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REDPATH ON THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

What is philosophy? What does it study? What is its method? What is its aim? How is philosophy related to modern science? Many of the battles among contemporary philosophers and academics can be traced back to the different answers given to these questions. Unfortunately, there is so much disagreement among contemporary philosophers concerning these questions that philosophy as a discipline is rightly said to be in a crisis. And this crisis affects not only the academy, but the whole of Western civilization itself—for our civilization was founded on some important philosophical principles that have increasingly come under attack over the last four centuries.¹

Scholars of different disciplines have discussed the decline of the West, but philosophers, in particular, have written with urgency about it. For example, after the horrors of World War II, Étienne Gilson discussed how the loss of God, noted by Friedrich Nietzsche, was at the root of significant cultural changes in the West. For millennia, the men of the West had always believed in God or gods but now “all of a sudden, there is no longer one, or rather, we see that there never was one!

¹ Peter A. Redpath, “Justice in the New World Order: Reduction of Justice to Tolerance in the New Totalitarian World State,” *Telos* 157 (2011): 190.

We shall have to change completely our every thought, word and deed. The entire human order totters on its base.”²

Indeed, with the advent of modernity, and especially during the Enlightenment period, the West increasingly grew secular and this had a dramatic effect on philosophy and modern science. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre described his philosophy of existentialism as “nothing else but an attempt to draw the full conclusions from a consistently atheistic position.”³ In addition, Alasdair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue*, argued that the West has largely lost its understanding of what genuine morality is. Alluding to the fall of the Roman Empire, and with a sense of foreboding, he advocates “the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us.”⁴

Citing *After Virtue*, Peter A. Redpath makes a more provocative claim—that what MacIntyre has argued about morality can be applied with “equal veracity to the condition of contemporary Western philosophy as a whole . . . [and to its] cultural institutions in general.”⁵ With respect to modern science, Redpath argues that it has divorced itself “from any essential connection to wisdom, virtue, and human happiness, a human soul, human habits, and a creator-God . . . In place of these, it has gradually identified itself with an intellectually-blind urge (misnamed “will”) to power, to torture the physical universe to reveal its secrets.”⁶ Additionally, he has argued that utopian socialism, “as a historical/political substitute for metaphysics,” was used to “justify the

² Étienne Gilson, *The Terrors of the Year 2000* (Toronto: St. Michael’s College, 1984), 8.

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism and Humanism,” in *Sartre: Basic Writings*, trans. P. Mairet and ed. S. Priest (London: Routledge, 2000), 45.

⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 3rd ed., 2007), 263.

⁵ Peter A. Redpath, *Cartesian Nightmare: An Introduction to Transcendental Sophistry* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, B.V., 1997), 1.

⁶ Peter A. Redpath, “The Nature of Common Sense and How We Can Use Common Sense to Renew the West,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 3: supplement (2014): 479.

false claim that the whole of truth is contained within modern science generically and specifically understood.”⁷

Clearly, a large part of the crisis discussed above concerns philosophical questions about the nature of human knowledge and science. Thus one of the necessary conditions of cultural renewal is to recover the correct understanding of the nature of philosophy and its relation to other disciplines, such as modern science. Here I think the work of Redpath is particularly important, and in honoring him I shall discuss his understanding of the nature of philosophy and his account of how erroneous understandings of philosophy have led to the decline of the West. These are themes that Redpath discusses in many of his works.⁸

The Wonder of It All

Philosophy in the West began among the ancient Greeks. Tradition holds that Pythagoras coined the word ‘philosopher,’ which etymologically means “lover of wisdom.”⁹ The goal of philosophy is to obtain knowledge of the causes of things. In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle says we “possess unqualified scientific knowledge of a thing . . . [when] we know the cause on which the fact depends, as the cause of that fact and of no other, and, further, that the fact could not be other than it is.”¹⁰ In discussing ‘scientific knowledge,’ it is important to understand that science and philosophy are the same thing for Aristotle.

⁷ Peter A. Redpath, “The Essential Connection between Modern Science and Utopian Socialism,” *Studia Gilsoniana* 3 (2014): 204.

⁸ Redpath’s most comprehensive treatment of these topics occurs in his trilogy of books about philosophy and its history: *Cartesian Nightmare: An Introduction to Transcendental Sophistry* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, B.V., 1997), *Wisdom’s Odyssey from Philosophy to Transcendental Sophistry* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, B.V., 1997), *Masquerade of the Dream Walkers: Prophetic Theology from the Cartesians to Hegel* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, B.V., 1998). Other important books and articles are cited in these footnotes.

⁹ Joseph Owens, *A History of Ancient Western Philosophy* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), 32.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 71b8-12, trans. G. R. G. Mure, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 111.

This is in contrast to the prevailing view today, which tends to reduce science to the modern experimental sciences (such as biology and physics), thereby excluding philosophy (such as metaphysics and ethics) from the genus science. Indeed, ending the centuries-old separation between philosophy and modern science is one of the important themes of Redpath's work, and later on we shall discuss it in greater depth.

For now, let us focus on the following question. Why did humans begin to philosophize? That is, why did humans begin to search for the causes of things? In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle argues that philosophy began because of wonder:

For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of Wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders); therefore since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end. And this is confirmed by the facts; for it was when almost all the necessities of life and the things that make for comfort and recreation had been secured, that such knowledge began to be sought.¹¹

Drawing on Aristotle and piecing together St. Thomas Aquinas' teachings about wonder, fear, and hope, Redpath gives a more precise account of how wonder is the first principle (the starting point) of philosophy.¹² Three stages are involved in his account. The first stage in-

¹¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982b12-24, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 692.

¹² Peter A. Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics: Written in the Hope of Ending the Centuries-old Separation between Philosophy and Science and Science and Wisdom* (Manitou Springs, CO: Socratic Press, Adler-Aquinas Institute Special Series, vol. 1, 2012). See also Redpath, "The Essential Connection between Common

volves *fear*. Redpath notes that Aquinas taught that wonder is a species of fear.¹³ Wonder comes from a recognition of ignorance, which is born of the fact that we do not know the causes of the things that produce wonder in us. This recognition of ignorance is a recognition of personal weakness and it produces fear about the danger and difficulty ignorance can pose for us. The second stage involves *dissatisfaction*. In this stage, we experience dissatisfaction (intellectually, volitionally, and emotionally) about being in a state of ignorance and we desire to eliminate it.¹⁴ The third stage involves *hope*. Our dissatisfaction coupled with hope that we can succeed, prompts us to search for the causes of things. When, finally, through philosophy, we learn the causes of the things about which we initially wondered, wonder ceases.

Redpath's account of wonder as the first principle of philosophy is important for several reasons. First, as I will explain shortly, his account helps illuminate other first principles of philosophy. To be correct about the starting points of any discipline is important because, as Aristotle and Aquinas have warned, a "slight initial error [if left uncorrected] eventually grows to vast proportions."¹⁵ Indeed, Redpath effectively argues that one of the reasons modern philosophy went horribly wrong was because its founder, René Descartes, did not employ the correct starting points.¹⁶ This leads to a second reason why Redpath's account is important. That is, knowing the proper starting points of philosophy helps one to understand the decline of Western philosophy

Sense Philosophy and Leadership Excellence," *Studia Gilsoniana* 3: supplement (2014): 605–617.

¹³ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 209. Aquinas discusses wonder as a species of fear in *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 41, 4, ad 5.

¹⁴ Redpath, "The Essential Connection between Common Sense Philosophy and Leadership Excellence," 608.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, prologue, in *Thomas Aquinas on being and essence*, trans. and ed. Armand A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2nd rev. ed, 1968), 28. See also Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, 271b8-13.

¹⁶ See Redpath, *Cartesian Nightmare*, and "Why Descartes is not a Philosopher" in *The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999).

and helps to light the way for its renewal. Third, Redpath's account is important because we can learn much about philosophy itself from studying its first principles. Let us turn to that task next.

The First Principles of Philosophy

One thing we learn by reflecting on Redpath's account of how philosophy begins in wonder is that philosophy presupposes pre-philosophical knowledge (common sense). According to Redpath, common sense consists of "principles rooted in sensation that make all human experience, sense wonder, and philosophy/science possible."¹⁷ Some of the most important principles of common sense are: (1) things exist and have natures (that is, things act for an end, as, for example, animals seek out food), (2) the way a thing acts reflects its nature, and (3) human knowing faculties of sense and intellect are generally reliable and capable of learning the truth about the nature of things.¹⁸

Without these common sense principles philosophy would not be possible. For example, wonder, and thus philosophy, is not possible unless humans are able to know that things exist. And to the extent that wonder is a species of fear overcome by hope, wonder is not possible unless humans possess a faculty psychology.¹⁹ By a faculty psychology, I mean that humans possess different mental powers that allow for intellectual understanding and emotions such as fear and hope. And the hope that we can learn the causes of things, which prompts us to pursue philosophy, would not be possible if we did not have reliable faculties. More importantly, hunting, farming, and the general ability of humans to survive in their environment would not be possible if our knowing faculties were unreliable.

¹⁷ Redpath, "The Nature of Common Sense and How We Can Use Common Sense to Renew the West," 471.

¹⁸ Id., 472. Aristotle notes that both living and non-living natural things have a nature, see Aristotle, *Physics*, 192b8-193b22.

¹⁹ Redpath, "The Essential Connection between Common Sense Philosophy and Leadership Excellence," 610.

For these reasons, Redpath argues that the ancient Greek philosophers were sense realists. Sense realists begin philosophy with knowledge of real things known through the senses. Real things are things that exist independently of our minds, such as lakes, trees, and other people. Philosophy must begin with the knowledge of such things because these are the first things that we know. As Redpath explains:

The point of departure for philosophical reasoning for the ancient Greeks . . . is the evident reality of individual physical objects external to the knowing subject apprehended through the human senses. The intellectual products first grasped by a human being in reflection upon sensory apprehension of the physical world constitute the primitive first principles of Greek philosophy, and of philosophy for all time. The order of apprehension of philosophical principles follows the order of apprehension of existence. Philosophy is an intellectual reflection upon something already known. Philosophy, therefore, follows an inexorable law of development: The first realities which we know to be are always the first principles of philosophical reasoning, for everyone. Since the first realities which we know are sense realities, the first principles of all philosophical reasoning must reside within sense realities. Other philosophical principles are refinements of knowledge added through judgments and conclusions of reasoning processes to these initial first principles.²⁰

As mentioned earlier, one reason why modern philosophy is in such bad shape is because Descartes did not begin with the correct starting points.²¹ Descartes did not begin with sense knowledge and wonder, but with universal doubt and a complete distrust of the senses. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, not only does he say that some-

²⁰ Redpath, *Wisdom's Odyssey*, 3–4.

²¹ Redpath traces the origin of the separation of philosophy, science, and wisdom earlier than René Descartes. He discusses the role of William of Ockham and medieval nominalism, as well as the doctrine of the double truth held by the Latin Averroists at the University of Paris during the thirteenth century. See Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 224.

times his senses deceive him, he confesses that he cannot distinguish his waking experience from what he experiences in dreams!²² Even worse, Descartes takes seriously the idea that perhaps there is an evil demon deceiving him about what he sees and experiences—and thus what he thinks to be “the air, the earth, colors, figures, sounds and all external things are nothing other than the playful deceptions of dreams by means of which he has set traps for my credulity.”²³

Having rejected the reliability of the senses, Descartes must look for something else upon which to build his system of thought. He searches for a first principle that he cannot doubt. He finds this principle in the famous *cogito*, “I think, therefore I am,” though in the second meditation he expresses it as the immediate intellectual intuition “I am, I exist.”²⁴ Thus Descartes begins philosophy not with the knowledge of real things known through the senses (sense realism), but inside of his mind with ideas (idealism). Choosing the *cogito* as the first principle of his system of thought has important consequences. For example, Descartes cannot know by means of his senses that a world external to his mind exists. Instead, Descartes must give an *argument* that such a world exists. That is, he must prove that what he thinks is the external world is not merely a dream of his mind, or the deceit of a demon.

Unfortunately, Descartes did not realize that this is an impossible task. As the great historian of philosophy, Étienne Gilson, has argued “The idealist . . . because he goes from thought to things, cannot know whether what he starts from corresponds with an object or not.”²⁵ Indeed, Descartes’ activity is so radically different from what the ancient Greek philosophers were doing, Redpath notes that some contemporary

²² René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. and ed. George Heffernan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 91.

²³ *Id.*, 97.

²⁴ See René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. and ed. Donald A. Cress, (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 3rd ed., 1998), 18; *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 101.

²⁵ Étienne Gilson, *Methodical Realism*, trans. Philip Trower (Virginia: Christendom Press, 1990), 128.

philosophers, such as Jacques Maritain, have denied that Descartes was practicing philosophy.²⁶ In the *Peasant of the Garonne*, Maritain, speaking of Descartes and the idealists who came after him, says the following:

All these men, begin with thought alone, and there they remain, whether they deny the reality of things and of the world (Descartes still believed in it, but on account of a wave of the magic wand by the God of the *cogito*), or whether, in some way or another, they resorb this reality into thought. What does this mean? They impugn from the outset the very fact on which thought gets firmness and consistency, and without which it is a mere dream—I mean the reality to be known and understood, which *is here*, seen, touched, seized by the senses, and with which an intellect which belongs to a man, not to an angel, has directly to deal: the reality *about which and starting with which* a philosopher is born to question himself: if he misses the start he is nothing. They impugn the absolutely basic foundation of philosophic knowledge and philosophical research . . . They are not philosophers.²⁷

Agreeing with Maritain, Redpath argues that Descartes was not a philosopher in the sense of the ancient Greek sense realists; instead, he was a proponent of a subjectivist “secularized theology,” which Redpath refers to as “Transcendental Sophistry.”²⁸ To defend this view, he devotes most of his book, *Cartesian Nightmare*, to a detailed analysis of Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*.²⁹

²⁶ Peter A. Redpath, “Poetic Revenge and Modern Totalitarianism,” in *From Twilight to Dawn: The Cultural Vision of Jacques Maritain*, ed. Peter A. Redpath with an introduction by James Y. Schall (Notre Dame, Indiana: American Maritain Association/University of Notre Dame Press), 231.

²⁷ Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne: An Old Layman Questions Himself about the Present Time* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), 100.

²⁸ Redpath, *Cartesian Nightmare*, 6.

²⁹ *Id.*, 20–132.

Philosophy is the Study of the One and the Many

Returning to Redpath's account of philosophy as understood by the ancient Greeks, and as exemplified by Aristotle, Redpath argues that philosophy is the study of the one and the many.³⁰ The study of the one and the many is only possible because humans are capable of performing acts of abstraction. Abstraction is an act of the mind whereby we mentally separate a one (a universal) from a many (a multitude of things). For example, if I study the drawings of many triangles I can ignore the fact that they have different sizes and colors. Instead, I can mentally focus on what they share in common (the one in the many, the universal). That is, I can abstract *triangle*, understand its nature (a plane figure with three straight sides and three angles), and realize that *triangle* is predicable of all the drawings I am studying.

In addition, I am aware that "three sides" is a necessary property (a *per se* effect) of being a triangle. That is, by their nature triangles have exactly three sides. In contrast, while triangles can be blue, there is nothing about their nature that determines that they must be blue. Unfortunately, terminologically speaking, Aristotle calls both qualities such as *blue* and quantities such as *three* "accidents." This is because they are not substances in their own right. Everything that exists besides a substance is either predicated of a substance or present in a substance.³¹ However, Aristotle makes an important distinction between *per se* accidents (necessary properties) and non-*per se* accidents (incidental properties).³² In our example about triangles above, blue is an incidental property, and having three sides is a necessary property.

Science would be impossible if necessary properties did not exist.³³ To engage in science is to demonstrate a relation between a proxi-

³⁰ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, chapter 6.

³¹ Aristotle, *Categories*, 2b15-17.

³² Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 90b 14-16.

³³ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 142-143.

mate subject and its necessary properties. To understand the role of a proximate subject, consider the differences between how geometricians and biologists study the human body. Geometricians focus on the surface of the body because the geometrical shapes they study require a surface in order to exist. That is, the *surface body* is the proximate subject and principle of different geometrical figures, which are its *per se* effects. For example, a geometrician might note how, concerning the eye, the pupil is inside of the iris as one circle is within another circle. But studying the *surface body* is not enough for the biologist. Biologists must study the *living body*, which is the proximate subject and principle of life. The *living body* is a system of organs, processes, etc.—and to study that requires much more than merely studying the surface of the body. As such, biology studies a different proximate subject than geometry.

Each science has its own proximate subject that it investigates in order to understand how its *per se* effects (necessary properties) are related to their cause. Terminologically, Aristotle uses the word ‘genus’ in this context, saying: “A single science is one whose domain is a single genus.”³⁴ Here, as Redpath explains, a genus is “a kind of whole” that is a proximate subject “of different *per se* accidents, unities, or properties with the genus.”³⁵ In addition, Redpath cautions us not to understand genus in this context as the genus of the logician.³⁶ The logician uses univocal predication when relating one idea to another idea. To borrow an example from Armand A. Maurer, the logician univocally predicates *substance* (a genus) of material and immaterial substances (species) because the logician considers them only as concepts in the mind. However, as Maurer explains, the philosopher can only analogously predicate substance of material and immaterial things, because the philosopher considers “the natures of things as they actu-

³⁴ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 87a38.

³⁵ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 146.

³⁶ *Id.*, 146–147.

ally exist in reality, and in actual existence the substance of material things is not the same as that of immaterial things.”³⁷

Redpath expresses these points by saying that the logician considers the genus abstractly and as existentially neutral; in contrast, the philosopher, although initially using abstract reasoning, considers the genus concretely and causally, as the generator of *per se* effects that exist and which we experience.³⁸ Consider the science of medicine. Here the genus is the *healthy body* and it is helpful to understand the genus as an organization of parts (such as the heart and lungs) ordered to a goal (health). By understanding how these parts interact to cause health, and how, under some circumstances, they can also cause the contrary of health (disease), we can recognize when patients are ill and we can help treat them so that they will get well.

By drawing on the above points, Redpath argues that all sciences, including the modern experimental sciences, involve the problem of the one and the many:

By observing the effects that qualities and movements have on dimensive bodies, a mixed practical or productive science like mathematical physics uses mathematics to study opposing physical movements, forces, qualities (the many, like hot, cold, acceleration, deceleration, and so on) with the chief aim of understanding how mathematically to measure qualitative changes from a state of prior uniformity (equality) so as to be able to predict and regulate such changes, give them mathematical unity and productive intelligibility and regulation. Hence, no science, no division of philosophy, can study its subject-matter without, simultaneously, studying the problems of the one and the many and opposition. This is because, strictly speaking, (1) as the major philosophers of ancient Greece clearly understood, philosophy and science are identical; (2) philosophy,

³⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, trans. Armand A. Maurer, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 4th rev. ed., 1986), 83, note 15.

³⁸ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 147.

or science, chiefly studies substance in terms of contrary opposites; (3) contrariety and opposition always involve the problem of the one and the many; (4) all philosophical and scientific study for all time essentially involves the problem of the one and the many.³⁹

Philosophy is a Habit

The section above clarifies how philosophy is certain knowledge demonstrated through causes. To produce and understand a philosophical demonstration is a skill that comes through repeated practice. Mere memorization of facts does not make someone a philosopher or scientist. As such, philosophy is a habit that takes time and effort to acquire. Following Aristotle, Aquinas understood a habit, in a general sense, as a stable disposition we acquire that inclines us to act in a way that is good or bad.⁴⁰ For example, *temperance* in food and drink is a good habit (a virtue) because it disposes us to act in a way that is perfective of our nature. In contrast, *licentiousness* (routinely overindulging in food and drink) is a bad habit (a vice) because it is contrary, and thus harmful, to our nature.⁴¹ In the case of a scientific habit what we acquire is a simple quality of the intellect that enables us to demonstrate (prove) the necessary properties of a genus through their causes or principles.⁴² Because science helps perfect our intellect, science is an intellectual virtue; and, as Redpath notes, “by perfecting our intellectual operations, the whole of art and science chiefly exists to enable us to become happy.”⁴³

³⁹ Id., 208. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1018a9-1019b9. For more on the problem of the one and the many in the modern sciences, see Charles Bonaventure Crowley, *Aristotelian-Thomistic Philosophy of Measure and the International System of Units (SI)*, ed. Peter A. Redpath (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1996).

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-II, 49, 1, resp.; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1022b10-14.

⁴¹ Id., I-II, 71, 1, resp.

⁴² Id., I-II, 54, 4.

⁴³ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 168.

Following Aristotle, Aquinas divides the sciences into *theoretical sciences* such as natural philosophy (ancient physics), mathematics, and metaphysics, and *practical sciences*, such as ethics, economics, and politics.⁴⁴ Practical sciences, such as ethics, aim at obtaining knowledge for the sake of action. We study ethics so that we can make good choices and live a good life. Theoretical sciences, such as metaphysics, aim at obtaining knowledge for its own sake. In the science of metaphysics, which Aristotle called *Wisdom*, we search for the first causes and principles of things because we want to know the truth about them.⁴⁵

Aquinas is clear that the theoretical sciences, because they aim at truth, must have their foundation in real things. But the theoretical sciences are not distinguished according to incidental distinctions among real things; instead, as discussed above, science seeks to demonstrate the necessary properties of a genus. Earlier we discussed the science of geometry, which studies the genus *surface body*, and the science of biology, which studies the genus *living body*. In this case it is clear that both sciences study bodies, but from different perspectives. Aquinas calls this perspective the formal object.

Although the formal object of a theoretical science has a foundation in real things, understanding science as a habit of the human intellect, Aquinas notes, entails that the formal object also derives partly “from the side of the power of the intellect.”⁴⁶ Redpath expresses this by saying that “philosophy’s . . . formal object includes its content and method.”⁴⁷ With respect to method, human beings use different kinds of abstraction in order to understand the different genera they study. For example, in the case of natural philosophy, the kind of abstraction is called *abstraction of the whole*. This type of abstraction

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b28-43; Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, V, 1, reply, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 981b27-29.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, V, 1, reply, p. 13.

⁴⁷ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 129.

does not completely exclude materiality because natural philosophy studies what depends on matter for being and being understood. As Aquinas explains, in abstraction of the whole, “The nature of man, which his definition signifies and which is the object of science, is considered without *this* flesh and *these* bones, but not absolutely without flesh and bones.”⁴⁸

In the case of mathematics, however, *abstraction of the form* is used.⁴⁹ This kind of abstraction considers things that do not include sensible matter (the matter we perceive with our senses) in their definitions. Consider, for example, a line. Sensible matter is the subject in which a line inheres. For instance, a line exists in a flower stem. Yet, we can understand what a line is without considering the color or the smell of the stem. Mathematics makes use of this kind of abstraction to study what is dependent on matter for being but not for being understood.

Finally, the formal object also takes into account the aim of a science. The formal object of a theoretical science, such as geometry, studies the genus *surface body* in order to understand it. In contrast, the formal object of a practical science, such as medicine, studies the genus *healthy body* in order to improve it. As Redpath, following Aquinas, explains:

[T]he knowledge a scientist must have of a nature he studies must extend as far as understanding *the essential relation the nature has to the chief end of the science*. So, for example, since the chief aim of medicine is health (that is, since the medical doctor chiefly studies the “health-generating body” as his scientific subject), a medical doctor must study the nature of a nerve as “health-related” (or generated) while, since the chief aim of a biologist is to study life (the “life-generating body”), the

⁴⁸ Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, V, 2, resp. As Aquinas explains, “individuals include determinate matter in their nature, whereas universals include common matter,” 29.

⁴⁹ Id., V, 3, resp.

biologist must study the same nerve as “life-related” (or generated). In both cases, both scientists must understand the nature of a nerve (its distinctive kind of unity, the unity of opposing principles that make it distinctively one, or what it is), *but from a different formal perspective that is mainly determined in relation to the chief end (unity) of the science.* Hence, while the “health-generating body (or nature)” is the scientific subject of study for the medical doctor, the “life-generating body” is the subject of study for the biologist.⁵⁰

Unfortunately, the understanding of science as an intellectual habit unified by its formal object, which had a foundation in real things, began to unravel towards the end of the middle ages. First, nominalists, such as William of Ockham, eliminated the formal object from science. Ockham conceived of real things as radically individual and therefore they shared nothing in common. As Maurer notes, it was generally agreed by Ockham’s predecessors that “individuals in some way contain natures or essences which are the foundations of our universal concepts and which serve as the objects of science.”⁵¹ However, Ockham completely rejected such a view.

Second, Descartes eliminated the understanding of science as a habit. As Redpath notes, Descartes conceived of science as a “logical system of clear and distinct ideas,” using deductive mathematical reasoning as his model.⁵² Indeed, the importance of mathematics to modern science, methodologically speaking, finds one of its roots in Descartes. Third, Kant rejected classical metaphysics, which was anchored in the being of real things, as the foundation for the sciences. As Maurer notes, Kant held that each “science is an organic unity built

⁵⁰ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 191; my emphasis.

⁵¹ Armand A. Maurer, “The Unity of a Science: St. Thomas and the Nominalists,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974, Commemorative Studies*, vol. 2, ed. Armand A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 281.

⁵² Peter A. Redpath, “Philosophy’s Non-Systematic Nature” in *A Thomistic Tapestry: Essays in Memory of Étienne Gilson*, ed. Peter A. Redpath (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, B.V., 2003), 32. See also Redpath, *Cartesian Nightmare*.

around an a priori idea, that is to say one that is not derived from experience but is furnished by reason itself.”⁵³ Aristotle and Aquinas, however, would argue that it is a serious mistake to reject metaphysics as the foundation of the sciences. Let us examine why next.

Metaphysics is the Final Cause of the Arts and Sciences

As mentioned earlier, Aristotle called metaphysics *Wisdom*, and he held it studied the first causes and principles of things. For example, Aristotle notes that the law of non-contradiction—“it is impossible for anything at the same time to be and not to be”—is the most certain of all principles and it is presupposed by every other science.⁵⁴ Metaphysics also investigates notions such as *cause* and *truth*, which are essential to science. In this way metaphysics provides the *foundation* for all of the arts and sciences. And, as Redpath argues, by providing *justification* for the principles used by the other sciences, metaphysics exonerates them of the charge that they are merely “matters of belief or arbitrary dogmatism.”⁵⁵

Unfortunately, however, Aristotle was not always clear about what metaphysics studied. For example, he had said that other sciences, such as mathematics, “cut off a part of being [quantity, in the case of mathematics] and investigate the attribute of this part” but metaphysics “treats universally of being as being.”⁵⁶ What, precisely, Aristotle meant by being as being is not easily discerned from his writings. Aquinas, however, famously argued for an existential interpretation of being as being, holding that metaphysics studies things insofar as they exist (have being). And, undeniably, questions about the existence of things are some of the most important and profound questions we can ask. Our knowledge of reality is woefully incomplete if we ignore

⁵³ Maurer, “The Unity of a Science: St. Thomas and the Nominalists,” 269–270.

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1005b1-1006a28.

⁵⁵ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 2.

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1003a20-25.

questions about the existence of things. In this context, consider the comments of the famous physicist Steven Hawking:

Even if there is only one possible unified theory, it is just a set of rules and equations. What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe? The usual approach of [modern] science of constructing a mathematical model cannot answer the questions of why there should be a universe for the model to describe. Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing? Is the unified field theory so compelling that it brings about its own existence? Or does it need a creator, and if so, does he have any other effect on the universe?⁵⁷

Modern science is incapable of answering such questions about existence because existence cannot be investigated through mathematics or the experimental method. Having narrowed its methods to experimentation and mathematical modeling, modern science excludes metaphysics (and other branches of philosophy) from the genus science. But as Redpath noted earlier, and I have argued elsewhere, the modern experimental sciences need metaphysics as a foundation and justification for their principles.⁵⁸

And not only does modern science need metaphysics, it also needs God. In addition, to calling the science of metaphysics *Wisdom*, Aristotle also called it *Theology* (not a religious kind of belief, but instead the natural knowledge of God, understood as the first cause, we can acquire through philosophy).⁵⁹ Indeed, as Redpath notes, Aristotle argued that “the existence of an Unmoved Mover [God] was a necessary condition for the intelligibility of all science, not just physics.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1988), 74.

⁵⁸ Robert A. Delfino, “The Cultural Dangers of Scientism and Common Sense Solutions,” *Studia Gilsoniana 3: supplement* (2014): 485–496.

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1026a19.

⁶⁰ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 145; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072b13-29. For a contemporary defense that modern science is incompatible with

However, with modernity's loss of belief in God and its rejection of metaphysics as a science, Redpath has argued that utopian socialism has become an historical/political substitute for metaphysics.⁶¹ He argues that this utopian socialism largely stems from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who understood the whole of science as the "historically progressive project of emergence of human conscience from backward states of religion to enlightened states of ever-inclusive feeling, of love for the utopian-socialist vision of humanity."⁶²

Conclusion

There are always great dangers when science is governed by political forces. Indeed, Albert Einstein himself expressed similar worries when he commented that "the man of science" has "slipped so much that he accepts slavery inflicted upon him by national states as his inevitable fate. He even degrades himself to such an extent that he helps obediently in the perfection of the means for the general destruction of mankind."⁶³

With a resounding clarion call, Redpath explains how we have reached this fateful moment in history and why we need to recover the proper understanding of philosophy and end the centuries-old separation between philosophy and modern science and modern science and wisdom:

Once we replace intellectual and moral virtue as the chief, proximate, intrinsic principles of science within a human being with socialistically-enlightened and mathematically-regulated-

atheism and requires monotheism, see Benedict M. Ashley and John Deely, *How Science Enriches Theology* (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2012), 15–28.

⁶¹ See Redpath, "The Essential Connection between Modern Science and Utopian Socialism," and *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 51.

⁶² Redpath, "The Essential Connection between Modern Science and Utopian Socialism," 213.

⁶³ Albert Einstein, "The Scientist's Responsibilities," in *What's the Matter?*, ed. Donald H. Whitfield and James L. Hicks, science consultant (Chicago: The Great Books Foundation, with support from Harrison Middleton University, 2007), 501.

and-restrained efficiency of will, what had been real science becomes essentially separated from natural pursuit of the human good, human happiness, and becomes essentially subordinated to the arbitrary social agreements of utopian socialists: to sincere, enlightened, feelings that some self-appointed intellectual elite (like university presidents and politicians) agree they share. In such a situation, by nature, human beings no longer incline to pursue science. Science must be imposed upon us against our natural inclination, by collective political fiat, collectively determined, mathematically-regulated technologies of violence.⁶⁴

Redpath, through his many books and articles on the nature and history of philosophy and its relation to modern science, has put us all into his debt. Like a voice crying out in the desert, his message is an important one; and time will tell if the West heeds the call. If it does not, then, as MacIntyre has warned, we must try to preserve what wisdom we can in these new dark ages which are already upon us.⁶⁵

REDPATH ON THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

SUMMARY

In this article the author discusses Peter A. Redpath's understanding of the nature of philosophy and his account of how erroneous understandings of philosophy have led to the decline of the West and to the separation of philosophy from modern science and modern science from wisdom. Following Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, Redpath argues that philosophy is a sense realism because it begins in wonder about real things known through the senses. Philosophy presupposes pre-philosophical knowledge, common sense, which

⁶⁴ Redpath, "The Essential Connection between Modern Science and Utopian Socialism," 210. Despite his critique of modern science, Redpath does acknowledge and celebrate its technological achievements, which have improved human life. See Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 171–180.

⁶⁵ I would like to thank Peter A. Redpath, who was one of my early philosophy professors, for all of his help and encouragement throughout the years. I also feel blessed to have met and learned from Armand A. Maurer. My gratitude also extends to Curtis Hancock, for his wise counsel over the years, and to Stephen B. Greeley for his friendship and comments on an earlier draft of this essay. *Et Deo Gratias*.

consists of principles rooted in sensation that make human experience, sense wonder, and philosophy possible. Philosophy is certain knowledge demonstrated through causes and thus philosophy is the same as science. Redpath understands science as a habit that we acquire through repeated practice. More precisely, a scientific habit is a simple quality of the intellect that enables us to demonstrate (prove) the necessary properties of a genus through their causes or principles. In this way, science is the study of the one and the many. Redpath argues that metaphysics is the final cause of the arts and sciences, providing the foundation for all of the arts and sciences and justifying their principles. Finally, he argues that with modernity's loss of belief in God and its rejection of metaphysics as a science, utopian socialism has become an historical/political substitute for metaphysics.

KEYWORDS: Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Peter Redpath, Armand Maurer, philosophy, science, modern science, theoretical science, practical science, wisdom, wonder, fear, hope, first principle, sense realism, common sense, faculty psychology, problem of the one and the many, cause, universals, abstraction, formal object, method, demonstration, experimentation, aim, virtue, vice, happiness, habit, substance, genus, proximate subject, necessary properties, *per se* effects, incidental properties, accidents, existence, metaphysics, mathematics, natural philosophy, geometry, biology, medicine, logic, nominalism, William of Ockham, René Descartes, idealism, system, universal doubt, utopian socialism, decline of the West.