

Peter A. Redpath

Rector, Adler-Aquinas Institute
Chair, St. John Paul II Thomistic Studies
Graduate Concentration in Christian Wisdom,
Holy Apostles College and Seminary
USA

THE NATURE OF COMMON SENSE AND HOW WE CAN USE COMMON SENSE TO RENEW THE WEST

Before I start the subject of this paper, I want to thank all the participants and co-sponsors who had helped organize the historic event at which I delivered it.¹ In referring to this as a “historic event,” I employ a phrase I have used several times related to conferences in which the Gilson Society in the United States and its offspring, the International Étienne Gilson Society, have been involved for several decades. Bear with me as I explain to you why this event was historic, for it is directly related to why I had encouraged all the attendees to participate in this international congress.

Catholics and Christians as well as most people who claim to know about philosophy and its history know how, historically, philosophers and, especially Catholics and other Christians, have depended upon the power of signs to confirm the providential nature of their work and its nature as philosophical.

Consider, for example, the Herculean Labour upon which the Oracle at Delphi had sent Socrates millennia ago.² Think about, as he reported in his famous *Consolation of Philosophy*, Lady Philosophy’s coming to Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius to console him in as he sought to as-

¹ The historic event to which I refer is the *Inaugural International Congress, Renewing the West by Renewing Common Sense*, 17 to 20 July 2014, at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Huntington, Long Island, NY, USA. The original talk was given on 17 July 2014 in Plenary Session 3.

² Plato, *Apology*.

suage his grief by ruining his soul through reading poetry. Consider the “Father of Modern Philosophy” René Descartes’s three famous dreams coming, in part, from the Spirit of Truth, in which, among other things, Descartes found himself struggling violently against a whirlwind as he was trying to reach a Church at his Jesuit College of La Flèche; turning to show a courtesy to a man he had neglected to greet; hearing a report in the courtyard that someone had a melon to give him; hearing a crack of lightning that terrified him as he saw thousands of sparks in his room; noticing a dictionary and book of poetry; opening a passage that read “What path shall I follow in life?,” by an unknown man giving him a bit of verse with the Latin words *Est et non* included in it.³

Who can forget the famous inspiration that came to Jean-Jacques Rousseau on a hot summer day in 1749 when, as he walked alone along a hot, dusty road, he read about a philosophical essay contest sponsored by the Academy of Dijon and said he suddenly saw another world and became a new man? So overcome was he by this clearly inspirational event that he felt his spirit dazzled by a thousand lights. He reports that crowds of vivid ideas so overwhelmed and confused him with an irrepressible tumult that his brain started to turn as if in a state of drunkenness. His heart started violently to palpitate, causing his chest to heave. Not being able to breathe, to regain composure, he threw himself under a tree, where he remained in a state of agitation for a half an hour. Upon rising, even though he had been totally unaware he had been weeping, he found his waistcoat wet with tears.⁴

Or think about the spiritual significance that Sir Isaac Newton had given to the fact that he had been born on Christmas Day, confirming for him that he was a prophet and historical descendant of the ancient Magi.⁵

I am no different than these other men whose life’s quest has been repeatedly confirmed by signs and oracles of different sorts. Like Newton, consider the date of my birth, 16 August 1945, under the Zodiac sign of Leo (clearly indicating a life of leadership), the day after the feast of the Assumption, on which I was expected to be born, on the very day that peo-

³ Jacques Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*.

⁴ Jules Le Maître, “Discours sur Les Sciences et Les Arts—The Moral Reform of Rousseau,” in Jules Le Maître, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. Jeanne Mairet (Madame Charles Bigot) (London: William Heinemann, 1908), 80–81.

⁵ Richard S. Westfall, “Newton and Christianity,” in *Newton*, ed. I. Bernard Cohen and Richard S. Westfall (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1995), 356–370.

ple in the United States had received reports of the surrender of Japan to the United States ending World War II and the day on which, decades later, Elvis Presley, the King of Rock and Roll, would die.

Consider how, like Socrates, I have virtually nothing I can claim to know unaided by inspiration. Ask anyone who has known me for any extent of time or any student I have ever had in class. He or she will verify this.

Also consider, how, like Socrates, Descartes, and Rousseau, the start of my philosophical quest was heralded by several oracular signs, on the feast of All Souls, 02 November 1996, approximately ten years after, having asked myself what course I should steer for the rest of my academic life. Through what then appeared to be a chance event, I had arbitrarily opened a page in a work written by Fr. Armand A. Maurer to recall the astounding claim that, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, philosophy is chiefly an intellectual operation, a habit of mind, not a body of knowledge, which caused me to remember a puzzling claim I had come across in an annotated footnote in the same work by Fr. Maurer: that the genus (that is, the subject) the philosopher studies is not the genus (the subject) the logician studies.⁶

Ruminating on these events for about a decade, on that holy feast day, I delivered a paper entitled, “Why Descartes is not a Philosopher,” at an International Conference of the American Maritain Association, held at Arizona State University, in Tempe.⁷ My faithful sidekick in this decades-long quest, Curtis Hancock, was there on that historic day and witnessed 3 miraculous events that happened to me (a number that many of you will recognize for its special spiritual significance, for Christians in general, Georg Hegel, and me), Curtis is still alive and can verify for you the report of what happened to me actually did happen.

⁶ Armand A. Maurer, “Introduction,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas, The Divisions and Methods of the Sciences, Questions V and VI of his Commentary on the de Trinitate of Boethius*, trans. with an intro. and notes Armand A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 3rd rev. ed., 1963), XVI and 75, fn. 15. Regarding this issue of the nature and unity of a science for St. Thomas, see Maurer, “The Unity of a Science: St. Thomas and the Nominalists,” in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274–1974, Commemorative Studies*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 269–291. In works of St. Thomas, see also *In I Sent.*, d. 19, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1; *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, lect. 12, nn. 2142–2144; and *Summa theologiae*, I, 66, 2, ad 2 and 88, 2, ad 4.

⁷ Peter A. Redpath, “Why Descartes is not a Philosopher,” International Conference, American Maritain Association, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, 2 November 1996.

On that day, after hearing my argument, John Knasas, from the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas, was so moved by an evidently malicious spirit that, against every natural inclination of his being, he told the audience he felt compelled to take sides against my claim that, strictly speaking, Descartes was no philosopher, and that, strictly speaking, he was a sophist, or, as I called him that day, a “transcendental sophist.” Anyone who knows John Knasas can attest that nothing short of some sort of evil genie could have caused him to turn from his connatural inclination to dislike everything Cartesian and come to a defense of Descartes against a fellow student of St. Thomas.

What happened next, however, was so miraculous that, were not Curtis Hancock still alive to verify the events, I would not have the courage to report them, lest you might think me a bit mentally unstable. No sooner had my session ended at this conference than that a short rain immediately occurred, followed by the most glorious rainbow I had ever seen. Following the rainbow, Curtis and I took refuge under a tree when, suddenly, a crack, like a burst of lightning broke a limb of the tree under which I was standing when, coming from out of nowhere, one of our colleagues pushed me out of the way, saving me from death or serious injury.

Recognizing the significance of this event, as Curtis can attest, I immediately collected parts of that sacred bough and have kept them to this day, above a William Schickel portrait of Jacques Maritain with flames radiating from his head that hangs in my office, at my home in Cave Creek, Arizona, located in North Phoenix. Again note how the reference to a cave, a phoenix, and the last three years of my life being spent, like St. Anthony, in a desert preparing for this meeting are all signs of this conference’s inspirational and historical philosophical significance.

So, too, was the event that happened on the evening of 02 November 1996. For what is occurring today is the historical descendant with modification of a series of developments essentially connected to what happened that evening. In a sense, all of us were there then because of what happened that night in a hot tub in Tempe, Arizona, when, reflecting on the series of miraculous events that had transpired that day, a long-time friend of Curtis Hancock and me, Tom Michaud, asked me what was my long-term goal related to the research I had been doing. In the matter of fact and typically humble manner that have come to be my trademark, I answered that my chief goal was to change the popular understanding of philosophy and higher education globally.

To my surprise, Tom Michaud could not help break out in howling guffaws, after which he decided to join Curtis Hancock and me to start a renaissance in learning that would eventually reunite philosophy and science and science and wisdom.

Along the way, through providential intervention, we were joined in this quest by our colleagues Pat Carmack and Steve Bertucci, who, with the help of Mortimer J. Adler and his partner in crime at the Center for the Study of The Great Ideas, Max Weismann, helped us build an international Great Books home school program called the Great Books Academy and the Angelicum Academy. With the help of Fr. Joseph Fessio, publisher of Ignatius Press, we recently formed what we have conceived to be a kind of combination of an online monastery and renaissance academy to preserve the best of works of classical Western cultural heritage for future generations: the Adler-Aquinas Institute.

So now you know why we were in Huntington, Long Island that day. That day was the day that, with the help of our co-sponsors, especially Holy Apostles College and Seminary, we begin in earnest to take this decades-long counter-revolution to reunite philosophy and science and science and wisdom to the next level by turning our attention to a cultural crisis of monumental proportions that only a reunification of philosophy and science and science and wisdom can remedy.

That the world suffers from a leadership deficit today is evident to any psychologically healthy human adult aware of contemporary cultural events locally, nationally, or internationally. In all human industries and organizations, increasingly, on a global scale, people called “leaders” today appear no longer to understand how to lead and inmates appear to be running the cultural asylums. Just as, several decades ago, the French existentialist thinker Gabriel Marcel described his contemporary world, on all cultural levels, the current world appears to be “broken,” like a watch that no longer works.⁸

While, throughout human history, human cultures have always been somewhat pathological, today the pathology has grown to epic proportions that threaten the future of global, including Western, civilization. A proper and swift diagnosis of the chief causes of this civilizational disorder is

⁸ Gabriel Marcel, *The Broken World*, in *Gabriel Marcel's Perspectives on The Broken World: The Broken World, a Four-Act Play, Followed by Concrete Approaches to Investigating the Ontological Mystery*, trans. Katharine Rose Hanley (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1998).

crucial so that proper remedies can be administered as swiftly as possible to help restore the world to global, cultural health.

As Mortimer J. Adler observed in his 1940 article presented in New York City at a conference on science, philosophy, and religion, entitled “God and the Professors,” like the health and disease of the body, cultural health consists in organizational health, the harmonious functioning of its parts, and cultures die from lack of harmonious functioning of these same parts. He added that

science, philosophy, and religion are certainly major parts of European culture; their distinction from one another as quite separate parts is certainly the most characteristic cultural achievement of modern times. But if they have not been properly distinguished, they cannot be properly related; and unless they are properly related, properly ordered to one another, cultural disorder, such as that of modern times, inevitably results.⁹

In short, Adler was maintaining that, if we do not properly understand the natures of things, especially of culturally-related organizations like religion, science, philosophy, we cannot properly relate and unite them as complementary parts of a coherent cultural whole, or healthy cultural organization. This, however, is precisely the problem we have with solving the decline of Western culture and global civilization in our time. We do not properly understand the natures of things, and especially of the natures of philosophy, science, and religion; the way common sense essentially relates to all these, and how, through this relation, the natural human desire to have common sense regulate all aspects of human life uses the natures of things, arts, philosophy, science, and religion to generate cultures and civilizations as parts of organizational wholes.

During the early part of the twentieth century, this lack of common sense was so bad that it prompted Adler to write his scathing 1940 *Harper's Magazine* article “This Prewar Generation” in which, among other things, he accused post-World War I American young people of having a mindset largely similar to that of Hitler's youth. “Our college students today, like Thrasymachus of old,” Adler said, “regard justice as the will of

⁹ Mortimer J. Adler, “God and the Professors,” *Philosophy is Everybody's Business* 9:3 (Winter 2003): 7–24. I thank my friend Max Weismann, director of the Center for the Study of The Great Ideas, for providing me with a copy of this article.

will of the stronger; but unlike the ancient sophist they cannot make the point as clearly or defend it as well.”¹⁰

Immediately Adler went on to add that, while American students might not have read *Mein Kampf* and might not have been inoculated with nihilism’s revolutionary spirit, they have become the same sort of realists, “believing only in the same sort of success—money, fame, and power.” While their understanding of “success” was not identical with that of the Hitler youth, while, by “success,” they understood personal advancement (*individual* power, money, fame; not mystical identification of the individual with success of Germany, working for the Fatherland), post-World War I and pre-World War II American youth did not think that democracy was intrinsically superior to fascism. Hence, Adler claimed that American youth would continue to work for democracy only so long as democracy continued to work for them: only so long as it continued to serve their sense of pragmatic liberalism.¹¹

Adler did not think that post-World War I American culture alone had initially generated this post-World War I mindset. He maintained that centuries of Western cultural change had prepared the minds of American youth to become sophists. He argued that this situation was “the last fruition of modern man’s exclusive trust in science and his gradual disavowal of whatever lies beyond the field of science as irrational prejudice, an opinion emotionally held.”¹²

While Adler considered “the doctrine of scientism” to be “the dominant dogma of American philosophy,” during the early part of the twentieth century, he maintained that this last fruition of modern thought had received its finishing touches in university philosophy courses, reaching “its culmination in American pragmatism and all its sequelae—the numerous varieties of positivism.” Adler added that all these varieties agreed about one the same reductionistic point: “only science gives us valid knowledge of reality.”

Such being the case, Adler maintained that, at its best, philosophy “can be nothing more than a kind of commentary on the findings of science; and at its worst, when it refuses to acknowledge the exclusive right

¹⁰ Mortimer J. Adler, “This Prewar Generation,” in Mortimer J. Adler, *Reforming Education: The Opening of the American Mind*, ed. Geraldine van Doren (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company and London, England: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1988), 7–9.

¹¹ Id.

¹² Id., 9.

of scientific method to marshal evidence and draw conclusions therefrom, philosophy is either mere opinion or nonsensical verbiage.”¹³

In the above claim, Adler does not explicitly state another, more important, role that, at best, philosophy could become in the modern world: the sophistic source of metaphysical fables about the origins of human consciousness to justify the claim that the whole of truth is to be found in modern physical science. Nonetheless, Adler implicitly well understood this other role. Hence, in philosophy courses, Adler continued, “the student really learns how to argue like a sophist against all ‘values’ as subjective and relative.” Instead of being the last bulwark against the scientism that every other part of the curriculum, especially social science, professes or insinuates, he said, “philosophy courses reinforce the *negativism* of this doctrine by inspiring disrespect for any philosophy which claims to be independent knowledge.”

To finish their job, Adler asserted that Philosophy departments used semanticism to implement the ancient sophistries they had revived.

The student learns to suspect all words, especially abstract words. Statements which cannot be scientifically verified are meaningless. The abstract words which enter into moral judgments—such words as ‘justice’ and ‘right’ or even ‘liberty’ and ‘happiness’—have only rhetorical meaning. Denuded of all deceptive verbiage, such judgments can be reduced to statements of what I like or what displeases me. There is no ‘should’ or ‘ought.’¹⁴

While Adler rightly understood the sophistic nature of most twentieth-century American Philosophy Departments, I am puzzled that he would call such departments “philosophical.” Most twentieth-century U.S. college and university Philosophy Departments were not examples of “the degenerative tendency of modern philosophy.” They were, and still are, prime examples of the modern lack of philosophy, of the degenerative cultural effects of neo-sophistry fulfilling its nature in modern culture under the rubric of “philosophy.”

As that great master of common sense, Gilbert Keith Chesterton once observed:

¹³ Id., 9–11.

¹⁴ Id., 12.

Since the modern world began in the sixteenth century, nobody's system of philosophy has really corresponded to everybody's sense of reality: to what if left to themselves common men would call common sense. Each started with a paradox: a peculiar point of view demanding the sacrifice of what they would call a sane point of view. That is one thing common to Hobbes and Hegel, to Kant and Bergson, to Berkeley and William James. A man had to believe something that no normal man would believe if it were suddenly propounded to his simplicity; as that law is above right, or right is outside reason, or things are only as we think them, or everything is relative to a reality that is not there. The modern philosopher claims, like a sort of a confidence man, that if once we will grant him this, the rest will be easy; he will straighten out the world if once he is allowed to give this one twist to the mind.¹⁵

One of the many twists in which modern "scientists," "philosophers," falsely-so-called tend to glory is that things have no natures, or, if they do, that only physical scientists can know what these are and tell us about the way they relate and act. Indeed, according to many of these thinkers, those of us that maintain otherwise must be intellectually backward, intolerant, bigoted, *medieval*, and must be forced to become scientifically enlightened and made scientifically free through educational and political re-education programs and a series of social experiments and acts of intimidation to recognize our intellectual and cultural backwardness so as to embrace true, scientific freedom, which only thinking in such a modern way can bring us.

To an ancient Greek philosopher, like Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle, such claims defy common sense. These men considered the universe to be one, large, everlasting nature or operational organization, a giant composite whole, in which smaller natures, or operational organizations, smaller wholes, exist.

As another master of common sense, our friend Fr. James V. Schall, has observed:

'There are things and we can know them' is how the French philosopher Étienne Gilson once put the first intellectual affirmation

¹⁵ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Dumb Ox*, in *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*, vol. 2, ed. George Marlin, Richard P. Rabatin, and John L. Swan (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 514.

that we must implicitly make before we can state anything else. If we doubt either of these, either that there are things or that we can know them, we cannot get out of ourselves. Nothing is clearer than these statements and what they stand for. They are 'first principles,' evident. Nothing can be and not be at the same time. A thing cannot be true and false at the same time and in the same manner. We must distinguish. This distinguishing is why we have minds.

Nothing can 'prove' such immediate principles because nothing is clearer. To deny them is to affirm them. Their denial, at one point or another, leads to the construction of alternate worlds from the one *that is*. Whatever first principles we select, we seek to explain everything else in their light.¹⁶

What Schall makes evident to us in what he says is that explicit awareness of the common sense principle of non-contradiction is not the first of first principles of common sense. As Schall knows, even implicit awareness of this first principle of knowing and intelligible and meaningful speech occurs vaguely, implicitly, and simultaneously with, and naturally depends upon, a more explicit, natural conviction that a human being possesses a human soul with reliable knowing faculties. For this reason, among others, explicit conviction about the reliability of the senses and sense knowing powers preceded among ancient philosophers like Thales and the early physicists the *explicit* discovery of the metaphysical and logical principle of non-contradiction through the paradoxes first raised by Parmenides's student Zeno of Elea and the early ancient Greek acceptance of the reality of a human soul.¹⁷

As any educated adult should know from human experience, precisely to acquire any art or science, a person must first to be able to establish an intellectual relationship with an imperfectly developed whole (like an incompletely healthy body, and incompletely perfected business, a somewhat impoverished person, dangers in voyages that only the skill of a pilot can remedy, or a block of marble that can become the *Pietà* or *David* at the hands of a master like a Michelangelo Buonarotti). *An art or science grows out of a human habit to which a subject known relates, that the subject known helps generate and activate within a natural human*

¹⁶ James V. Schall, *Reasonable Pleasures: The Strange Coherences of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2013), 12.

¹⁷ Peter A. Redpath, *Wisdom's Odyssey from Philosophy to Transcendental Sophistry* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Editions Rodopi, B.V., 1997), 1–29.

knowing faculty. For example, even before it is a finished whole, the genius of a Michelangelo can imagine the way the parts of his statue exist within a suitable piece of marble just as a good medical doctor can imagine the way the parts of a diseased organ are unharmoniously related so as to generate the illness whose symptoms the physician has observed and seeks to correct.

Every art, science, or philosophical activity grows out of the experiential relationship between the specific habit of an artist, scientist, or philosopher and a known material or subject that activates the habit. Eliminate one of the essential parts of this relationship, and the activity can no longer exist. No such subject (such as somewhat sickly bodies) known, or no habit of medicine in a physician, no art of medicine. The relation between the artist or scientist and the artistic or scientific subject known generates the habit and act of art and science. The two are essentially connected. Eliminate one or the other extreme of the relationship and the artistic, scientific, or philosophical activity becomes destroyed.

The above claim is universally true everywhere, for all time, for everyone. On an implicit level, most human beings know this. Wishing or hoping that it will not be true will not make it not true. No real enemies known to exist and no real military habits, and no military science, can exist for anyone.

Many self-professed modern philosophers generally deny the existence of human habits existing in a human subject. They also generally deny the existence of real natures, composite wholes, and real aims in things that human subjects can know. Many, even some contemporary physicists, deny the reality of principles like potency and privation, upon which the qualities of resistance and receptivity in matter, upon which Galileo Galilei's new theory of motion and Albert Einstein's teaching about general and special relativity essentially depend, in addition to the existence of real qualities, contraries, relations, and organizations.

Even professed students of St. Thomas and other self-proclaimed sense realists, who admit the existence of human habits and real natures existing within facultatively independent beings, tend to have no awareness of the essential connection that St. Thomas, Aristotle, and even Plato made between human habits and the subject known as constituting the essence of philosophy, or science, rightly understood. Instead, they tend to think of St. Thomas's teaching, and classical sense realism in general, as a logical system and of philosophical principles chiefly as logical premises. As

a result, pretty much no contemporary intellectual is able rationally to explain the nature of philosophy, art, or science as a humanly-produced act.

Nonetheless, when we praise someone for being scientific or artistic, we are not chiefly praising the fact that a person has scientific or artistic knowledge. We are chiefly praising the fact that this person has a personal quality capable of producing, causing, such exceptional knowledge, not the fact that the person, in some way, possesses it. If the knowledge is simply something someone has copied or stolen from someone else, or a bunch of purported “facts” that a person has memorized, that knowledge is not the product of art or science or chiefly worthy of praise. What makes it a product of art or science and chiefly worthy of praise is that an exceptional quality of soul has produced it.

Many years ago, if my memory serves me correctly, the satirist Ambrose Bierce wrote with some truth that a philosopher is someone who tells a person what he or she already knows in a language he or she does not understand. Part of the truth contained in that statement resides in something that people who want to think philosophically or scientifically often fail to realize, but which was evident to ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle: that philosophy is chiefly and directly an intellectual awareness generated by a prior knowledge a person has had of things, not a direct knowledge of the things considered simply in themselves.

Decades ago, such a realization struck me when I came to recognize that none of my colleagues in any of the university disciplines where I had ever worked or studied, nor I, could make intelligible to me precisely what was the nature of our profession, where we got our principles, how we got these principles, or why they worked. Decades before me, Mortimer Adler had a similar, but more narrow experience, giving up the practice of psychology after having received a Ph. D. in it because he had become aware of his inability to explain to himself or to anyone else what was his subject and its principles.

Sometime thereafter, before I had delivered my 02 November 1996 talk in Tempe, I came across a statement by one of the leading Catholic intellectuals of the twentieth century, Jacques Maritain, claiming that modern philosophy was not philosophy.¹⁸

¹⁸ Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne: An Old Layman Questions Himself about the Present Time* ((New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1968), 100–102.

As a result chiefly of those 2 events, plus the events of 02 November 1996 and the claim Fr. Maurer had made about St. Thomas maintaining that philosophy is chiefly a habit of mind and not a body of knowledge and that the subject the philosopher studies is not the subject the logician studies, I started an intense examination of Western intellectual history to determine whether Maritain was right and to discover precisely what this subject called “philosophy” might be.

Somewhat like Odysseus, returning from Troy, I spent about 10 years doing this. At the end, I decided Maritain was right. Most contemporary philosophers are not philosophers. I even went beyond Maritain, concluding that, strictly speaking, most people in the so-called history of philosophy were not philosophers, that philosophy more or less ended with the ancient Greeks and that, strictly speaking, even what we call “science” today cannot be science.

Today, as far as I can tell, most professional practitioners of what people call “philosophy,” including most students of St. Thomas, tend to think that philosophy is a body of knowledge or a logical system of ideas and science is a body of empirically demonstrable facts. Often, many people who claim to be philosophers today will maintain that philosophy differs from other subjects because philosophers ask the question why, not the question how; or they will make some other vague generalization, such as that philosophers ask meaningful questions.

Through this research, I came to realize that ancient Greeks chiefly studied their knowledge of things, not ideas. More precisely, they studied their knowledge of the actions of things inasmuch as they found this knowledge to be presenting them with paradoxes, or what, in Book 7 of his famous *Republic*, Plato calls “provocative thought,” or apparent contradictions, about which they decided to wonder.¹⁹

Their chief concern was to understand what precisely existed within some multitude of things and human knowing faculties that enabled that multitude to act the way it did and present the human senses and intellect with apparently contradictory communications, or reports. Their chief interest was to understand causes of organizational unity and action and apparent contradictions these actions present to human knowers. Their chief interest was not to understand abstract numerical relations.

They recognized that organizational unity accounts for organizational action; that, in a way, organizational action results from harmonizing

¹⁹ Plato, *Republic*, Bk. 7, 521B–524B.

opposition between and among organizational parts, much like an orchestra leader does. They (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, especially) generally agreed that partial, not total, organizational opposition causes action and apparent contradictions because total opposition within a multitude causes total chaos, anarchy, and immobility, while partial, not total, opposition allows one principle of organization to dominate the others, rule the multitude, as a common source of unity, leadership, and cause order and uniform direction within it.

They generally agreed that opposition between two things within an organizational whole could not be so great that the existence of one part of an organization would totally annihilate the existence of another. The parts of organizations must include opposites, but these opposites must not be so greatly opposed that they cannot simultaneously co-exist and complement one another. Hence, they concluded that the existence of action generated by organizational wholes, or natures, could not be generated by contradictory opposition because the existence of one contradictory opposite precludes the existence of any other opposite. Total opposites in a contradictory sense can never be united, in short, because, in the case of total opposites, only one of them can exist at any one moment.

If the only sort of opposition that existed in the universe were contradictory opposition, as Aristotle more than anyone else among the ancient Greeks finally came to realize, no organizational unity could exist and no organizational action could be. But organizational action does exist. So, wherever action exists in the physical universe, Aristotle recognized that human beings could discover parts existing within an organization, or substance, harmonizing opposing actions (like giving and taking, delivering and receiving, commanding and being commanded), through the influence of a leading part communicating a general rule of action to other parts of the organization.

Hence, Aristotle concluded, another kind of opposition must exist that enables multitudes to be partially united through relationships of sameness, equality, and similarity, which can generate principles of sense wonder and philosophy, or science, and can lead to theoretical scientific divisions like metaphysics (based upon the relation of substantial sameness), mathematics (based upon the relation of quantitative equality), and physics based upon the relation of qualitative similarity, all of which, in a way express a qualitative unity among beings that are not totally one.

Aristotle called this kind of opposition “contrariety.”²⁰ He considered it to be the foundation of all reality-based paradoxes, including that of sense wonder, which, for all the ancient Greeks, had been a the first principle of philosophy, and, as Gilson recognized centuries later, for every human being for all time.

Aristotle also realized ancient Greeks had recognized that organizational unity was more or less strong depending upon the parts being united and the way they are united. He came to understand that thinkers who had preceded him had conceived of unity chiefly as a qualitative cause, a principle of indivision, indivisibility, and indestructibility, not as a principle of number. For this reason, Aristotle said that the unity which is the principle of being (that is, the principle of being an organizational whole) is not identical with unity that is the principle of number (that is, the principle of quantity, which is the subject of study of mathematics).²¹ As Aristotle realized, the unity of a nation, military unit, or a healthy person is not the same as the unity of a numerical multitude or magnitude.

Different multitudes have different principles of unity. Know what they are and you know how to build and destroy organizations, perfect or debilitate their actions. This is chiefly what the genius of the ancient Greeks recognized that philosophical/scientific study could identify. Hence, their chief interest in, and their development of, this subject. Little wonder should exist, then, that the greatest of the ancient Greek philosophers would have been the tutor of the military genius Alexander the Great.

This philosophical understanding of the ancient Greeks is something that, at least implicitly, Gilson realized when he wrote his classic historical-philosophical thriller, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, about what happens to purportedly philosophical teachings once they leave the abstract thought of so-called “philosophers” and these thinkers and their students, or disciples, try to put them into practice in the real world. Gilson tells this tale by chiefly weaving together two principles that he takes from history and philosophy, especially from ancient Greek common sense.

While Gilson does not say so explicitly, from ancient Greek common sense, he takes the classical philosophical principle (expressed later on through the medieval Latin maxim *agere sequitur esse*) that things tend

²⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. 10, ch. 1, 1052a1–1053b; ch. 4, 105514–1055a32; Bk 14, ch. 1, 1087b29–1087b42; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, Bk. 5, l. 2 and l. 3; Bk. 10, l. 2, nn. 1920–1960 and l. 5, nn. 2024–2026.

²¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. 1, ch. 9, 991b9–993a10.

to act according to their natures, or according to the organizational unity they have. Before anything can act in this world of ours, it must first be a unity, or composite, organizational, whole. Hence, when an organizational whole that is a dog or cat acts, a dog will tend to act like a dog, a cat like a cat, and so on.

Gilson extends and transposes this principle to human behavior and comes up with a more specific common sense principle regarding human psychology: We human beings think and act the way we can, according to our natural and acquired facultative abilities, not the way we wish. The way we act tends to reflect our natural and acquired organizational abilities, the principles we apply, not our wishes.

From this extension and transposition, Gilson makes a further extension and transposition to history, and derives the historical principle that, once we accept a specific teaching as a chief principle to guide our actions, and then attempt to apply it to reality, that teaching takes on a life of its own, leading, perhaps, to consequences that its author never envisioned and with which its author might vehemently disagree.

From history alone, Gilson makes the observation that, often, people called “philosophers” tend not to learn from philosophical experience. Once we find that our principles do not work when we try to apply them with logical consistency to the real world, instead of rejecting our principles as real philosophers and people of common sense would do, we often try to dodge the consequences of our foolishness by rejecting the ways of the world, not the ways of our false principles.

In short, Gilson recognized that we choose philosophical, scientific, principles the way we can, not the way we wish. Hence, even if the wishing is done by sincere, enlightened intellectuals, wishing them to be so *will never* make non-philosophical, non-scientific principles, philosophical or scientific.

Nonetheless, on some occasions, the philosopher-falsely-so-called tends to evince a kind of behavior the opposite of St. Augustine’s faith seeking understanding: what I call “a refusal to understand in order to be able to continue to believe.” As Chesterton observes, such behavior often exhibits the quality of a confidence man coming to realize his confidence is without foundation, or of being what Plato calls a “philosophical bastard,” not a true philosopher.²²

²² Plato, *Republic*, Bk. 7, 535C–538A.

Failing to understand the natures of things, we cannot properly understand the nature of religion and unite philosophy and science to religion to produce a healthy culture and civilization. Worse, our actions will be totally incapable of reflecting prudential judgment. For this reason, in his *Politics*, Aristotle chiefly defined a “barbarian” as someone who, having a slave-like nature, cannot think prudentially because he denies the existence of natures in things, because such a person has an essentially anarchic mind.²³ The reason for this is that, by being incapable of recognizing principles (*archai*) in things, a person can never understand their natures, the organizational unity of their parts, their essential internal relationships, and can never anticipate beforehand how they will act in the future.

Following the lead of the ancient Greeks and St. Thomas, Gilson and Fr. Schall, by “common sense,” I mean chiefly principles rooted in sensation that make all human experience, sense wonder, and philosophy/science possible. Reflecting upon the common sense realism of the ancient Greeks and St. Thomas, unlike some of our contemporaries who would diagnose the chief cause our contemporary problems to be a loss of faith, or adhering to the wrong politics, I see the chief cause of most of our current cultural problems to reside chiefly, in a sense, in having lost our minds, not our faith, in a moral refusal, intellectual *hubris*, to admit we understand that our minds can know the natures of things so that we might continue falsely to believe this refusal is a sign of some kind of higher, gnostic truth, or “belief system,” by which we are elevated to a kind of enlightened understanding that transcends the rubes with whom we often have to associate on a daily basis.

Because, in a sense, we have lost our minds, not our faith, I maintain that we can only culturally renew the West by reuniting philosophy and science and science and common sense. And we can only reunite philosophy and science and science and common sense by reuniting human reason with sense reality. As Gilson tells us, since our chief problem is that we have lost reason, to recover the health of our minds, we must turn our minds again to the world, to have them measured by the being of things, not by our unbridled and unmoored poetic imaginations.²⁴

²³ Aristotle, *Politics*, Bk. 1, 1252a32–1252b8.

²⁴ Étienne Gilson, *The Terrors of the Year 2000* (Toronto: St. Michael’s College, 1949), 5. I thank my former colleague at St. John’s University, Richard Ingardia, for, many years ago, first informing me about the existence of this work by Étienne Gilson.

To Gilson, this means that we must attempt once again to inhabit the universe of St. Thomas in which the service of God and reason are compatible and produce in us order, beauty, and joy—not nausea—because, in this world, unlike the contemporary world, the necessary condition for the existence of one does not entail the necessary destruction of the other. For, sharing the same cause as part of the same creation, or organization, the order of our freedom, thoughts and, reality are complementary parts, contraries of the same organizational whole, not contradictory opposites whose co-existence is impossible because the existence of one being destroys the existence of the other.²⁵

In this return to common sense realism, a main thrust of my argument in this article is that, when most people use the phrase “common sense,” we tend to use the term somewhat ambiguously, in somewhat the same and somewhat different senses; and that, in its chief sense, we tend to recognize that the chief principle of common sense is not common experience or practical knowledge (as many people often appear to think). Instead, it is an evident conviction that precedes common experience and practical knowledge comprised of essentially four unshakable convictions, the evident existence of: (1) substantial wholes composed of essentially reliable organizational parts (an organizational unity within a thing that constitutes a “truth in things”); (2) reliable human knowing faculties of sense and intellect that can adequately apprehend the truth in things; (3) the analogous unity of truth existing among things and the human knowing faculties; (4) the way things act reflect, are signs of, a relationship of organizational wholeness existing among parts of a multitude, which possess this wholeness through unequal relation to each other through unequal relation to a leading part through which a common organizational aim is chiefly communicated to all the parts.

As Adler keenly observed decades ago, which I have already mentioned in this paper, the chief cause of our cultural disorders today arise from common sense defects of our intellectual leaders, teachers, savants. “The disorder of modern culture,” Adler told us, “is a disorder in their minds, a disorder which manifests itself in the universities they have built, in the educational system they have devised, in the teaching they do, and which, through that teaching, perpetuates itself and spreads out in ever widening circles from generation to generation.”

²⁵ Id., 29–31.

I maintain that this defect is chiefly due to a denial on their part of one or more of the above common sense principles I have just identified, which are the remote first principles of all other common sense principles, including those involved in sense wonder, upon which any sound philosophy, science, essentially depends.

Such being the case, if we want to stop the decline of Western culture and global civilization, we need to do a “Hail Mary” pass over the skeptical, sophistic, and essentially anarchic mindset that tends to dominate in modern Western political and educational institutions so that we can learn once again how to communicate with each other in properly scientific, philosophical, and religious ways.

This is something that I think Gilson was concluding just after World War II as he was musing about how some Westerners tend to be slow learners, have needed some time to grasp the full implications of the late modern project. At the close of World War II, Gilson claimed we in the West had made our most astounding, involuntary, discovery: late modern science had become essentially Nietzschean. “The great secret that science has just wrested from matter,” Gilson observed, “is the secret of its destruction. To know today is synonymous with to destroy.”²⁶

Gilson considered Nietzsche’s declaration of God’s death to be “the capital discovery of modern times,” bigger than the explosion at Hiroshima. Compared to Nietzsche’s discovery, Gilson maintained that, no matter how far back we trace human history, we “will find no upheaval to compare with this in the extent or in the depth of its cause.” While his friend and fellow Frenchman Jacques Maritain was musing about how to use recognition of natural law to form common practical agreements among the world’s people to generate future world peace, Gilson thought that Nietzsche’s declaration of God’s death signaled a metaphysical revolution of the highest, widest, and deepest order. Nietzsche is metaphysical dynamite. He knew it, readily admitted it. “This is not just our imagination,” Gilson stated. All we have to do is read Nietzsche’s *Ecce Homo* to find proof that what Gilson said is true. As Nietzsche said:

I know my fate. A day will come when the remembrance of a fearful event will be fixed to my name, the remembrance of a unique crisis in the history of the earth, of the most profound clash of consciences, of a decree enacted against all that had been believed, ex-

²⁶ Id., 7–9.

acted and sanctified right down to our days. I am not a man, I am dynamite.²⁷

Clearly, to Gilson, the chief terrors of the contemporary age are, in root cause, metaphysical. The chief clash of cultures and civilizations we face today is not between the politics of West and East, between traditional political liberals and conservatives, or the West and other political orders. It is a metaphysical clash between the ancient and modern West.

Gilson maintained that, from time immemorial, we in the West have based our cultural first principles, our cultural Western creed and scientific inspiration upon the conviction that gods, or a God, existed. All of our Western intellectual and cultural institutions have presupposed the existence of a God or gods. No longer. All of a sudden, God no longer exists. Worse, He never existed! The implication is clear: "We shall have to change completely our every thought, word and deed. The entire human order totters on its base."

If our entire cultural history depended upon the unswerving conviction that God exists, "the totality of the future must needs depend on the contrary certitude, that God does not exist." The metaphysical terror now becomes evident in its depths. Nietzsche's message is a metaphysical bomb more powerful than the atomic weapon dropped on Hiroshima: "Everything that was true from the beginning of the human race will suddenly become false." Moreover, mankind alone must create for itself a new self-definition, which will become human destiny, the human project.

What is that destiny, project? "To destroy," Gilson said. Nietzsche knows that, as long as we believe that what is dead is alive, we can never use our creative liberty. Nietzsche knows and readily admits his mission is to destroy. Hence, he says:

When truth opens war on the age-old falsehood, we shall witness upheavals unheard of in the history of the world, earthquakes will twist the earth, the mountains and the valleys will be displaced, and everything hitherto imaginable will be surpassed. Politics will then be completely absorbed by the war of ideas and all the combinations of powers of the old society will be shattered since they are all built

²⁷ Id., 14–16. While Gilson gives no specific reference to the location of this and the ones that follow passages in Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, this one starts the section "Why I am a Fatality." See "Ecce Homo," in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, no editor or translator listed (New York: Random House, Modern Library, 1954), 923–933.

on falsehood: there will be wars such as the earth will never have seen before. It is only with me that great politics begin on the globe. . . . I know the intoxicating pleasure of destroying to a degree proportionate to my power of destruction.²⁸

If Nietzsche was speaking the truth about his project, which Gilson thought he was, Gilson maintained that he was announcing the dawn of a new age in which the aim of contemporary culture, its metaphysical project, was to make war upon, to overthrow, traditional truths and values. To build our brave new world order, we have to overthrow the metaphysical foundations of Western culture. “Before stating what will be true, we will have to say that everything by which man has thus far lived, everything by which he still lives, is deception and trickery.” As Nietzsche says, “He who would be a creator, both in good and evil, must first of all know how to destroy and to wreck values.”

In fact, Gilson maintained, our traditional Western values are being wrecked all around us, everywhere, under our feet. He said he had stopped counting “the unheard of theories thrown at us under names as various as their methods of thought, each the harbinger of a new truth which promises to create shortly, joyously busy preparing the brave new world of tomorrow by first of all annihilating the world of today.”²⁹

What, then, are we who oppose Nietzsche’s project to do in the face of such a cataclysm? Nietzsche’s plan, his mission, is to destroy “today to create tomorrow.” Gilson considered forgivable that we should not have anticipated Nietzsche’s advent. “But,” he says, “that we should not understand what he is doing while he is doing it right under our eyes, just as we were told he would do it—that bears witness to a stranger blindness. Can it really be that the herd of human being that is led to the slaughter has eyes and yet does not see?” Gilson’s explanation for such a depth of blindness was that announcement of a catastrophe of such an order usually leaves us “but a single escape: to disbelieve it and, in order not to believe, to refuse to understand.”³⁰

Those who reject the escape of sticking our heads in the sand while we are sheepishly led to the slaughterhouse have another, more common sense, choice: to recognize the reality of the enemy we face and the nature of his project and reasonably to oppose it. Contemporary man tends to be

²⁸ Gilson, *The Terrors of the Year 2000*, 16–17.

²⁹ *Id.*, 17–18.

³⁰ *Id.*, 17.

essentially Nietzschean. And his “mad ambition” is impossible to achieve. We choose the way we can, not the way we wish. We might wish to become absolutely free creators, creators *ex nihilo*, but, at best, our wish is an impossible dream.

True creation, Gilson rightly recognized, is not fashioning material like a demiurge. It is a totally self-authoring gratuitous act, “the only act which is truly creative because it alone is truly free.” As much as we might wish to become free in this strict sense, our *esse* (act of existence) is always *co-esse* (co-existence), not *esse subsistens* (subsistent existence).

The nature of the material world confronts us, limits us, and determines the extent to which we can fashion and remodel it. “We shall perhaps be great manufacturers,” Gilson maintained. “[B]ut creators—never. To create in his turn *ex nihilo*, man must first of all reestablish everywhere the void.”³¹

This, then, has become contemporary man’s project: mad ambition, everywhere to reestablish the void. On all sides, postmodern man falsely-so-called feels Nietzsche’s intoxicating joy, his mad delight, in the power of destruction. When Gilson said Nietzsche is the Antichrist, he was speaking of Nietzsche metaphorically, much like Socrates says the Delphic oracle singled him out as an exemplar of wisdom in her cryptic message to his friend Chairephon that “no one is wiser than Socrates.”³² The Antichrist is postmodern man falsely-so-called drunk

with the supremely lucid madness of a creature who would annihilate the obstacle which *being* places in the way of his creative ambitions. Such is the profound sense of our solemn and tragic adventure. Antichrist is not among us, he is in us. It is man himself, usurping unlimited creative power and proceeding to the certain annihilation of that which is, in order to clear the way for the problematic creation of all that will be.³³

While Gilson did not say so specifically, the Antichrist as Gilson described him as embodied metaphorically in Nietzsche is the secularized ghost of Renaissance humanism haunting the Earth, the contemporary attempt *to supplant creation with metaphysical epic poetry effected through the unbridled free spirit of artistic destruction*. No wonder, then,

³¹ Id., 18–20.

³² Plato, *Apology*, 23B.

³³ Gilson, *The Terrors of the Year 2000*, 20–21.

that Gilson would turn to a critic of Stéphane Mallarmé's poetic project to find just the right phraseology to describe "precisely the sacrilegious effort whose meaning" he sought to unravel: "to construct a poetry which would have the value of preternatural creation and which would be able to enter into rivalry with the world of created things to the point of supplanting it totally."³⁴

Contemporary man's project is universal surrealism, total release of human reason, of creative free spirit, from all metaphysical, moral, and aesthetic, and common sense controls; the poetic spirit, the spirit of the artist gone totally mad with the intoxicating, surrealistic power of destruction. Once we destroy everything, nothing can stop us. Since the beginning of recorded time, God has gotten in the way of the artistic human spirit, has been the "eternal obstructor" to us being total self-creators. Now the tables are turned. With the advent of a new age announced by Nietzsche, we have entered "the decisive moment of a cosmic drama."³⁵ Protagoras and Musaios have become Dionysus.

"Everything is possible," Gilson admonished us, "provided only that this creative spark which surrealism seeks to disclose deep in our being be preceded by a devastating flame." Since "the massacre of values is necessary to create values that are really new," André Breton's description of "the most simple surrealist act" becomes perfectly intelligible and throws dramatic light upon the increasingly cavalier destruction of innocent life we witness in our own day: "The most simple surrealist act consists in this: to go down into the streets, pistol in hand, and shoot at random for all you are worth, into the crowd."³⁶

As he was writing in 1948, Gilson understood that many intellectuals in the early post-World War II era had not fully comprehended the metaphysical drama unfolding before them. As a result, while they had gotten out of the habit of talking about things like "divine law," some, like Maritain, apparently still held onto its vestige in enlightened, secularized appeals to "the voice of conscience" to solve the world's problems. But what will happen to us, Gilson asked, when more of us start to realize that the modern voice of conscience (and, presumably, its principle: the modern understanding of natural law) is the reflection of nothing, a convenient

³⁴ Id., 21–22.

³⁵ Id., 21–25.

³⁶ Id., 26–27.

illusion we have created to maintain the intoxicating joy of our own poetic and sophistic project?³⁷

Gilson clearly appeared to be saying that, if a natural law truly exists, looking today to international law for evidence of its existence and the notion of the dignity of the person that supports it historically in order to overcome contemporary intellectual incoherence cannot work. The chief reason that our falsely-so-called “postmodern” world is essentially hostile to such notions is rooted in the late modern world’s essential moral, metaphysical, and political rejection of the first extrinsic principle of natural law: the existence of a creator-God.

Instead of presuming a common agreement about the existence of a natural law upon which to build a common consensus about human nature, like his friend Jacques Maritain had done, Gilson appears to have been saying Maritain would have been better off facing the reality of the world around him, in recognizing that the modern project is essentially rooted in a rejection of natures, or forms, in things and that incoherence in modern thought cannot be overcome unless and until, like an alcoholic incapable of self-recovery, modernity first hits bottom and accepts a common sense understanding that forms exist in facultatively-independent realities that we today commonly call “organizations.”

If modernism and false postmodernism are built upon a rejection of the existence of forms in things, or the existence of real organizations, and of gods, or a creator-God, upon which the classical understanding of natural law depends, how can we make appeals to that law to give us a true postmodernism based upon the common understanding of the human person that will allow for communication between substances?

To Gilson’s ears, the explosion of Hiroshima resounded a solemn metaphysical assertion of post-Nietzschean, late modern, man’s statement that, while we no longer want to be God’s image, we can still be God’s caricature. While we cannot create anything, we now possess the intoxicating power to destroy everything. As a result, feeling totally empty and alone, late modern man offers, to anyone willing to take it, the futile freedom he does not know how to use. “He is ready for all the dictators, leaders of these human herds who follow them as guides and who are all finally conducted by them to the same place—the abattoir” (the slaughterhouse). Having freed ourselves from divine rule, the necessary political consequence for “postmodern man” falsely so-called is political enslavement by

³⁷ Id., 26–28.

a totalitarian State. Having refused to serve God, we have no one left to judge the state, no arbiter between us and the state.³⁸

As Gilson saw it, just after World War II, appeals to conscience helped some of us in the West, apparently Maritain included, to pretend not to understand the catastrophic consequences for the West and the world of the grandiose sophistry of the post-Nietzschean project: Our destiny has become “the absurd” and “truly exhausting task” of perpetual self-invention without model, purpose, or rule. Having turned ourselves into gods, Gilson maintained, we do not know what to do with our divinity.³⁹

Finding ourselves totally free to engage in the perpetual, Sisyphean task of endless self-creation, Gilson said, we resemble a soldier on a twenty-four hour leave with nothing to do: totally bored in the tragic loneliness of an idle freedom we cannot productively use.⁴⁰

Clearly, for Gilson in this work, the terrors of the late modern world are, in root cause, “modern,” as well as moral and metaphysical; but, as I have said, for Gilson, the chief clash of civilizations we face today is not between the politics of West and East, or the West and other political orders, between the Western tradition and other metaphysical and religious traditions. It is a metaphysical and moral clash between the ancient and modern West.

No wonder exists why this current metaphysical and moral clash exists. Having essentially divorced itself from all moral and intellectual virtue, from wisdom and happiness, and classical common sense realism, having reduced all these to its all-consuming method, like modern economics and politics, modern “science” has essentially divorced itself from all real human good, and the chief end of human life: the creator-God. As a contrary of real science, modern “science” has embraced as its natural end real science’s opposite natural end: moral and intellectual vice (including foolishness and the chief natural end of foolishness: human misery).

Since the time of Descartes, “science” falsely-so-called has divorced itself from any essential connection to wisdom, virtue, and human happiness, a human soul, human habits, and a creator-God (from all human good), and classical common sense. 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. Such being the case, hav-

³⁸ Id., 28–31.

³⁹ Id., 21–23.

⁴⁰ Id., 24.

ing embraced a kind of intellectual Machiavellianism as its nature, why should anyone be surprised to discover such a blind urge eventually to reveal itself as the neo-sophistic inclination to dominate: naked violence, universal despotism? No knowledge that knowingly separates itself from wisdom and happiness can legitimately claim to be science. It is foolishness.

In his now famous and historic 12 September 2006 address at the University of Regensburg entitled, “Faith, Reason, and the University: Memories and Reflections,” Pope Benedict XVI offered to the world community a positive critique to help modernity expand its intellectual horizons to avoid real dangers that arise from the incoherence of modern thought that Benedict called a “self-imposed limitation of reason to the empirically falsifiable.”⁴¹ Devoid of such a broadening of the notion of reason, Benedict maintained that the Western world is incapable of entering into “that genuine dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today.”⁴²

He claimed that, while the West widely holds “that positivistic reason and the forms of philosophy based on it are universally valid,” it largely cannot recognize the universal validity of forms of religious reason.⁴³ This puts the West in diametric opposition to “the world’s profoundly religious cultures” which “see the exclusion of the divine from the universality of reason as an attack on their most profound convictions.” He said, “A reason which is deaf to the divine and which relegates religion into the realm of subcultures is incapable of entering into the dialogue of cultures.”⁴⁴

Put slightly differently, the Pope was saying that people cannot enter into genuine dialogue with other people, *cannot genuinely communicate between substances*, unless we enter into rational dialogue with them. Such dialogue must have at least two characteristics; it must: (1) be in touch with reality and (2) assume the rationality of the interlocutors. Unhappily, the

⁴¹ Pope Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason, and the University: Memories and Reflections,” Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to München, Altötting, and Regensburg (09–14 September 2006), Meeting with the Representatives of Science, Lecture of the Holy Father, *Aula magna* of the University of Regensburg. [www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html], Tuesday, 12 September 2006.

⁴² Id.

⁴³ Id.

⁴⁴ Id.

modern Western notion of reason arbitrarily tends to limit rational discussion, *communication between substances*, to talk about mathematical being and sense experimentation, tends to view all other talks as essentially non-rational. Hence, strictly speaking, people who hold this narrow, fundamentalistic, notion of reason cannot enter into rational debate with other people about moral and religious issues because their narrow understanding of reason cuts them off from such debate about these issues.

More or less, the Pope was saying that, in relation to religious and moral issues, the modern West's narrow understanding of Cartesian and Enlightenment human reason places it in the same situation as many Muslim fundamentalistic extremists. Modern Western reason tends to be arbitrarily narrow because it tends to be essentially fundamentalistic, but in a secular way. It cannot rationally dialogue with people about moral and religious issues because it has relegated religious and moral being and talk to the sphere of the essentially non-rational, capricious, arbitrary.

The Pope emeritus well recognized, and recognizes, that this places the West in an extremely precarious position relative to religious cultures, especially to extremist elements of Islamic culture. How are enlightened Western intellectuals supposed to dialogue with Muslims who think that God is an arbitrary Will, not subject to behaving according to mind-independent standards of rationality, like non-contradiction, when the Western intellectuals have a view of moral, political, and religious reason as essentially irrational (but at the secular extreme) as their extremist Muslim counterparts?

The West's view of moral, political, and religious reason tends to be a secularized reformulation of a popular Reformation notion of the essential depravity of reason (religious reason, in the contemporary West's case), just as narrowly fundamentalistic as that of Muslim extremists. Hence, strictly speaking, modern Western intellectuals cannot enter the debate because, by their own admission, because of their arrogant and unjustified presumption of their own rational superiority, they are totally incapable of conducting rational dialogue in the areas of religion, politics, and morality. Clearly, if such dialogue is to take place, it will have to occur between individuals in the West and East who do not share such hubristic and narrow understandings of rationality.

While modern "scientific" reason has to accept and base its methodology upon matter's rational structure "and the correspondence between our spirit and the prevailing rational structures of nature as given," Benedict claimed the real question remains why it has to do so? Moreover, he

asserted that the natural sciences have to remand this question to philosophy and theology to answer because the natural sciences are incapable of addressing the question. Benedict maintained that philosophy and theology are sources of knowledge derived from human experience, much of which in the West comes from religious traditions and Christian faith.

He made special reference to Socrates' observation in the *Phaedo* that extended philosophical argumentation involving "talk about being" might incline a person to mock all such talk, and, in so doing, "be deprived of the truth of existence" and "suffer a great loss."⁴⁵ In a similar fashion, Benedict claimed that "the West has long been endangered by this aversion to the questions which underlie its rationality, and can only suffer harm thereby."⁴⁶

He argued that to ignore theological and philosophical sources of knowledge is "an unacceptable restriction of our listening and responding" to reason, and is something we do at our peril. Hence, he concluded by asserting that "a theology grounded in biblical faith enters into the debates of our time" with a program that involves "the courage to embrace the whole breadth of reason," not to deny its greatness. "It is to this great *logos*, to this breadth of reason," he said, "that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures. To rediscover it constantly is the great task of the university."⁴⁷

During the twentieth century, emeritus Pope Benedict XVI's predecessor, Saint John Paul II (b. 1920; d. 2005) was able to help colleagues introduce this *logos* to the Philosophy Department at The Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), now The Pope John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. As a result, with the help of Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec (b. 1921; d. 2008), and other members of this Philosophy Department at KUL, the Pope was able to cause the personalist metaphysical principles of the Lublin School of Thomism to radiate from this Department throughout Eastern Europe and severely weaken the disordered notion of science that held these people for decades under the yoke of the Babelism of "scientific socialism." No reason exists why a similar revival of Christian metaphysics throughout the West cannot do the same for the entire West in our day.

It is to this same great *logos* that this conference is dedicated. In his Regensburg address, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI attributed the at-

⁴⁵ Id. See Plato, *Phaedo*, 89A–91C.

⁴⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, "Faith, Reason, and the University: Memories and Reflections."

⁴⁷ Id.

tenation of modern reason largely to a concerted effort that started in the West several centuries ago to remove the influence of classical reason, especially Greek philosophical reason, from the modern notion of science and higher education. Devoid of proper self-understanding, we in the West cannot enter into rational dialogue with other cultures.

If we do not know who we are, how we came to be the way we are and think the way we do, if we do not precisely grasp our situation and its history, we cannot possibly expect rationally to listen to and understand other cultures. More than anything else today, we in the West need a *renaissance of philosophical and scientific reason*, a recovery of the understanding that a reason that is out of touch with reality, which refuses to have its judgments measured by mind-independent reality, has lost its common sense and is no reason at all, much less a scientific or philosophical reason.

If the chief cause of our contemporary, attenuated notion of reason is a loss of classical reason, its philosophical realism and common sense, and the essential connection of science and virtue to wisdom and human happiness, then nothing short of a new *Renaissance of Common Sense Philosophical and Theological Reason*, what my friend Bill McVey has dubbed a “born-again Thomism,” can restore *logos* to its proper place within contemporary world cultures. It is to this great *logos*, to this breadth of reason, that, in the spirit of emeritus Pope Benedict, are dedicated this conference, a new Adler-Aquinas Institute/Holy Apostles College and Seminar graduate Thomistic Studies concentration in Christian wisdom that started in the fall of 2014, a recently-established Aquinas School of Leadership, and formation of an “Aquinas Leadership International” association are dedicated. I welcome those reading this slightly revised 17 July 2014 inaugural conference lecture to join us in promoting these efforts. Thank you.

**THE NATURE OF COMMON SENSE AND
HOW WE CAN USE COMMON SENSE TO RENEW THE WEST**

SUMMARY

Since most pressing today on a global scale is to be able to unite religion, philosophy, and science into parts of a coherent civilizational whole, and since the ability to unite a multitude into parts of a coherent whole essentially requires understanding the natures of the things and

the way they can or cannot be essentially related, this paper chiefly considers precisely why the modern world has been unable to effect this union. In so doing, it argues that the chief cause of this inability to unite these cultural natures has been because the contemporary world, and the West especially, has lost its understanding of philosophy and science and has intentionally divorced from essential connection to wisdom. Finally, it proposes a common sense way properly to understand these natures, reunite them to wisdom, and revive Western and global civilization.

KEYWORDS: aim, analogy, anarchy, art, body of knowledge, cause, common sense, communication, comprehensive understanding, concept, contemporary, contrary, contrariety, culture, demonstration, demonstrative, disorder, education, equality, emotion, end, enlightened, enlightenment, excellence, existence, explanation, fear, fundamentalistic, genus, God, habit, happiness, harmony, hierarchically ordered, history, hope, human, humanist, inequality, inspiration, inspired, judgment, justice, knowledge, language, leadership, logic, mathematics, memory, metaphysics, modern, multitude, nature, Nietzschean, operational, opposite, order, part, person, philosophy, physical, poetry, power, principle, provocative thought, quality, reality, reason, receptivity, relationship, renaissance, resistance, rhetoric, science, scientism, skeptic, sophist, soul, species, strength, success, system, truth, utopian, West, Western civilization, unity, universe, values, virtue, whole, will, wisdom, wonder, World War.