’. Desolation may result. It should be recalled, however, that nothing is really new here, of course. The psalmist expresses the same worry: ‘Look at them: these are the wicked, well-off and still getting richer! After all, why should I keep my own heart pure, and wash my hands in innocence?’ (Ps 73/72 vv. 12-13). Christian intellectuals grapple, in their own distinct way, with this deep question. They are not alone. It is a fundamental question for all Christians. Ultimately it constitutes the only way for the individual to encounter Divine love within the Pascal Mystery.

A second possible source of spiritual darkness is related to the perennial challenge of growth. The Jesuit charism, in all its dimensions, is characterised by what Pedro Arrupe called ‘a certain apostolic aggressivity’.¹² This holds also for the intellectual worker, who grows in the virtue of heuristic courage and explores new territory, off the beaten track. Any exploration, any novelty, however, is bound to raise eyebrows. In Plato’s famous story of the cave, there is an important detail that often goes unnoticed. The prisoner who manages to climb out of the cave and see the light, Plato explains, should not be allowed ‘to stay there and refuse to go down again to the prisoners in the cave’, even though, if he does so, he will be ridiculed and maltreated by those previous colleagues of his who have no idea of the light.¹³ The prisoners prefer to remain as they always were, without disturbance. The analogy reminds us of the painful misunderstanding that is often associated with the intellectual apostolate that goes public. Formulating arguments against injustice, criticising apathy, making real, public choices in favour of the world’s poor, criticising attitudes within universities and within the Church that support unjust global structures – all this can cause pain, sorrow, and discouragement.¹⁴

¹² P. Arrupe, ‘Our Way of Proceeding’ n.12; *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu* 17 (1979), p. 697; quoted also in GC 34, §561.

¹³ Plato, *Republic* VII, 519d.

¹⁴ On this point, see also: John A. Coleman, S.J., ‘A Company of Critics: Jesuits and the Intellectual Life’, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 22/5 (1990).

The third possible source of desolation I want to highlight deals with the sheer complexity of knowledge in the modern world. Gone are the days when the structure of knowledge used to be considered conveniently pyramidal. Gone are the days when a clear order used to be easily conceived, with a place for everything, and everything in its place. Knowledge is now fragmenting in an ever-growing number of disciplines and sub-disciplines, each of which demands the dedication of the entire person. Pedro Arrupe, in his 1972 talk entitled ‘Theological reflection and interdisciplinary Research’, explained how Jesuit intellectuals are called to resist this unbridled fragmentation of knowledge that often results from over-specialisation:

The tendency of scientific specialization is to create separate fields or compartments, smaller day by day and limited, with the purpose of going deeper and deeper in each discipline. This carries the danger of an atomization of science and of limiting our mental horizon to a bare minimum. The remedy against this fragmentalization consists in creating a new category of researchers whose task is to offer a synthesis by developing interdisciplinary comprehension and creativity.¹⁵

What is the main point here? Arrupe encourages Jesuits to stay away not only from academic isolationism, but also from rushing into interdisciplinarity without roots in some genuine specialisation. Can this challenge be met? For some, it might appear that Arrupe here is setting his men a task that is simply overwhelming. On the one hand, intellectuals who expose themselves to the vastness of secular scholarship, as they indeed need to do according to the experiential spirituality described above, will feel the demands of that milieu. They will need to be specialised so as to be recognised as genuine scholars. On the other hand, these same intellectuals are being asked to assume a new role: the role of interdisciplinary inquiry. This new role is often judged by top scholars as being neither here nor there. The struggle to be both here and there is often the cause of anxiety and desolation. And this is quite specific to the experiential mode of spirituality. Intellectuals with another spirituality, situated at

¹⁵ P. Arrupe, ‘Theological reflection and interdisciplinary research’ in: Pedro Arrupe, S.J., *Jesuit apostolates today*, J. Aixala S.J. (ed.) (Institute of Jesuit Sources: St. Louis USA, 1981), pp. 33–42 (the quote is from p. 37); see also ‘The intellectual apostolate in the Society’s mission’, *Ibid.*, pp. 111–26. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach has expressed similar views in talks he gave to academic institutions in various parts of the world, e.g. ‘The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education’, delivered at Santa Clara University, California, in October 2000 (see sections II and IIIB); URL: < http://www.scu.edu/news/attachments/kolvenbach_speech.html >

a distance from the frontlines of ideological battles, are often untouched by such tension.

I offered a brief sketch of three possible sources of darkness. Of course, they do not constitute all there is to say about the experiential mode of spirituality. Moments of light are certainly possible; and the typical moments of light associated with this way of living include, for instance, the joy of being part of a network of scholars that can literally span the globe. Paraphrasing the tremendous opening words of *Gaudium et Spes*, we can say that this apostolate ensures that the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the intellectuals of our time will be also the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of those intellectuals that are followers of Christ. Exercising the most specifically human of all faculties, namely the exercise of reason, the Christian intellectual experiences the joy of being created – not of being created *simpliciter*, which is a source of great joy in itself, of course – but of being created specifically as a human. In the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, the second prelude to the Contemplation to Attain Love consists in a prayer for interior knowledge of all the great good the person received. There is little doubt that the philosophical enterprise, if engaged in well, sharpens our thinking faculties and thus renders such interior knowledge more accessible. St. Ignatius continues the prelude by saying that such knowledge is asked for so that, stirred to profound gratitude, the person may become able to love and serve the Divine Majesty in all things. This is a reminder of Ignatius' constant desire to 'find God in all things'. This concern has often been taken to refer to finding God in all ordinary things. Isn't this, however, a somewhat restricted interpretation? The star of Bethlehem shone on shepherds and on Wise Men alike. Finding God in all things includes finding Him in what intellectuals do: finding Him in seeking truth in all its forms, finding Him in the disentanglement of pockets of confusion that sometimes accumulate in our thought and language, finding Him in the encounter with the greatest minds in history, finding Him in the desire to turn the eyes of youth towards what really matters and their hearts towards supreme ends.

Moreover, intellectuals living in line with the experiential mode of spirituality will also be exposed to a variety of voices. They will be exposed to the variety of ways the human intellect strives to offer answers to the deep questions: What is it to be human? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is truth? What is justice? These questions are not all dealt with in the same way. They are not all dealt with in the same tradition. Catholic intellectuals, never underestimating the power of the

human intellect as it shares in the light of the divine mind, strive to make themselves open so as to be surprised by God, if He so wishes. They find joy in encountering others. They reject nothing of what is true and noble in all philosophies and traditions. They see in them a ray of that truth that enlightens all people. Even those who speak from the opposing side may have something to offer. Aristotle clearly declares: 'it is just that we should be grateful, not only to those with whose views we may agree, but also to those who have expressed more superficial views; for these also contributed something, by developing before us the powers of thought.'¹⁶

Conclusion

My main aim in this paper has been to show how those engaged in philosophy have ample opportunity to live a deep spiritual life of a certain kind. I started with a quick description of the tension between a representational kind of philosophy and a sapiential kind. The former is often associated with the naturalistic trend we find in the work of scientifically inclined philosophers. The latter is associated with the desire to see philosophers rediscover their original vocation as teachers of how to live a good life. I proceeded then by showing how this tension has an analogue in the realm of the spirituality of the intellectual life. I highlighted a contrast between a Thomistic view and an Ignatian view, the former characterised by a certain caution as regards interacting with the world, while the latter characterised by a certain heuristic courage as regards such interaction. This latter mode of spirituality, here called the experiential mode because of its appreciation of experience as a source of insight, offers the intellectual a location where he or she is open to moments of desolation and moments of consolation that are typical of this way of life. The upshot of the foregoing arguments is that the intellectual life in general, and certainly philosophy in particular, can absorb and colour the person as a whole, including body and soul, thought and feeling, contemplation and action. Philosophers are not necessarily mountain-dwellers. They can be pilgrims.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IIa 993 b 15, trans. W.D. Ross in: *The basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. R. McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941).