

Philosophers in Jesuit Education session: Nov 9, 2007, ACPA, Milwaukee, Hilton Hotel, Miller Room, 4:00 to 6:00 PM.

Some informal remarks on Jesuits in philosophy (Andrew Tallon)

My assignment is to say a few words that could initiate discussion from the perspective of what we might loosely call the transcendental Thomism of Pierre Rousselot, Joseph Maréchal, and Karl Rahner. Rahner is more familiar to most of us, so I will say little about him. Let's think of these Jesuit colleagues from the first decades of the last century as a window on our new century. If I were to propose a thesis that could focus us, it might be that they (and their colleagues of the same spirit) did something in their time, with a gradualism we partly share, that we should be emulating in our time. What did they do? They began to break away from a Scholasticism that had become too limiting; their dialogue partners were secular philosophy, Bergson, Kant, Hegel, or Heidegger, for example. We can and should emulate them and perhaps go a bit farther in the direction of breaking away from a version of philosophy that needs a new dialogue partner, namely, science, rather than just secular philosophers; Rahner, in fact, once said that whereas theology's dialogue partner once was philosophy, it is now science. Should our dialogue partner also be not just secular philosophy but science?

Our Jesuit colleagues opened the doors to a secular world of the twentieth century's teens, twenties, and thirties that was entering into the age of Einstein and relativity, of Heisenberg and Bohr and the indeterminacy of quantum physics, and of Gödel and the incompleteness thesis. Of course, these challenges came on the heels of Darwin's news about evolution, Freud's revelations about how much of us is unconscious, and Marx's materialization of Hegel's world spirit. There has probably never been a broader assault on absoluteness than those early decades of the twentieth century. And yet there is something about our own century that seems as radical. There was a time, centuries ago, in the age of faith, when if a conflict arose between faith and reason, reason had to capitulate. With the rise of the universities a millennium ago and of science in thirteenth-century Oxford and on the continent a little later, the tide began to turn, so that when conflicts arose it was religion that felt challenged. Historians state this quite confidently, as a routine fact to be observed and reported without question. But when we read the history of science and philosophy since that period, we can wonder whether we have learned anything, so much do we seem to be repeating the process in our time.

I think that today the new challenge, despite rather than because of the erosion of church-state separation by the religious right, is to rise to the challenge of secularization and naturalization. As an example, the choice Einstein faced was whether to assimilate as did German Jews in his time, many out of fear of anti-Semitism. So one question we might discuss is whether not assimilating represents holding out against the challenge of the naturalizing philosophy of our day. What the Jesuits faced at the turn of the century, in response to Leonine Scholasticism, we face today in response to the naturalization of philosophy itself. It seems to me, both in Europe and in the U.S., to be true that academic freedom and excellence go hand in hand. I think we have in the Jesuits of the movement called Transcendental Thomism a model, albeit incipient, of the way philosophy and theology should go, namely, in the direction of welcoming, promoting, and accelerating dialogue with the best arts and sciences of our day. There is certainly plenty of

precedent for this in our history. As we all know very well, dialogue with that pagan Aristotle got Thomas Aquinas into a lot of trouble, enough to earn his bishop's condemnation. History repeated itself in our time when dialogue with Kant, Hegel, and especially Heidegger got Karl Rahner into a lot of trouble, and look at how conservative he seems to some philosophers and theologians today. He was constantly under this cloud or that, this *monitum* or that admonition or silencing. He had to write cryptically in some cases to avoid being censured.

The Society of Jesus conducts the largest private educational system in the world. In over 100 countries, with hundreds of kindergartens, elementary schools, high schools, colleges, and universities.¹ It is quite impressive. Jesuit colleges and universities, no less than the Jesuit figures I have mentioned, have a proud and glorious history of innovation and adventurous thinking. They showed a bold spirit and a willingness to test limits. Jesuits have been remarkable as the avant garde. I got a first taste of this while a Jesuit scholastic at Weston College when Weston was a philosophate and theologate of the New England province actually in the town of Weston, Mass. We had Jesuits from Baghdad on both sides of the rotunda, as we called the space separating the two parts of the building and the two Jesuit grades. How many people know about Al-Hikma, the Jesuit University in Baghdad? How many people know that Sophia, the Jesuit University in Tokyo? Our colleagues have been in dialogue with all comers and what came out of the interchange was progress. Another small anecdote: as part of an effort by 3 universities, one in Texas, one in Canada, and Marquette, I taught philosophy in Gaza in the summer of 1995. We had fundamentalist students and we had moderate students and liberal students, both male and female. Some of the women would not even stand closer than a couple of feet from males, and you saw at most their hands and faces, while others dressed in a Western style, although not in the brief clothing, like shorts, Israelis wore in Jerusalem. Some dated openly, defying convention; they were the hope of dialog with Israelis. I mention these things to set a tone for urging us to think of ourselves as part of a tremendous educational effort that is not famous for suffering easily or gladly the limits of a sometimes less open hierarchy. Dialogue is possible, and when you are part of such a vast educational network, you have a sense that you can really make a difference.

How did the so-called transcendental Thomists exemplify this for us? Rousselot in the first decade, especially with Bergson, and Maréchal, a bit later, entered into dialogue with the dominant neo-Kantian thought of their day, right about when it was being supplanted by the intuitionism of Bergson, eventually to be supplanted itself by the phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger, and others.

1. To mention Maréchal first. This Belgian (1878-1944) was first a biologist, then experimental psychologist, and after finishing his PhD entered the Society and went on to make two great advances. The first thing I would note was his studies of mysticism, in which he identified the sense of felt presence that according to another great Jesuit, Auguste Poulain,² is the

¹ The Word file you can download is over 200 pages long, straight text, in 3 languages, over 2 MB (<http://www.sjweb.info/education/directory.cfm>).

² In *The Graces of Interior Prayer*.

fundamental fact or “bottom line,” as it were, of authentic mystical experience. I want to emphasize the word “felt” in this phrase “felt sense of presence” because feeling in the very basic sense of affective intentionality is what marks the novel contribution to epistemology made by Maréchal’s contemporary, Pierre Rousselot. Second, although first in importance for most neo-Thomists, was how deeply Maréchal read Kant, for him the most powerful and influential mind of his world of philosophy in general and ethics in particular, and found resources in the Thomist tradition to work out a position that still looks impressive. Why did he bother to stay with Aquinas? The short answer is that Pope Leo XIII had called for a renewal of Catholic thought based on Thomas Aquinas, and Maréchal responded. But was there more than that? I have been asked the same question. Why did I turn to Aquinas for a solution, I was asked about my book *Head and Heart*, which explores a triadic concept of consciousness as constituted by three distinct and irreducible but inseparable intentionalities? Like Maréchal, Rousselot, and Rahner, I knew that there were ways of reading Aquinas that were not restricted to the usual passages or the usual interpretations. Bernard Lonergan, of course, did the same thing. There are still tremendous resources in Aquinas.

2. A few words on Pierre Rousselot (1878-1915). It is fair to say that his turn to Aquinas was also inspired by the Leonine call, and once again we find a dialog with the best thought of his day. Rousselot is also famous for two things, first his clear recognition of Aquinas’s unabashed intellectualism, meaning that the human soul is the lowest level of spirit on a continuum with angels and God such that the highest cognitive performance of the human spirit just approximates the lowest performance of the angels. Happiness comes for an intellectualist in an act of intellect taking possession of the being the other. While Rousselot followed Aquinas’s intellectualism to a point, there was something about the doctrine of happiness that did not ring so true for Rousselot. Julien Péghaire³ wrote about reason and intellect as the lower and higher deployments of the cognitive soul. Rousselot wanted to understand how the human spirit managed to activate the higher part of the soul, and his answer was love, not as an act of will, which was the usual way love was understood in an Aristotelian-Thomist dyadic conception of the soul (i.e., a soul with two faculties, intellect and will), but love as *affection*.⁴ Today, it seems to me we have to reject Rousselot’s idea of knowledge on the model of intuition and the whole idea of knowing as possession, the alimentary model Sartre decried and Levinas rejected. If knowledge is a union with the other such that the otherness of the other is lost, then something is wrong. Rahner, of course, says he follows Rousselot and Maréchal, along

³ *Intellectus et ratio selon s. Thomas d’Aquin*, par Julien Peghaire. Paris, J. Vrin; Ottawa, Inst. d’études médiévales, 1936; I have summarized this book in my *Head and Heart*.

⁴ I am drawing on 4 sources for Rousselot, (1) my own study of Rousselot in my new translation of Rousselot’s book *Intellectualism*, (2) the published translation of Rousselot’s book on love by my student, Alan Vincelette, and (3) the forthcoming third volume of translations of seven of Rousselot’s papers translated by myself, Pol Vandeveld, and Alan Vincelette, and finally (4) some reading of the fourth volume on which we are working, materials from the Rousselot papers in the Jesuit Archives in Vanves-Malakoff just outside Paris.

with Kant, to hold for a sense intuition wherein it is *oneself* that is lost, not the other, but then regained by the *conversio ad phantasma* as the self is distanced from other at the level of spirit as intellect; there was no intellectual intuition. But Bergson *did* teach intellectual intuition, and there is no doubt that Rousselot was influenced by Bergson. The interesting thing about Bergson's intellectual intuition, as I understand it, is that it was a *sympathetic* knowing, a synthesis of knowing and sympathy. This kind of intellectualism was something new, and yet Rousselot found roots of it in Aquinas's idea of connaturality, found mostly in Aquinas's treatment of wisdom. His thesis is that what attunes cognition is affection, not in the ordinary sense that we desire to know, but that there has to be a kind of connaturality, a like knowing by like, that sets up a resonance between knower and known and that draws the knower up into a communion with the known that cognition alone cannot achieve. Rousselot also called it a *sympathetic knowing*, and his writings are filled with one way after another of describing and arguing that this is the true way that humans approximate the way angels and God know; Maritain and others also found it prominently in Aquinas. Rousselot's other major work, on love, distinguished the physical theory (love that starts *from* a union of nature) from the ecstatic theory (love starts in separation)

I mention all this in order to point out that these Jesuits set a standard of openness that we follow today. Granted that we have new sciences and a never-ending series of exploding horizons of accelerating technological innovation that they only began to face. Let me close with a comment about where I personally see current philosophy headed. I recently wrote a critical review of Michael Purcell's book on *Levinas and Theology*.⁵ I liked Michael's the book but not for its attempt to retain some of what I would consider unnecessary theological trappings. I think Michael is right about one thing, namely, that just as *ethics is first philosophy*, as Levinas has insisted, ethics is also first *theology*. Mortimer Adler was right many years ago (in *The Conditions of Philosophy*) to identify ethics as the main task (for Adler the *only* remaining task) left to philosophy in these latter days. The rest of philosophy and theology is history, we might say, and certainly historical studies are the *sine qua non* of any dialogue with contemporary science. The danger is to run scared of a new modernism, as though awaiting a new *Pascendi*. We have precedent in the tradition of transcendental Thomists to cite when taking Jesuit education into the new century and new millennium. Where else shall we find God except in one another? I find myself emboldened and empowered as a student of Rousselot, Maréchal, and Rahner to stand on their shoulders and take their openness to another level. Einstein resisted the move to quantum physics even though he overthrew the Newtonian physics of absolute spacetime. Einstein would not take the next step. I think we have to take the next step. Let me propose for discussion this question: Should we be taking steps to transform the divine into the human, the theological into the ethical, the transcendent infinite into the social field? In other words, what is for us today what Scholasticism was to our Jesuit forebears in the early decades of the last century?

⁵ Michael Purcell, *Levinas and Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.