



PHILOSOPHICAL THERAPY: RETURNING TO FIRST PRINCIPLES – A MEDICINE AGAINST MODERNITY

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CLASS #2: RECLAIMING REASON

The Euthyphro Dilemma:

- Do we call things good and right because God declares them so, or does God declare them so because they are good and right? Does God conform to or invent the moral order?
- Option #1: God is capricious, morality is arbitrary, reason subsumed under faith (fundamentalism, fanaticism)
- Option #2: God's will is limited by something existing outside of Him, faith subsumed under reason. (liberal forms of religion, empty churches)
- But don't worry: There is a way out of this dilemma!
- Pope Benedict XI, Regensburg Lecture: Is there some necessary connection between reasonableness and godliness? Yes! "In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*)."
- The Christian resolution of the dilemma: God neither conforms to nor invents the moral order. Rather His very nature is the standard for value.
- Scholasticism, St. Aquinas: a realist metaphysics: when we perceive and understand and use words to talk about things, we are accessing FORMS. Forms exist only as they characterize individual things, but they are essential in accounting for the intelligibility of reality, and for our mind's ability to perceive and signify reality.
- Pope Saint John Paul II, from the beginning of his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves."
- So what happened?
- Instrumental reason (is about means, answers the question "How?") vs. substantive reason (is about ends, answers the questions "What?" and "Why?")

Ockham

- Nominalism: Forms are unnecessary, and they constrain the will of God. (Back to Option #1, see above.)
- No universal forms or natures that we can know by reason. Universals are nothing more than names. There is no connection of intelligibility between the human mind and the order of the universe.
- Made way for the scientific revolution

Descartes

- His goal: to gain for philosophy the certainty of mathematics
- Metaphysics had gone from being to thought – now, with Descartes, it goes from thought to being (which is how math works, but as it turns out, not metaphysics.)
- Descartes began all inquiry with radical subjectivity, and thus with doubt.
- From “Things are, therefore I think” to “I think, therefore I am.”

Kant

- The Enlightenment: “Man’s release from his self-incurred tutelage.”
- Kant’s Copernican revolution in philosophy: instead of our minds receiving knowledge from the world, our minds structure reality in order to make experiences meaningful and to make knowledge possible. We can’t know things in themselves – the noumena – but only how they appear to us – phenomena.
- Reason couldn’t attain knowledge of things like God or the afterlife or the meaning of human life. If these sorts of realities exist, they lie beyond experience, and thus beyond knowledge.
- And yet, we still need many of these beliefs. Reason’s reaching after ultimate truths, isn’t about knowledge, but about practical need.
- From Transcendentals – the True, the Good, and the Beautiful – to “values”



Conclusion:

- The Age of Reason or the Age of Proof?
- The pathologies of reason divorced from faith, and of faith divorced from reason.
- What to do?
- Be bound by your tradition (rejoice in your self-incurred tutelage). Faith in proper relation to reason enlarges your capacity to reason rather than constricting it.
- Build deep communities
- Free yourself from have anxiety about proving what can't be proven. Prod those around you to think and to reason about questions whose answers aren't subject to proof.

Recommended reading:

G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (especially the essay "The Maniac")

Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option* (especially chapter 2)

Pope Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason and the University:

Memories and Reflections" (also known as "The Regensburg Lecture")

