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Ars Christiane Philosophandi: Étienne Gilson's Concrete Approach to the Christian Love of Wisdom

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Ars Christiane Philosophandi: Étienne Gilson's
Concrete Approach to the Christian Love of Wisdom

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Due to currents in the history of philosophy many contemporary scholars tend to see philosophy as more of an academic discourse and less as a practical way of life. For this reason when approaching the thought of Gilson many scholars tend to see him as primarily a historian and not as a philosopher mainly because he did not produce a systematic theoretical doctrine. However, Gilson approached philosophy as primarily a way of life and, when viewed in this light, Gilson appears as a life-philosopher whose personal mission was to revive the Catholic philosophical life and thereby revive and bolster Western culture. Our claim then is that the 'spirit of Gilsonism' is philosophy as a way of life.

The first two parts of this dissertation contextualize Gilson in a post-Enlightenment movement of a return to the philosophical life. In part one we see this movement's deep roots in both Romanticism and Nietzsche who attempted to live the philosophical life on the model of Diogenes the Cynic. In part two we look at three Nietzsche-inspired paradigms of the philosophical life. Henry Adams exemplifies the medieval model of a life based on a vital tension between faith and reason. Leo Strauss exemplifies the Greek Socratic model of a life of radical questioning. Pierre Hadot—along with Michel Foucault following him—exemplifies the Stoic-Epicurean model of a life of spiritual exercises.

In part three we apply Hadot's distinction between philosophy as a theoretical discourse and philosophy as a way of life to Gilson. This method shows that beginning with his encounter with

Bergson in 1904 Gilson always approached philosophy more as as a way of life than a set of endorsed propositions. This also reveals that the highpoint of Gilson's work was the foundation of the PIMS as a veritable 'school of philosophy' (much like Plato's Academy or Alcuin's schools under Charlemagne) intended to train life-philosophers and transmit Western culture. I conclude that this important cultural mission and its rigorous curriculum makes PIMS possibly one of the most important schools founded in the twentieth century and makes Gilson arguably the most important Catholic philosopher of the twentieth century.

This dissertation by Fr. Ronald H. Hurl fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in philosophy approved by Timothy B. Noone, Ph.D. as Director, and by Kevin White, Ph.D., and Tobias Hoffmann, Ph.D. as Readers.

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Timothy B. Noone, Ph.D., Director

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Kevin White, Ph.D., Reader

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Tobias Hoffmann, Ph.D., Reader

To Michael Davis who inspired me to the philosophical life.

To Kenneth L. Schmitz who showed me how to live it from the heart.

To Timothy B. Noone who taught me how to live its discipline.

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.—Soft you now!

—Hamlet, Shakespeare

Where there is no knowledge of the soul, there is no good:
and he that is hasty with his feet shall stumble.

He that followeth after words only, shall have nothing.

—Proverbs

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Works by Henry Adams

EHA	*The Education of Henry Adams*
MSC	*Mont Saint Michel and Chartres*

Works by Étienne Gilson

AA	"Amicus Amicis"
AM	"Art et métaphysique"
BL	*Bergson Lectures*
Compagnons	"Compagnons De Route"
CP	*Christianity and Philosophy*
CPST	*The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas*
EPM	*L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale*
EP	"The Education of a Philosopher"
Essai	"Essai sur la vie intérieure"
FD	*Discourse on the Sciences and Arts or First Discourse*
FSA	*Forms and Substances in the Arts*
HA	*Heloise and Abelard*
HPE	*History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education*
ICT	"L'innésme cartésien et la théologie"
ISA	*Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*
LST	"Le système de Thomas d'Aquin"
Mediaevalism	"Mediaevalism in Toronto"
Origins	*The Origins and Meaning of Neo-Scholasticism*
PST	*The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*
PT	*The Philosopher and Theology*
PVI	"Une philosophie de la vie intérieurs: Maine de Biran (1766-1824)"
RP	*Recent Philosophy: Hegel to the Present*
Le rôle	"Le rôle de la philosophie dans l'histoire de la civilisation"
SLP	*"Sur le positivisme absolu"*
SMP	*The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*
St. Michael's	*"St. Michael's Establishes Institute of Mediaeval Studies"*
Study Hall	*Professor Gilson's Lecture to the Students in the Study Hall*
Le Thomisme 1st. ed. (1919)	*Le thomisme: introduction au système de saint Thomas d'Aquin*
Le Thomisme, 2d. ed. (1922)	*Le thomisme: introduction au système de saint Thomas d'Aquin.* 2nd. ed.
Le Thomisme, 3rd. ed. (1927)	*Le thomisme: introduction au système de saint Thomas d'Aquin.* 3rd ed.
Le Thomisme, 4th ed. (1942)	*Le thomisme: introduction à la philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin.* 4th ed.
Le Thomisme 6th ed. (1965)	*Le thomisme: introduction à la philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin.* 6th ed.
TPT	*Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*

UE	"Un Exemple"
WCP	"What is Christian Philosophy?"

Works by Pierre Hadot

Dieu	*"Dieu comme acte d'être: à propos des theories d'Étienne Gilson sur la «metáphysique de l'exode»"*
PAH	*The Present Alone is Our Happiness*
PWL	*Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises From Socrates to Foucault*
WAP	*What is Ancient Philosophy?*

Works by Friedrich Nietzsche

BGE	*Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*
BT	*The Birth of Tragedy*
GS	*The Gay Science*
GT	*Die Geburt Der Tragödie*
Jenseits	*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*
OTA	*On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*
SAE	*Schopenhauer as Educator*
Vom Nutzen	*Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*

Works by Leo Strauss

IHE	"An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism"
JA	"Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections"
LIGP	"The Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy (1940)"
NRH	*Natural Right and History*
PR	"Progess or Return?"
RR	"Reason and Revelation (1948)"
SA	*Socrates and Aristophanes*
SCR	*Spinoza's Critique of Religion*
WIPP	*What is Political Philosophy?: And Other Studies*

Works By Various Authors

AAB	*An Abbreviated Biography of Étienne Gilson's Intellectual Life*
AIP	*Art and the Intellect in the Philosophy of Étienne Gilson*
The Autobiography	*The Autobiography of Philosophy*
Bir. Mod.	*The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830*
CS	*The Care of the Self: Volume Three of the History of Sexuality*
DAH	*The Drama of Atheist Humanism*
EG	*Étienne Gilson*
EGCP	"Étienne Gilson, Critic of Positivism"
EL	*Examined Lives: From Socrates to Nietzsche*
GCH	"Gilson as Christian Humanist"
GCE	"The Gilson Collection in the Library of the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies"

HAP	*Hermeneutics as Politics*
HPP	*"De l'histoire de la philosophie à la philosophie"*
HS	*The Hermeneutics of the Subject*
LEG	"The Legacy of Etienne Gilson"
LEGH	*Letters of Ètienne Gilson to Henri De Lubac*
Lettres	*Lettres de M. Étienne Gilson adressées au P. Henri De Lubac et commentées par celui-ci*
LPC	*La Pensée Catholique En Amérique Du Nord*
MFB	*Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*
Mod. Tim.	*Modern Times: The World From the Twenties to the Nineties*
PMF	*The Passion of Michel Foucault*
UP	*The Use of Pleasure: Volume Two of the History of Sexuality*
UHA	*Une heure avec*
WE	*What is Enlightenment?*
Wonderlust	*Wonderlust: Ruminations on Liberal Education*

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study of French philosopher, medievalist, and historian Ètienne Gilson's view of the nature of philosophy. One may well wonder why we would not rather choose to direct our efforts toward another area of Gilson's thought such as, for instance, his rich philosophy of history, or his well-known and influential existential philosophy of being, or his very original, yet still untapped, work on the philosophy of art? Why would we choose instead to focus our energies on his philosophy of *philosophy*?

The initial answer to this important question comes in the form of a promise by Gilson himself who, in an introduction to his textbook series on the history of philosophy, claims that one will never regret a detailed focus on any philosopher's distinctive way of doing philosophy. Gilson says,

> One will never regret the time and care dedicated to a detailed examination of what a philosopher calls philosophy, of the method he advocates and uses in discussion of its problems, and, more important still, of his own personal way of understanding these principles.[1]

Gilson says this for three reasons. First, Gilson thinks that one cannot truly understand the doctrinal conclusions of a philosopher unless one understands the personal and historical process of how he came to his doctrine and this includes understanding his view of philosophy itself. Second, according to Gilson, it is important to understand the principles and methods of a philosopher so that we too will be able to imitate his way of doing philosophy and so engage in an authentic act of philosophy ourselves.

Third, and more importantly for our present purposes, Gilson also says this because on a personal level his main goal and vocation as a teacher of philosophy, and the history of

[1] Étienne Gilson, Thomas Langan, and Armand A. Maurer, *Recent Philosophy: Hegel to the Present,* (New York: Random House, 1962), vii. [Hereafter cited as *RP*].

philosophy, was to teach his students how to philosophize so as to live a truly philosophical life especially in the light of Christian faith. Gilson's approach was never just to teach a specific ready-made philosophical doctrine, or to simply clarify individual philosophical doctrines in history, but to instruct his students and readers, through the history of philosophy as a medium, to live the philosophical life. In this way, Gilson wanted his students and readers to learn from the great masters of philosophy and so to learn how to enter into the 'great conversation' about truth found in the Western tradition. By putting his students in intimate dialogue with the great philosophers, Gilson wanted them to learn how to engage in the philosophical act itself and thereby begin to live the philosophical life.

Especially after the First World War, during which some of his one time early philosopher-friends such as Fr. Lucien Paulet, Fr. Pierre Rousselot, and Charles Péguy tragically died, Gilson felt it behooved him to revive and pass on the art of philosophizing in the light of Christ—an art that Gilson thought was at serious risk of being lost within the context of a disintegrating Western culture which was animated more and more with the Nietzschean notion that 'God is dead.' Additionally, the 'Modernist Crisis' in the Catholic Church also motivated the young Gilson to attempt to discover an authentically Catholic approach to philosophy on the model of the great Catholic masters like Augustine, Bonaventure and Aquinas and not according to the neo-scholastic manualist tradition. In short, Gilson saw his primary personal vocation as rediscovering and handing on an authentic Christian philosophical life that was in danger of being lost.

The Spirit of Gilson: Philosophy as a Way of Life

Our guiding thesis, then, is that, from his encounter with Bergson at the *Collège de France* lectures in 1904 to Gilson's final lectures at The Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies [PIMS] in 1972, Gilson holds a consistent concrete approach to philosophy as primarily a way of life and only secondarily as a theoretical systematic doctrine. In other words, Gilson locates the essence of philosophy primarily in the existential act of a philosopher himself, which he sees as both a desire for, and at times an encounter with, truth or wisdom. The results of this essentially contemplative act then often later get translated into a logical order of words and doctrines, or what we would usually call a 'philosophy.' This doctrinal phase is an attempt to signify for others the insights and concepts generated by a philosopher's act of submitting to the truth of reality. This 'external word' or doctrinal phase is not the primary reality of philosophy, for Gilson, as it often may be for other thinkers, and especially for the common text book approach that presents philosophy as a set of ready made answers regarding reality. Thus, for Gilson, because philosophy is not an abstract essence that exists beyond the individual philosopher himself, or his existential act of loving wisdom, philosophy is for Gilson primarily a way of life and only secondarily a systematic theoretical doctrine.

Gilson's concrete approach to philosophy as a way of life is often easily lost on many of his readers for three main reasons. First, Gilson does not often explicitly say that he sees philosophy as a way of life. Second, more than many of his contemporaries, Gilson emphasizes the need for extensive historical scholarship and cultural knowledge which often makes it seem like Gilson is primarily a historian focused simply on the most accurate portrayal of past philosophical doctrines. However, Gilson's history has deeper philosophical purposes that often

go unnoticed by his readers. Gilson emphasizes painstaking historical erudition for two main reasons. First, Gilson wants to enable his students and readers to actually move beyond the doctrine of a philosopher to the concrete realities he is trying to describe and intellectually assimilate. Second, Gilson also wants his students to gain an absolute mastery of, and be permeated with, the principles of a great thinker so that they could see the world as he saw it and turn around and apply these principles to their own world in a creative fashion. In other words, the ultimate purpose of Gilson's strong emphasis on history was so that his students could creatively apply the principles they learned from thinkers like Augustine, Bonaventure, Dante and Aquinas to modern day realities and contemporary philosophical discussions. In this way, Gilson's strong emphasis on historical erudition was actually for the sake of moving beyond history, so the scholar can learn from the great masters how to authentically philosophize in the present day.

Third, the idea of philosophy as primarily a theoretical doctrine disconnected from a way of life remains so ingrained in our modern consciousness that it is often difficult for Gilson's readers to lay aside this assumption and to clearly perceive how he approaches philosophy more concretely as a way of life. On the other hand, it is often the case that when reading Gilson's work his readers experience a tangible, yet, at times, inexpressible difference between his work and that of his contemporaries. This difference indeed goes beyond Gilson's nearly unmatched historical erudition and his uncanny mastery of language which makes some of his writings rise to the level of pieces of fine literature in both French and English. Rather, the 'Gilsonian difference' seems to lie primarily in his distinctive concrete approach to reality and especially his existential approach to philosophy as a way of life. More than anything else it is Gilson's

sapiential approach to truth that sets him apart from many of his peers who often had a much more conventional doctrinal or logical/dialectical approach to philosophy.

For example, this 'Gilsonian difference' can be seen in a telling anecdote about Dr. Anton Pegis—one of Gilson's most faithful students and closest friends. Pegis is reported to have habitually asked his students at PIMS: "What is the difference between Gilson and Maritain"? To which Pegis would always reply: "Maritain had disciples Gilson did not."[2] This very simple but interesting observation by Pegis seems, at least partially, to point to the fact that Gilson did not have a strong doctrinal or formal approach to philosophy around which he could gather a body of disciples. Gilson, rather, tended to train his students how to do philosophy in their own right as seen, for example, in the cases of Henri Gouhier, Anton Pegis, Daniel Walsh, Fr. Joseph Owens and Kenneth Schmitz all of whom developed their own very distinctive yet highly effective philosophical approaches and none of whom could be said to be close to following something like a "Gilsonian doctrine." Yet, it was undoubtedly Gilson himself who taught them all the art of philosophizing whether they studied under him at PIMS or the Sorbonne. This observation again points to the fact that Gilson was focused primarily on teaching his students how to philosophize based on certain Catholic principles and so to live the Christian philosophical life.

Gilson's distinctive view of philosophy as a way of life permeates his thought and underlies all of his scholarship in history, philosophy and culture. Gilson's existential approach to philosophy also guided his decision to found PIMS as a place to preserve and pass on a sapiential approach to truth in the light of faith to future generations. For passing on a Christian

[2] As related by Dr. Herbert Hartmann a one time student of Dr. Pegis and now a professor of philosophy in The School of Philosophy at The Catholic University of America.

philosophical way of life was what Gilson considered his vocation and highest honor. In this way, the notion of philosophy as a way of life, which seems to best encapsulate Gilson's concrete approach to truth, is one of the most important concepts for understanding not only Gilson's thought and the meaning of his life's work but also Gilson's enduring value and importance in the history of Christian philosophy.

For these reasons, my claim in this dissertation is that philosophy as a way of life is indeed the 'spirit of Gilson' or the key notion for understanding the inner meaning and organic unity of not only Gilson's thought, but also his personal philosophical project especially as it is expressed in his founding of PIMS. In short, the concept of philosophy as a way of life is the 'spirit of Gilson' because it unifies both Gilson's thought and his life's work. In other words, this notion not only brings together and accounts for the inner connection between all his historical and philosophical works, but also accounts for Gilson's actions as both a teacher of philosophy and his vocation as a founder of PIMS.

We see Gilson's life mission especially in his founding of PIMS as a school of philosophy as a way of life. In this way, PIMS was not intended to be focused on Medieval philosophical or theological doctrine alone but on the whole of Medieval culture so as to learn the Medieval way of seeking truth in the light of Christian revelation. From his own perspective Gilson's most important contribution to the history of philosophy was not a specific Christian doctrine, but a rekindling and passing on of the tradition of an authentically Christian way of philosophizing. This makes Gilson much like St. Alcuin of York (735-804) who is known historically not for producing an influential philosophical or theological doctrine, but rather for his coming from Northumbria and founding schools in northern France, especially at

Charlemagne's court, that passed on the Western tradition and the Christian philosophical way of life at a crucial moment in history.[3]

Preserving, reviving and passing on the Christian philosophical way of life was what Gilson saw as his highest honor and the personal vocation of his life. We could also say that his greatest contribution to the history of philosophy, especially to the history of Christian philosophy, in both his scholarly writings and especially with his founding of PIMS, was a real revival of the Christian love of wisdom as a way of life.

We see an important testament to Gilson's lasting legacy in Pope John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* which indeed does not present a Gilsonian doctrine as such, but explicitly presents Gilson's distinctive Christian way of philosophizing—which brings together human reason and the word of God in a vital union—as the exemplar model to be imitated by all Christians seeking to do philosophy.[4] The testimony of *Fides et Ratio* and the rich philosophical lives of his many students shows that Gilson was indeed successful in achieving the end of his personal vocation—to revive the Christian philosophical life. This dissertation, therefore, will attempt to underscore this aspect of Gilson's life and legacy by focusing on Gilson's view of the nature of philosophy as a way of life.

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[3] Michel presents Gilson as a modern day St. Alcuin of York in Florian Michel, *La pensée catholique en Amérique du Nord: Réseaux intellectuales et échanges culturels entre l'Europe, le Canada et les États-Unis (années 1920-1960),* (Desclée de Brouwer, 2010), 43; 97-103. [Hereafter cited as *LPC*].

[4] Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship between Faith and Reason, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091998_fides-et-ratio.html, §76.

The Criterion of this Dissertation: Hadot's Notion of Philosophy as a Way of Life

What exactly do we mean here by the multivalent phrase 'philosophy as a way of life'? This notion has been made more popular recently by the work of historian and philosopher Pierre Hadot and his followers. In his later work (*circa* 1977), Hadot begins to argue for the use of an important distinction between philosophy as a theoretical discourse and philosophy as a way of life. Hadot bases this distinction on a convincing historical demonstration that shows that from its foundation in ancient Greece philosophy was primarily a way of life that was made up of physical, moral, practical and intellectual exercises. Hadot calls these philosophical practices 'spiritual exercises' which were ordered toward the transformation of the life of the individual philosopher so he could better contemplate truth and live according to Nature and not according to human passions and conventions. Furthermore, these spiritual exercises almost always took place within the context of a philosophical school usually made up of disciples gathered around a master teacher.

According to Hadot, ancient philosophy always included an important theoretical component as one of its many spiritual exercises. So for instance, there was more emphasis on this theoretical component in the Platonic and Aristotelian schools but less emphasis on the theoretical element in the Cynic school. However, according to Hadot, due to certain historical trends involving Christian monasticism and theology along with the subsequent rise of modern science, in modern times philosophy has been totally reduced to its theoretical aspect alone and so has become a purely academic discipline. To put it another way, modernity has tended to inflate the theoretical aspect of philosophy so much that it has totally eclipsed its practical aspect

as primarily a way of life. From Hadot's perspective this modern tendency to reduce philosophy to its theoretical component alone involves a serious loss in the true essence of philosophy.

What we mean by philosophy as a way of life in this dissertation then is the way Hadot uses this term to signify the original notion of philosophy as it was born in Greece as the true way of living, or the art of authentic human living. This art always involves a theory of ethics, metaphysics, and logic yet these theoretical exercises, along with the other spiritual exercises, intends to transform and enhance the life of the philosopher and are never separated from this life. Often these philosophical spiritual exercises involve the inner transformation of the philosopher so that he can better apprehend the truth or be trained for a deeper revelation of truth.

The Method of this Dissertation

Our method in this dissertation is to take Hadot's concept of philosophy as a way of life as our primary criterion and then apply it to not only Gilson's thought but also his life's work and actions in order to demonstrate that Gilson's primary approach to philosophy throughout his intellectual life was as a concrete way of life and is therefore the spirit of Gilson.

This method of applying the 'Hadot distinction' to help illuminate the thought and life of Gilson was first proposed by dissertation director Dr. Timothy B. Noone without any explicit knowledge of any influence of Gilson on Hadot. However, after doing research for this dissertation I found that Hadot as a young seminarian actually was deeply influenced by Gilson in the 1940s to live the philosophical life and to take an existential approach to reality and philosophy. In this way, Hadot seems to have at least partially made explicit what is largely

implicit in Gilson's thought. So it seems to make sense for me to apply Hadot's notion of philosophy as a way of life back onto Gilson's thought and life from which it was inspired and originated. However, the lasting value of applying Hadot's concept of philosophy as a way of life or philosophy as 'spiritual exercises' to the work of Gilson will ultimately lie in the fruit it will bear in illuminating and unifying the thought and life of Gilson.

A Contextualization of Gilson's Thought

Applying Hadot's notion of philosophy as a way of life to the thought and life of Gilson also helps contextualize Gilson's personal philosophical project within a wider movement of the post-Enlightenment return to the ancient idea of philosophy as a way of life. This movement begins in nascent form in Romanticism's desire to bring back together thought and life in philosophy, poetry and religion. But it is Friedrich Nietzsche who is influenced by both the winds of Romanticism and Goethe's desire to make philosophy not destroy life but enrich it who is really the modern founder of a movement to return to philosophy as a way of life. In this way, we will look at three other thinkers who are influenced by Nietzsche who also want to return to philosophy as a way of life: Henry Adams, Leo Strauss and Pierre Hadot. There are many similarities between Gilson's return to philosophy as a way of life and that of Henry Adams, Leo Strauss and Pierre Hadot and Hadot's followers such as Michel Foucault. But the important difference for Gilson is that he brings a Christian interpretation to the philosophical life that the others do not with the exception Henry Adams who, like Gilson, prefers the medieval cultural model of the fruitful synthesis of faith and reason yet remains himself personally an agnostic. Nonetheless, comparing and contrasting Gilson with these thinkers helps bring his thought and

its importance into relief and contextualizes Gilson within a modern movement within the history of philosophy that is rooted in the thought of Nietzsche.

A Brief Summary of the Three Parts of this Dissertation

This dissertation has three parts each of which has its own more detailed introduction that will give more specifics about its contents. Part one, *The Recovery of Philosophy as a Way of Life After the Enlightenment*, first looks at Romanticism's critique of modernity as the root of the modern return to philosophy as a way of life founded by Nietzsche. Romanticism reacted to the Age of Reason and how its attempt to base human life on scientific reason with its sterile analytic categories resulted in a dissolution of life, culture and history. The Romantics desired to find a more life-giving form of thought often returning to the medieval model of faith and reason. Nietzsche is not a Romantic *per se* but is deeply influenced by the Romantic movement especially by the pre-Romantic Goethe who wanted to restore a unity between thought and life. Nietzsche's Romantic critique of modernity leads him to rediscover philosophy as a way of life which in turn sparks a modern movement of a return to the philosophical life. The ultimate purpose of part one is to ground the modern movement of a return to philosophy as a way of life—to which Gilson makes an important Christian contribution—in Romanticism and the thought of Nietzsche.

In part two, *Three Life-Philosophers After Nietzsche*, we will look at three thinkers who were deeply influenced by Nietzsche to return to the philosophical life: Henry Adams, Leo Strauss and Pierre Hadot. We chose these three thinkers because each presents a different important paradigmatic model for a return to the philosophical life. Adams returns to the

synthesis of faith and reason in the Middle Ages pointing to its production of the Gothic cathedrals as evidence of this synthesis creating the highpoint of human culture and thought. Strauss returns to the Socratic model of philosophizing based on knowledge of ignorance which created an influential Straussian movement of living philosophy as a way of life among his students. Pierre Hadot returns to a more spiritual model of philosophy as a way of life found in Stoic and Epicurean and Cynic schools of philosophy focused on practicing spiritual exercises like meditation and examination of conscience. Hadot creates a whole movement of followers that he inspires to return the spiritual exercises of the Hellenistic and Roman philosophical schools; among these students we should include Michel Foucault. Although Foucault is without a doubt the most popular and influential of all those who under the influence of Nietzsche return to philosophy as a way of life we did not include a study on his thought because he actually turned to philosophy as a way of life at the end of his career after reading the work of Pierre Hadot which makes him somewhat derivative of Hadot and another version of Hadot's personal thought.

In part three, *The Catholic Recovery of Philosophy as a Way of Life in the Thought of Étienne Gilson*, we turn to an extended study of the thought and life of Gilson as the distinctive paradigm for the Christian version of returning to philosophy as a way of life. In a certain way, Gilson falls within the paradigm of Henry Adams because he returns not to the Greeks like Nietzsche, Strauss and Hadot but to the Medievals and their synthesis of faith and reason as source of the highpoint of human culture expressed in the Gothic churches. Although Gilson is deeply influenced by Henry Adams, Adams himself personally remains an agnostic and does not think within the orthodox Catholic/Christian tradition as Gilson does. This makes Gilson's

version of the philosophical life the truly Christian paradigm of the modern return to the philosophical life. In short, Gilson gives the Christian/Catholic answer to the problem of how to return to the philosophical life in the modern world.

In part three we will attempt to show that Gilson approached philosophy as a way of life throughout his whole intellectual career both in his thought but especially in his founding of PIMS. We will emphasize that PIMS was Gilson's personal dream to return to the medieval expression of philosophy as a way of life guided by faith and reason. By showing that Gilson held to his vision of philosophy as a way of life in both his philosophical and historical works as well as in his founding of PIMS as his personal vocation we hope to demonstrate that philosophy as a way of life, as expressed by Hadot, is indeed the spirit of Gilsonism.

PART I: THE RECOVERY OF PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE AFTER THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Introduction to Part I

We begin our study of philosophy as a way of life in the thought and work of Étienne Gilson with a look at Romanticism and its inner connection to the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche. We begin with Romanticism for two main reasons. First, Romanticism's adverse reaction to the Enlightenment and to scientific reason as destructive of both life and culture is the root of the post-Enlightenment return to philosophy as a way of life begun by Nietzsche. Second, Gilson himself, like Nietzsche, although not a Romantic *per se*, is deeply influenced by French Romanticism especially in his philosophy of art and because Gilson grew up in a culturally divided France bifurcated by the currents of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. We also see the influence of Romanticism in Gilson's critique of modernity and in his decision, like Henry Adams and the Romantics, not to return to the Greek model for a revival of the philosophical life but rather to return to the Medieval model in the face of the crisis of positivism.

Furthermore, Nietzsche himself was influenced by Romanticism's desire to revive a form or style of intellectual activity that would lead to life and the creation of a life-giving culture and so under this influence he decided to revive philosophy as a way of life. It is true that there has always been a minority strain of 'life-philosophers' such as Montaigne, Rousseau, and Thoreau who seek to practice philosophy in the modern age, but philosophy for the most part in modern times has become relegated to a completely theoretical academic subject. However, it is indeed primarily Nietzsche who revives philosophy as a way of life for the twentieth century, both with

his thought and in the example of the non-academic wandering way of life that he chose to live after resigning his professorship at Basel in 1878.

Part one consists of two chapters. In chapter one we show how Nietzsche is influenced by Romanticism in his critique of modernity and in chapter two we show how Nietzsche attempted to rediscover and revive philosophy as a way of life. The evidence, arguments, and concepts presented in these two chapters lays the groundwork for presenting a real movement of a return to philosophy as a way of life in the twentieth century with Gilson as one of this movement's primary members. In the next part we look at this movement by looking at three life-philosophers, Henry Adams, Leo Strauss and Pierre Hadot who have been influenced by both Nietzsche and Romanticism to return to philosophy as a way of life. These three philosophers all basically agree with Nietzsche's Romantic critique of modernity but provide different solutions to it and different versions of the philosophic life.

CHAPTER I

Romanticism and Nietzsche's Critique of Modernity

Section One: Romanticism: A Unified Cultural Movement

It is a well established custom in the vast scholarship to begin any discussion of the powerful cultural movement that swept across Europe between 1770-1848 known as "Romanticism" with the caveat that it is simply impossible to define.[1] In this regard, scholars of Romanticism often say, "Romanticism should be felt never defined."[2] The humor contained in this statement plays on both the Romantic movement's intentional rejection of the rational clarity of tight definitions championed by the Enlightenment, and also its advocacy of an Age of Feeling to supersede the Age of Reason. For, Romanticism is more of a feeling filled life than an easily definable set of thoughts. Hence, looking at the different ways Romanticism resists precise theoretical definition seems to be a good point of departure for illuminating its unique nature.

One of the other reasons Romanticism is so hard to define is that it has several different spontaneous historical points of origin that are not directly related to one another. Romanticism first originated in Germany with the proto-Romantic *Sturm und Drang* drama movement (1770s) and then more properly with the writings of Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel and others (1790s). Romanticism emerged in England at the very same time (1790s) with Wordsworth and Coleridge and the publication of their joint work *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Later, the Romantic spirit came to the surface in France more less with Chateaubriand's *Le génie du christianisme* (1802). Then

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[1] There were one hundred and fifty working definitions of Romanticism proposed in 1820. Two influential French scholars Dupuis and Cotonet at the time attempted to settle the matter and after a year of trying to define Romanticism they simply gave up. Paul Johnson, *The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-1830* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 143. [Hereafter cited as *Bir. Mod.*]. Cf. Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 1.

[2] Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *The Emergence of Romanticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 69.

Romanticism arose in Russia with Pushkin and Gogol (1820s)[3] and then the Slavophiles (1830s).[4] One of the distinctive aspects of Romanticism is that there is no one intellectual founder that inspired a Romantic school in the fashion that, for instance, Kant could be considered the founder of German idealism. There were indeed many so called 'pre-Romantic' thinkers like Goethe,[5] Hamann, Herder, Blake and Rousseau, but the Romantic movement proper began in Germany and England spontaneously at the exact same time (1790s) and in no apparent or explicit relation to one another.[6]

One could say, then, that Romanticism was more of a unique seismic cultural shift that took place in reaction to the French Enlightenment and to French cultural and political imperialism. The Romantic movement remained under the surface during the Napoleanic war years, but was very influential on those who attended the Congress of Vienna in 1815 after which it exploded onto the popular cultural scene in the period of peace which followed. Romanticism totally shifted the cultural emphasis in Europe from the Age of Reason to the Age of Feeling and religious faith.[7]

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[3] Virgil Nemoianu, *The Taming of Romanticism: European Literature and the Age of Biedermeier* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 138.

[4] Riasanovsky, 93. The beginning points of Romanticism in France and Russia are not as clear as in Germany and England mainly because the rise of Romanticism, most especially in Germany, was a full throated reaction against the tyrannical spread of the French cosmopolitan ideals of the Enlightenment which eschewed local language and folk culture. Romanticism as a cultural current against the Enlightenment could not truly bloom in France itself until after the end of the Napoleonic police state which mandated classicism as its official form of art. *Bir. Mod.*, 111.

[5] Even though Goethe later considered Romanticism as diseased and classicism as healthy he still holds to many key Romantic themes like a organicist view of nature and he had a pivotal influence on *Sturm und Drang* and the whole of the Romantic movement. Berlin, 14-15.

[6] Isaiah Berlin, however, argues that for the most part Romanticism originated in Germany as a protest against the French intellectual and political dominance and that the true father of Romanticism was Hamann who as a committed pietist and the first to openly criticize Kant and the Enlightenment. Berlin, 6; 36-45.

[7] *Bir. Mod.,*111.

In general scholars of Romanticism tend to deal with the protean nature of Romanticism in three different ways. First, there are those who downgrade its status from a unified cultural movement to a mere fashion or popular style.[8] Second, there are others who deny its unity and prefer to speak of 'Romanticisms'.[9] Third, there are still others who argue that Romanticism was really nothing new but only the manifestation of a perennial melancholic personality type found in every culture.[10] These approaches all illuminate certain aspects of Romanticism; however, all of them result in a common tendency to leave unrecognized the unified depth of Romanticism which was the key to making it the powerful cultural force that changed Europe almost overnight. For, more than any other cultural movement, Romanticism seems to be simply unmatched in how it suddenly and radically changed the intellectual culture of a whole continent in a very short period of time and still leaves its mark on Western thought today.

As evidence of the great power of Romanticism, intellectual historian Paul Johnson has convincingly shown that one cannot properly understand the Congress of Vienna, and the ninety-nine years of relative peace in Europe that followed upon it, or the nineteenth century unless one understands that more than anything else it was the fundamental influence of Romanticism on its world leaders that made the Congress of Vienna such a great success. As Johnson says,

> Castlereagh, Metternich, Talleyrand and Alexander lived in the same world as Beethoven and Byron, Turner and Victor Hugo, and felt the same intellectual breezes on their cheeks.[11]

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[8] Many encyclopedias of philosophy like *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* do not have an article on Romanticism. Because of its lack of theoretical unity contemporary philosophers tend to treat it as more of a literary or aesthetic fashion. However, this creates a lacuna in the history of philosophy because it misses the fundamental impact that Romanticism had thinkers like Schelling, Herder, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.
[9] See Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: 1948).
[10] Crane Brinton. "Romanticism," In *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Paul Edwards, VII, 206-209, (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 206-7.
[11] *Bir. Mod.*, 111.

These fathers of the Congress of Vienna were indeed conservative but in a spirit that was more progressively Romantic than merely restorationist.

After 1815 the cultural currents of Europe had almost completely shifted from the Age of Reason to the Age of Romanticism. The suddenness of this sea change from reason to feeling and faith seems to be simply unprecedented. Isaiah Berlin holds that Romanticism is not a mere movement in art and philosophy but rather the strongest symptom of an underlying cultural revolution that took place between 1770-1820. He says,

> For I hope to show that this revolution is the deepest and most lasting of all changes in the life of the West, no less far-reaching than the three great revolutions whose impact is not questioned--the industrial in England, the political in France, and the social and economic in Russia--with which, indeed, the movement with which I am concerned is connected at every level.[12]

Johnson argues that this phenomenal shift caused by Romanticism is in fact the official birth of the modern world.[13] Furthermore, as Johnson points out, this turn to an Age of Feeling does not mean people stopped using their reason, but that they tended to focus on different realms of human experience—love of nature, art and mysticism and even cultural history—that were viewed as insignificant and puerile by the Enlightenment.[14]

Another interesting reason why it is hard to define Romanticism is that there are different phases in the movement that seem to present totally contradictory ideas and positions. For instance, in the initial phase of Romanticism both Wordsworth, Coleridge and Friedrich Schlegel[15] started out with a vision of nature as alive that was essentially what we would now

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[12] Berlin, xiii.
[13] *Bir. Mod.,* 111.
[14] *Bir. Mod.,* 111.
[15] Hereafter we will refer to Friedrich Schlegel as 'F. Schlegel' in order to distinguish him from his brother A. W. Schlegel who was also at the epicenter of German Romanticism.

categorize as 'pantheism,' or at least 'panentheism.'[16] In this regard, F. Schlegel even saw himself as a founder of a new religion in a new age of humanity much like a new Mohammad.[17] Furthermore, Wordsworth, Coleridge and F. Schlegel were initially great supporters of the French revolution seeing it as helping to usher in the new age of religion and feeling. Yet, there was a kind of collapse of the initial explosion of core Romanticism which made their poetic output so fruitful. Due in part to the violence of the revolution especially toward religious figures, and to the oppression of the Napoleonic wars, Wordsworth, Coleridge and F. Schlegel all publicly renounced the French revolution and fervently embraced Christian political conservatism and restorationist monarchies.[18] This is why Wordsworth and Coleridge both became stalwart members of the Church of England. This is also why F. Schlegel, who came from a family of staunch Lutheran pastors, converted to Roman Catholicism around 1804, and then began serving under Metternich in Catholic Austria in 1808.[19] Wordsworth later also tried to revise his poems to expunge any semblances of his initial pantheism.

However, some scholars of Romanticism, such as Nemoianu, do not see this political reversal as a break from Romanticism, but as a kind of "taming" or domestication of its initial explosive power.[20] As Nemoianu says,

> This core of the Romantic model and purest form—the possible—impossible expansion of the self to a seamless identification with the universe—is unstable and explosive. ...the paradisiacal recovery of unity, the obliteration of analytical division, cannot be maintained long in purity, not even as an impression or as an aim. The brew does not age well, not because it is too weak, but because it is too strong. The almost mystical intensity of core Romanticism cannot survive long.

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[16] Riasanovsky, 71. Riasanovsky argues that the common theme that unifies early Romanticism is panentheism.
[17] Riasanovsky, 59-60.
[18] Riasanovsky, 35-9.
[19] Riasanovsky, 64-5.
[20] Nemoianu, 25-31; 58.

> The model is too ambitiously designed. This explains why early death becomes almost a norm. Core Romanticism results in suicide, misadventure, disease, drugs, madness, and the guillotine as exemplified by Kleist and Shelley, Byron and Novalis, Keats and Hölderlin, and Saint-Just--or alternatively deterioration and silence.[21]

Nemoianu defends the overall unity of Romanticism by splitting it into two unequal phases. First, there is high Romanticism or core Romanticism which is organized around an impossible vision of human expansion into a total unity of consciousness and nature that does not exclude reason but simply goes beyond it. Second, this first phase implodes into low Romanticism or that he calls "Biedermeier Romanticism." Beidermeier Romanticism is an attempt not to reject Romanticism but to make it practical and domesticate it. For, Nemoianu Jane Austen is the quintessential Biedermeier Romantic who creates Romantic characters, like, for instance, Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*, who are faced with the non-Romantic practical world of money and marriage which forces them to compromise.

Another more theoretical reason why Romanticism is so hard to pin down is because the Romantics like F. Schlegel fostered a longing for mystical union with the whole that was primarily expressed in the form of a commitment to dissolution of any formal differences between philosophy, poetry, and religion. From F. Schlegel's point of view, philosophy, poetry, religion and art were all nothing less than different expressions of man's longing for the infinite and he hoped all these disciplines would eventually become unified in a new Romantic age. As F. Schlegel says,

> Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and

[21] Nemoianu, 25.

> rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature.[22]

Romanticism, then, is best described, less as a philosophy in the strictly theoretical sense, and more as a life attitude or a particular vision of life that encompasses poetry, philosophy and religion. For Novalis and F. Schlegel poetry and philosophy were simply parts of a new religion with the artist, poet and philosopher as part of the new priesthood.[23]

The Four Principles of Romanticism

Copelston holds for the existence of a philosophy of Romanticism and he makes a very interesting short treatment of it in his Volume VII of his *A History of Philosophy* by showing its seminal influence on German idealism.[24] Copelston argues that German idealism is not the philosophy of Romanticism as some would hold. Rather, its theoretical elements can be found more properly in the writings of F. Schlegel and Novalis.[25] Copelston also admits that Romanticism is more of an attitude toward life than a systematic philosophy, yet he still treats it as a theoretical philosophy by outlining four primary ideas by which it is constituted: the creative genius as interpreter of truth; an organic view of nature; a nostalgia for the Middle Ages; and above all a longing for infinite life.[26] We will briefly look at these four primary ideas that make up the philosophy of Romanticism.

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[22] As quoted in Riasanovsky, 58.
[23] Riasanovsky, 59.
[24] Frederick Copelston, *A History of Philosophy: Modern Philosophy: From the Post-Kantian Idealists to Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche*, vol. 7, (New York: Image Books, 1963), 13-21. Copelston acknowledges a deep influence of Romanticism on German idealism especially on Schelling but does not hold that German idealism is the theoretical phase of Romanticism.
[25] Copelston, vol. 7, 13.
[26] Copelston, vol. 7, 15-7.

First, from an epistemological point of view, because the Romantic thinkers shift the emphasis from reason to feeling, they also replace the *philosophe* or scientist as the official interpreter of nature with the artistic genius. The creative genius is like a priest or special mediator between the divine, which is often identified with a living natural whole which includes human beings as a primary part. The artistic genius, as the interpreter of nature, seems to be a completely new concept that originates in Romanticism. For instance, Beethoven is regarded as the quintessential example of the creative genius to the point that he even promoted this same idea about himself.[27] Whereas the Age of Reason once held music in low estimation as merely sentimental, in the Romantic age the emotions imparted by Beethoven's music are now taken to be a unique form of knowledge, or the effect of a mystical experience of nature and of God to which reason or science could never gain access.[28] Furthermore, F. Schlegel sees poets, artists, and Romantic philosophers as Adam-like cultivators of human beings. F. Schegel says: "What men are among the other creatures of the earth, artists are among men."[29] This unique notion of the artistic genius as the maker of men is the idea behind Percy Shelley's famous last line of his *Defence of Poetry*: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."[30]

Second, closely connected to this idea of the creative genius is the metaphysical view of nature as a living organic totality often referred to by some scholars as the doctrine of "organicism." In this view, the human person is not only an integral part of nature, but the chief part that give expression or consciousness to the living whole. This idea of the human as the

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[27] *Bir. Mod.*, 117-125. Berlin also describes Beethoven as the quintessential Romantic genius. Berlin, 13.
[28] *Bir. Mod,* 118.
[29] Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1971), 245.
[30] Percy Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," http://www.bartleby.com/27/23.html.

self-consciousness of nature influences the philosophies of Schelling and Hegel. Whereas the Enlightenment approach leaves the human person essentially outside of nature as an unaccounted for objective scientific observer, the Romantics hold that the human spirit is the culmination of nature understood as living and divine.[31] The "organicism" of the Romantics is in opposition to the Newtonian mechanistic treatment of nature which tends to break up what they see as its inherent unity. The scientific approach, furthermore, also breaks up the unity of the human person into discrete pieces and then identifies him with abstract notions like 'pure reason.' The various dissections of the analytical-empirical approach tend to turn nature and human beings into broken pieces and therefore essentially leaving them dead.[32] In this way, the chief Romantic criticism was that the abuse of analytical thought tends to simply kill life both on the biological level in a lab and on a spiritual level in society.

Third, because the Romantics see the human spirit as the culmination of a living divinized nature, they also develop a reverence for past historical periods and cultures as revealing certain truths. In this way, the Romantics especially choose to identify themselves with the unity and religious feeling of the Middle Ages.[33] In other words, not only nature but also history, culture and language are sources of truth and divine revelation for the Romantics. The Romantics feel that the attempt of the *philosophe* to base politics, culture, morality and all realms of human behavior on a hypostatized pure reason alone and on universal ethical laws, without regard for local flavor, geography, history or language, creates a veritable cultural loss. This

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[31] Copelston, vol. 7, 16.
[32] Goethe despised Newton's optics which separated light through a prism and claimed that white light was the sum of the different many colored spectrum. Goethe thought this did violence to white light and that it was not the sum of its parts and so tried to found his own science of light or optics.
33 Copelston, vol. 7, 17.

cultural loss leads directly to forms of social disintegration: as, for example, in the French Revolution.

According to Beiser, Herder expresses the cultural loss of the Enlightenment in several ways.[34] First, the Enlightenment fails in its attempt to educate the people on pure reason alone and build a unified culture effectively. A nation cannot be effectively built on empty moral abstractions and slogans like equality, liberty, benevolence, tolerance, humanity, or fraternity. These pure ideas are indeed more easily comprehensible and transparent than the mysteries of religion and cultural traditions, yet they do not have the raw power to motivate human beings on the level of feeling the way religious faith and the arts do. Therefore, according to Herder, the rational bromides of the Enlightenment do not have the power to create a unified culture. In a certain way, the Enlightenment makes a fatal anthropological mistake by reducing man to his rational knowledge thereby discounting faith and feeling as powerful and necessary springs of human action. In short, according to Herder, abstract rational theory alone fails to motivate action.[35]

Second, according to Herder, the Enlightenment thinkers have not only failed in their own stated goal to educate the people, but also have, at the same time, succeeded in effectively destroying the local cultures and faith traditions already in place with the analytical forces of pure reason. That is, the universal rationalism of the Enlightenment ended up making people ashamed of their national identity and local culture.[36] In this regard, it is important to note that what especially drove the German Romantics was their hurt national pride which made the

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[34] Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790-1800*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 203-4.
[35] Beiser, 203-4.
[36] Beiser, 203-4.

Romantic movement always fundamentally anti-French.[37] The Enlightenment rational universalism tended to look with disdain upon the German cultural folk songs and poetry and to regard the German language as childish, unphilosophical and backward. This over-weaning attitude drove the German Romantics to defend their culture. Hamann, along with his disciple Herder, reacted to this and taught that the German language, folk culture and arts were a form of divine revelation. This idea of language and culture as a source of divine revelation is the beginning of historicism although of a non-relativistic type.[38]

Furthermore, the Romantics embrace the Middle Ages in a flagrant reaction to the Enlightenment's arrogant disdain for them as a dark period before the dawn of the Renaissance and the advent of the *philosophe* of the Enlightenment. Certain Romantic thinkers, like Herder, criticize the *philosophes* as being self-complacent and simply incapable of appreciating the Middle Ages, or any other historical periods, due to their rationalistic prejudices.[39] The Enlightenment thinkers approach history with a self-aggrandizing *a priori* pre-supposition that the history of the world is a movement of progress from the darkness of religious mysticism and superstition to the light of pure reason. The history of civilization is presented as leading to the

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[37] Some take this to indicate that Herder was a proto-fascist thinker. However, this is not the case, because Herder was a true cultural pluralist and felt that happiness is defined by each cultural context. Nor did Herder hold for anything like German racial or cultural superiority. In fact, on the contrary, Herder's theory of history and culture was formulated to fight against the French claim to cultural superiority. Whereas the *philosophes* thought they were basing a new society on universal rational ethical claims alone, Herder points out that in fact they were doing nothing more than imposing the decadence of the culture of the French court on the whole world. Beiser, 206.
[38] Copelston, vol. 6, 136. Herder was not a relativist in his historicism because he did see a progress in history with all cultures moving toward an increased development of all the spiritual, mental and physical faculties of the human being. Beiser, 209.
[39] Copelston, vol. 6, 172.

institution of a moral and political life based on reason alone and to the human person as living free from all the prejudices of faith and tradition.[40]

Fourth, and most importantly, according to Copelston, the Romantics are best characterized by a longing for infinite life. The Romantics see reason and the rationalistic program of the Enlightenment as a destructive force that kills life. Therefore, they simply propose infinite life as the centerpiece of their thought. This infinite life is manifested in both nature and human history. The human means of apprehending this life is not pure reason but rather feeling, intuition, faith and creativity beyond conceptual thought. Thought abstracts, separates, limits and fixes things in a deadly way whereas faith, feeling, and intuition apprehend things in their individuality as they are and lets them live.[41]

Along with Copelston, Berlin also argues that this longing for life is the single major unifying theme of Romanticism. As mentioned before, Berlin sees Romanticism in Germany as emerging out of an opposition to French political oppression. However, differing from Copelston, Berlin also sees Romanticism as rooted in Christian Pietism, a movement within Lutheranism which emphasized personal Bible reading and an individual's personal contact with the Creator.[42] Pietism emphasized spiritual life alone separate from learning, ritual, ceremony and high society which it held in contempt.[43]

In this context, Berlin puts his finger on an obscure but enigmatic figure, already mentioned, named Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788), a pietist from Königsberg and friend of both Kant and Herder, as the spiritual father of the Romantic revolution. Berlin argues that

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[40] Copelston, vol. 6, 172.
[41] Copelston, vol. 7, 18.
[42] Berlin, 36.
[43] Berlin, 36.

Hamann is the father of Romanticism because he was, as Berlin says, the first thinker to effectively "deal a violent blow," to the Enlightenment.[44] After a conversion experience in London when he felt God speaking to him through the Bible, Hamann came back to Königsberg and began writing against the rationalism of the Enlightenment. His conversion experience taught Hamann that the way one truly knows the world is not through reason but through faith.[45] He held that the French approach to the world through general scientific propositions of reason is incapable of truly catching the reality of life. As Berlin says, "From this he drew a kind of Bergsonian conclusion, namely that there was a flow of life, and that the attempt to cut this flow into segments killed it."[46] Hamann held that the sciences were fine for the purposes of growing plants, raising animals or knowing the properties of physical bodies, but when the French applied the scientific model to human life it tended to kill the creative impulses in human beings. For, according to Hamman, humans do not search for a simplistic tranquility but for the full exercise of their human powers and creative forces.[47] Berlin observes that Hamann:

> …influenced the young Goethe to be against the tendency on the part of the French to generalize, to classify, to pin down, to arrange in albums, to try to produce some kind of rational ordering of human experience, leaving out the *élan vital*, the flow, the individuality, the desire to create, the desire even, to struggle, that element in human beings which produced a creative clash of opinion between people of different views, instead of that dead harmony and peace which according to Hamann and his followers, the French were after.[48]

Dahlstrom also presents Hamann and Herder as leaders of a German counter-enlightenment who held a doctrine of "aesthetic holism" which believes that the truth of things

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[44] Berlin, 36.
[45] Berlin, 41.
[46] Berlin, 41.
[47] Berlin, 42.
[48] Berlin, 43.

can only be found within "a dynamic and self-determining whole."[49] Thus they view reason itself in a holistic way and attempt to break down the walls rationalist thinkers set up between reason, on the one hand, and language, history, nature, and human sensibility on the other.[50] By approaching the human being in this holisitic way, both Herder and Hamann come to respect both art and literature as stemming from the divine origins of language itself and having a transformative cultural power. Dahlstrom thus terms their doctrine "aesthetic holism" and he sees the German idealism of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel as an attempt to reconcile Kantian theoretical reason with Herder and Hamann's aesthetic reason.[51]

This present reflection on the Romantic longing for infinite life helps us see that the Romantics tended to see rational thought as killing life in the things it applied itself to whether it be to the human person, political society, history or culture. This reflection also makes evident that the Romantic movement can be characterized as being chiefly concerned with a split between thought and life and with the cultural losses resulting from the Enlightenment application of scientific rationality to politics, culture and human ends. In this way, Romanticism also seeks to put life back into philosophy, or, in other words, to revive philosophy as a way of life.

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[49] Daniel O. Dahlstrom, "The Legacy of Aesthetic Holism: Hamann, Herder, and Schiller," In *Philosophical Legacies: Essays on the Thought of Kant, Hegel, and Their Contemporaries*, 67-92, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 67.
[50] Dahlstrom, 68.
[51] Dahlstrom, 70.

French Romanticism

A short comment should be made about the distinctive origin and contours of French Romanticism which will influence the culture in which Gilson developed his thought a century later. Although France may be seen as the political and in many ways the the intellectual leader of the world in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it is interesting that France did not get hit with the Romantic wave until later than the rest of Europe. For, Romanticism in France does not manifest until after the 1820s with Chateubriand, Hugo, Lamartine and Vigny well over twenty years after Wordsworth and Novalis started the explosion of core Romanticism in the 1790s.[52]

Nemoianu points out that some Romantic scholars hold that this temporal lag shows that there really is no truly French Romanticism because it was an Anglo-German movement imported into France by Chateubriand and Germaine De Staël. Proponents of this view argue that classicism is really the only truly French approach to literature and art and thus see Romanticism as an un-French aberration. They also hold that it was actually due to their literary incompetence that the Romantics wrote differently than their predecessors: they were simply unable to be truly classicist and therefore truly French. It is indeed true that at no time before or after the defeat of Napoleon did France ever become so open to foreign intellectual influence.

However, as Nemoianu rightly points out, Rousseau's pre-Romantic influence on the English and German Romantics gives Romanticism an authentic foothold in the French tradition.[53] Furthermore, describing the French Romantics as foreigners is simply part of the

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[52] Nemoianu, 79.
[53] Nemoianu, 78.

polemical "talking points," so to speak, of Enlightenment classicists who try to delegitimize the French Romantics in the culture war that split France for a century.[54]

There seems to be two main reasons why the currents of Romanticism were initially muted in France: First, France in many ways was the intellectual leader of the world and was focused on its mission of spreading the ideals of the Enlightenment. In this regard Nemoianu says,

> French high Romanticism takes unusual forms precisely because the impetus and the transforming capacity of the French Enlightenment were tremendous and reached a degree of practicality that was unequalled in other literatures.[55]

Second, Napoleon created a totalitarian police state with a network of censors who enforced classicism as the official state form of art.[56] Also, classicism was the official philosophy of the *Académie Française,* the official arbiter of French culture, which accused the French Romantics of subverting the laws of French literature and other so called "cultural crimes."[57] Furthermore, the future French Romantics like Lacordaire, Hugo, and Balzac were the younger "imperial generation" who grew up and were educated during the Napoleanic wars under watchful eyes of the Napoleanic police state and therefore reacted strongly to this control and oppression.

For these reasons, when French Romanticism did finally emerge into the cultural limelight it formed one side of a strict dichotomy splintering French intellectual culture: on the one side was the classical French tradition, representing the Enlightenment, the rule of reason, and republicanism; on the other side there was Romanticism with its tendency to identify with the pre-modern medieval world, its positive attitude toward tradition, and its favorable attitude

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[54] Nemoianu, 119.
[55] Nemoianu, 119.
[56] *Bir. Mod.*, 144.
[57] *Bir. Mod.,* 147.

toward the monarchy. This conflict bifurcated French society into two factions and was often depicted visually in popular art, at the time, as a naked Greek figure armed with javelin and Doric column in a pitched battle with a man in sixteenth century dress armed with rapier and Gothic spire.[58] Germaine De Staël, a founder of French Romanticism, embraced this clash and described it succinctly as one side imitating the ancients and having its origins in paganism, and the other side embracing the medievals originating in the spirit of religion.[59]

This dichotomy has partially to do with the fact that Romanticism in France started with the publication of Chateaubriand's *Génie du christianisme* (1802) which inspired young men like Hugo and resulted in a French religious revival after 1810.[60] This religious revival quickly took on deep political implications by creating the first of many French right wing resistance movements that sought to restore the monarchy called *Les Chevaliers de la Foi*.[61] This created a defining split in French society and politics between the left-classicist-republicans and the right-romantic-Catholic-royalists which still existed up until the early twentieth century. This split was manifested especially in the strict division between the religious free schools and the state run schools. Johnson says,

> The bifurcation in the French schools tended to produce two distinct races of Frenchmen, who had different heroes (and villains), different political vocabularies, different fundamental assumptions about politics and, not least, two completely different images of France.[62]

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[58] *Bir. Mod.,* 143.
[59] *Bir. Mod.,* 143.
[60] *Bir. Mod.,* 138.
[61] *Bir. Mod.,* 138.
[62] Paul Johnson, *Modern Times: The World From the Twenties to the Nineties,* (New York: HaperPerennial, 1991), 144. [Hereafter cited as *Mod. Tim.*].

Interestingly both sides in this debate agreed that France was the birthplace of civilization but what they disagreed about was whether the culture that vivifies this civilization should be secular and positivistic or confessional and metaphysical.[63] This split of the two French cultures, rooted in the Enlightenment and Romanticism, had a large influence on shaping the thought of the young Gilson who transcended this divide by going to both the Catholic schools and the secular Lyceés and being both a life long Catholic and a defender of the Republic.

Section Two: Nietzsche and Romanticism

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), in what is known as his 'early period' (1872-1876) in the *Birth of Tragedy* and the four essays in *Untimely Meditations*, presents an essentially Romantic critique of modern culture. He holds with the Romantics that basing life on pure reason alone, with no regard for the deeper human needs for feeling and faith, brings forth life-degenerating effects. This rational breakdown of authentic life in turn destroys a genuine life-giving culture and replaces it with a rather weak scientific pseudo-culture. Nietzsche's project in his early period consists not only of this critique of modern rationalist culture but is also characterized by a search for the means to restore a unity of thought and life in a genuine culture through philosophy and art. In the present section we will first present Nietzsche's Romantic critique of modern culture and his desire to revive a form of intellectual activity that fosters life. Then, in the next chapter we will present Nietzsche's view of philosophy as a way of life based on this critique which spurred on a veritable revival of philosophy as a way of life in the thought of many thinkers in the twentieth century including Gilson.

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[63] *Mod. Tim.*, 142.

Nietzsche on the Romantics

However, it is important to note that calling Nietzsche a 'Romantic' could be taken as a bit of an overstatement for two reasons. First, writing thirty years after the unraveling of the actual movement in the 1840s, Nietzsche himself was not a 'Romantic' in the strict sense of the term. Second, Nietzsche is at various times negative toward the Romantics especially during what is known as his 'middle period' (1878-1883) when he does a sudden about face in support of Enlightenment/Socratic rationalism.[64]

However, especially during his 'early period,' and to some degree during his 'late period' (1883-1889), Nietzsche advances what can be safely called a "Romantic critique" of Enlightenment rationalism and the rise of historical progressivism which logically followed from it. Nietzsche also shares with the Romantic movement an overriding concern with recovering forms of intellectual activity like art, literature, philosophy, and even religion to some degree, that will foster a dynamic human life which produces genuine life-giving culture. In this regard, Nietzsche also betrays his Romantic stripes as a committed proponent of the "cult of genius" which is, as he says, any culture's "highest fruit of life."[65] For the early Nietzsche, the poet and

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[64] During his rationalist second period Nietzsche says of Romanticism: "We must still say of this development as a whole: it was no slight universal danger, under the semblance of full and final knowledge of the past to subordinate knowledge to feeling altogether and to speak with Kant, who thus determined his task 'to open the way again for faith by showing knowledge its limits.' "The Dawn," in *The Portable Nietzsche,* ed. Walter Kauffman, (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 84-5. Later Nietzsche does once again subordinate philosophy to instinct and feeling but nonetheless he still remains critical of the Romantic movement proper which he calls a "malignant fairy" because it fosters a dangerous belief in mystical intuition. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,* trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 18. [Henceforth cited as *BGE*]

[65] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Schopenhauer as Educator," in *Untimely Meditations,* ed. Daniel Breazeale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 146. [Hereafter cited as *SAE*].

the philosophical genius are the official interpreters of nature and the true creators of culture and not scientists.[66]

It is true however that even during his Romantic early period Nietzsche does at times strongly criticize the Romantics. For instance, in the *Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche criticizes the Romantics for thinking that a state of harmony between man and nature mediated by a "naive artist" like Homer is the ground of every culture which will come into being eventually and naturally.[67] However strong in tone it might be, in reality his criticism here is rather slight because Nietzsche accepts the basic Romantic premise of a union between man and nature by means of art. Nietzsche's only real disagreement with the Romantics here is that he holds that a rebirth of true culture through poetry and art will not inevitably come by necessity, but only through a consciously willed effort of human creativity of monumental proportions. This difference is important as we will see later. However, because Nietzsche fundamentally agrees with the 'what' but not the 'how,' of Romanticism his disagreement with the Romantics here is more of a so called 'in-house quarrel' among members of a common school. Also Nietzsche's consistently polemical style is always so harsh, and at times insulting, that a mild or qualified criticism such as this one toward the Romantics amounts essentially to a compliment in the writings of Nietzsche.[68]

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[66] *SAE*, 177; 186; 187.
[67] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy," in *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner,* trans. Walter Kauffman, (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 43. [Hereafter cited as *BT*].
[68] French theologian Henri De Lubac convincingly argues that the early Nietzsche is essentially a Romantic and referring to the *Birth of Tragedy* De Lubac says, "The whole work exhales Romanticism of which it took the author years of critical reflection to rid himself--not that he ever succeeded in doing so completely."[74] *The Drama of Atheist Humanism*, trans. Edith M. Riley, Anne Englund Nash, and Mark Sebanc (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 83. [Hereafter cited as *DAH*].

On the other hand, the early Nietzsche at times explicitly compliments the Romantics. For instance, referring to the Romantic movement in his essay, *On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life,* he says: "Not much more than a century ago in Germany a natural instinct for what one calls poetry awoke in a few young people."[69] Nietzsche also directly associates himself with this movement in *OTA* when he notes that just as this awakening to the true nature of poetry in Romanticism is growing slowly at the rate of about one hundred people per generation, so also Nietzsche's own awakening to the true nature of culture as rooted in life and not knowledge will also grow slowly in a creative minority.[70] Also in a rare complimentary spirit, Nietzsche praises the Romantic poets Shelley, Hölderlin and Kleist as uncommon souls who liberated themselves from the conventions of society by living something of a philosophic life, which due to external pressure, resulted in suffering depression and an early death.[71]

Nietzsche's Romanticism in OTA and the Goethean Principle

Having touched on Nietzsche's close but at times conflicted relationship with Romanticism, we shall now turn to Nietzsche's *OTA* to show the Romantic elements in the early Nietzsche's philosophy and especially to highlight certain aspects of his critique of modernity. Nietzsche sets a decisively Romantic tone in the opening lines of *OTA* where he quotes the famous words of Goethe: "Besides I hate all things which merely instruct me without

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[69] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), 58. [Hereafter cited as *OTA*].
[70] *OTA*, 58.
[71] *SAE*, 138.

multiplying or directly reviving my activity."[72] From this quote Nietzsche derives a basic principle of discernment that guides his meditation on how the study of history can help or hurt human life and culture. We would like to here refer to Nietzsche's criterion as the 'Goethean principle' or the 'Goethean criterion.' By means of this principle or criterion Nietzsche affirms all knowledge that serves life or action and rejects all knowledge that degenerates life and action.[73]

There are three very interesting Romantic aspects of this opening sentence and preface which set the focus of the whole essay. First, Nietzsche holds that a certain kind of disinterested scientific approach to knowledge can carry a degenerating effect on life. This is because, according to Nietzsche, the scientific approach, in its arrogance, disregards the deeper human needs for meaning and feeling as "rude and graceless requirements."[74]

Second, Nietzsche's expressed goal of the whole essay in the spirit of Goethe is to stir up hateful (*Verhaßt*) passions in his readers so that they will hate all non-life giving forms of knowledge, especially the excesses of history.[75] Nietzsche does this not with an extended rational argument focused on exposing the errors of the methods of modern science and history, but by describing his "feelings" of distaste and repulsion toward their present state in Germany by means of an extended series of polemical illustrations and rhetorical examples.[76] Nietzsche shows that he is aware that his feelings of pessimism toward the "mighty historical orientation of

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[72] "Uebrigens ist mir Alles verhasst, was mich bloss belehrt, ohne meine Thätigkeit zu vermehren, oder unmittelbar zu beleben." Friedrich Nietzsche, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben," In *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, 75-148. n.p.: Goldmann, n.d.), 75. [Hereafter cited as *Vom Nutzen*]. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
[73] *OTA*, 7.
[74] *OTA*, 7.
[75] *OTA*, 7.
[76] *OTA*, 7.

the age" flies directly in the face of the atmosphere of great optimism and pride in Germany.[77] This is especially true in regards to Germany's political and academic progress especially after defeating France in the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871) and subsequently establishing the second German *Reich*.[78] Hence, Nietzsche is fighting directly against the tide of those who interpreted this victory over the French as a sign of cultural superiority and historical progress.[79]

Third, Nietzsche wants to discover ways of doing history that serve life. In this regard, Nietzsche later outlines three ways of doing history properly: the monumental, the antiquarian and the critical. The short eight page section of the essay on these three life-giving approaches to history is its most influential part and the focus of most of its commentators.[80] However, most of Nietzsche's energy is spent later in the essay on a passionate critique of historical education in Germany, which under the influence of neo-Hegelian historicism, claims to be a science.

Due to the Romantic emphasis on history and culture in Hamann and Herder it may be surprising that Nietzsche is criticizing history. Nietzsche is not critiquing Herder and Hamann's notion of history as revelatory of truth but rather the treatment of history as a science much later by the neo-Hegelians. Indeed, here we see Nietzsche dealing with the aftermath of German idealism's attempt at reconciliation between Kant's rationalism and Herder and Hamann's emphasis on history whereby they turned history into a lifeless science, according to Nietzsche and thereby subverted the goals of Herder and Hamann.

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[77] *OTA*, 7.
[78] Daniel Breazeale, "Introduction," in *Untimely Meditations,* ed. Daniel Breazeale, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), xiii.
[79] Breazeale, xiii.
[80] Breazeale, xv.

Nietzsche's Definition of Leben

Nietzsche's Goethean criterion articulated in the first sentence of *OTA* immediately raises question: what exactly does Nietzsche mean by '*leben*'? Nietzsche is not immediately forthcoming with a clear answer to this main question but later in the essay Nietzsche defines 'life' cryptically as a "dark, driving, insatiably self-desiring power" that never flows from "a pure fountain of knowledge."[81] Although he does not use his famous term 'Dionysian principle' in this essay, 'life' for the early Nietzsche is closely related to his description of the Dionysian element found in Greek tragedy and art. The "glowing life" that comes from the Dionysian principle for Nietzsche is a kind of self-forgetting ecstasy or blissful intoxication that both produces and expresses a kind of primordial union between humans and nature achieved through certain forms of art, religion and especially music.[82] Therefore, it is safe to say, at the very least, that, 'life' for Nietzsche is indeed a Romantic notion in that it is connected more with feeling than with reason.

The preface of *OTA* also raises the question what exactly Nietzsche means by the term 'history'? History is a broad term for Nietzsche which at times can denote simply the past in the fashion that it is denoted by the German *Geschichte*.[83] 'History' can also denote the simple human awareness of the past. History can also denote the scholarly study of the past in the sense of historiography denoted by the German *Historie*.[84] Nevertheless, history, even in the last

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[81] *OTA*, 22.
[82] *BT*, 36-7.
[83] Unfortunately, translators are forced to translate both *Historie* and *Geschichte* with the broader English word 'history.' *Historie* usually means the scientific discipline of historiography and *Geschichte* means not just past isolated events but the overall unfolding of past events. *Historie* then for Nietzsche is the intellectual study of *Geschichte* as a connected issuance of meaningful events. In this sense he sees history as revelatory like Herder and Hamann. '*Historie*' for Nietzsche is the "*Beschäftigung mit der Geschichte*". *Vom Nutzen, 83*.
[84] Breazeale, xv.

mentioned sense, is a significant form of life-giving knowledge for Nietzsche just like it is for Hamann and Herder. However, when history is reduced to science, according to Nietzsche, it loses its life-giving capacity.

The Great Tension between Thought and Life

In section one of *OTA*, Nietzsche roots the necessity of the application of the Goethean criterion, not only in the crisis of historical education in his present day Germany, but also in a more fundamental tension present in human nature between life in the present and knowledge of the past. Nietzsche attempts to illustrate this tension in human nature a with a series of images, examples, and short philosophical arguments. He begins this description by noting that human beings tend to look at the contentment of herd animals, as well as little children, with "great envy" because they both live and act in the present moment and are "neither melancholy nor bored."[85] However, this desire is in vain because humans want the animal's self-forgetting happiness in a distinctively human way. For, according to Nietzsche, human pride demands that self-awareness always be coupled with the present bliss of the animal. In other words, humans not only want to experience animal bliss, but they also want to remember it from the past, talk about it with one another in the present, and look forward to it in the future. Nietzsche makes fun of human beings who in their zeal wonder why animals don't speak back to them when they ask the brutes to teach them how to achieve the speechless bliss of animal happiness.[86]

This reflection on the human envy of animals describes what Nietzsche sees as a fundamental human predicament: On the one hand, with too little knowledge of the past, men

[85] *OTA*, 8.
[86] *OTA*, 8.

cease to be human and devolve into animals. On the other hand, with too much knowledge of the past, the human drive for action is paralyzed which also causes men to cease to be human.[87] An excess of history thus makes men evolve into what Nietzsche calls, "walking encyclopedias" who accomplish very little.[88]

In this way, human nature is such that both an excess of forgetfulness and an excess of knowledge makes man disappear. Given this difficulty, the task of being truly human involves a tricky balance on the scale of self-knowledge. A human person who wants to truly live must seek a golden mean between the total forgetfulness of a speechless animal and the excessive knowledge of a nineteenth century German scholar.[89] Nietzsche concludes from his analysis, quite contrary to the scientific/historic spirit of his age, that some amount of forgetfulness and unhistorical life is necessary for human happiness.

He also concludes that the capacity to "perceive unhistorically" like an animal is more "important and fundamental" because it is the very "foundation upon which something right, healthy and great, something truly human may grow."[90] In other words, Nietzsche makes a conscious choice to err on the side of life over knowledge. This means that he is willing to sacrifice the clarity of truth and justice for the sake of unleashing human passion and life. This

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[87] Although he does not refer to Shakespeare explicitly in this essay Nietzsche's basic argument is very similar to Hamlet's famous third soliloquy:
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Joseph Pearce, Ignatius Critical Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 82.
[88] *OTA*, 24.
[89] *OTA*, 24.
[90] *OTA*, 11.

seems to be one of the main reasons why Nietzsche chooses to not present a strong critique of the substantial logical errors of scientism and historicism, but to only deplore their life-degenerating and culture-destroying effects. For, Nietzsche himself upholds the basic underlying philosophical conclusions and truth of modern scientism and historicism, but only denies the doctrines of progress commonly attached to them. In this regard he says,

> If on the other hand, the doctrines of sovereign becoming, of the fluidity of concepts, types and kinds, of the lack of any cardinal difference between man and animal—doctrines which I take to be true but deadly—are flung at the people for one more lifetime in the current mania for education, then let no one be surprised if that people perishes of pettiness and misery, ossification and selfishness, that is, if to begin with it disintegrates and ceases to be a people: it may then perhaps be replaced in the arena of the future by systems of individual egoism, fellowships intent on the rapacious exploitation of non-fellows and similar creations of utilitarian vulgarity.[91]

Thus, Nietzsche does not condemn modern scientism and historicism because they are untrue, but rather because their truth is undercutting life itself and thereby leading modern culture to a regress into barbarism and political oppression.[92] In this way, Nietzsche is here following the Goethean criterion to the point of even rejecting truth in exchange for life.

This is because life and happiness imply action and all human action, for Nietzsche, requires some level of forgetting or some amount of what he labels "unhistorical life."[93] Nietzsche argues that a man with total awareness, without the capacity to forget, will see everything as "a flow of becoming" and eventually die similar to an insomniac who will die if he is unable to sleep.[94] He says such a man "sees everything flow apart in mobile points and loses himself in the stream of becoming: he will, like the pupil of Heraclitus, hardly dare in the end to

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[91] *OTA*, 55.
[92] *OTA*, 25.
[93] *OTA*, 9-10.
[94] *OTA*, 9.

lift a finger."[95] This man would no longer believe in himself or his own existence and in turn he would never have a reason to be moved to action according to Nietzsche.[96]

For, action implies choosing one deed over all the others. This choice points to an underlying reason in nature and in being for a person to love one object more than another. Since nature is a perpetual flow, which carries in its currents no definable meaning, choosing one deed over another implies loving one deed more than it deserves. So according to Nietzsche if a man of action wishes to act, he must then forget that nature is a meaningless flow of becoming and engage in "rude willing and desiring."[97] For action a person must take on the irrationality and thoughtlessness of "a man tossed and torn by a powerful passion for a woman or a great thought."[98] According to Nietzsche a man of action thus "forgets a great deal to do one thing."[99]

As was said above, Nietzsche here implicitly agrees with the picture of nature provided by modern Newtonian science as a series of bodies in motion with no internal direction, meaning or purpose. However, true this non-teleological picture of nature may be, it is still not life-giving, because it is inimical to the unconditional love in humans that leads to action, life and culture. This kind of unconditional love for Nietzsche is "blind to danger" and "deaf to all warnings" and is the basic energy that motivates all the artists who paint great pictures, generals who win great victories, and peoples who liberate themselves from oppression.[100]

Furthermore, the man of action must not only be without an excess of knowledge but also without an excess of conscience because, according to Nietzsche, there is an inherent injustice

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[95] *OTA*, 9-10.
[96] *OTA*, 9.
[97] *OTA*, 11.
[98] *OTA*, 11.
[99] *OTA*, 12.
[100] *OTA*, 11.

involved in loving one deed over another. For there is nothing in the universe, understood as a flow of becoming, that indicates one deed or object as better than another. As Nietzsche says:

> The agent loves his deed infinitely more than it deserves to be loved: the best deeds occur in such an exuberance of love that of this love, at least, they must be unworthy even if their value is otherwise immeasurably great.[101]

How Historical Dissection Destroys Life and Culture

At various points throughout the essay Nietzsche makes an important move from the predicament between knowledge and action on the existential human level, to the study of history which investigates precisely how different peoples and cultures have dealt with this existential tension created by self-consciousness itself. History, for Nietzsche, should not be a mere enumeration of past events on the model of objective science, but the study of all the great loves and cultural goals of the past that have moved people to action, life and culture. In other words, genuine history looks at how different times and cultures have overcome the existential paralysis of self-consciousness. The study of past events, executed properly, takes what has happened in the past and refashions it into history for the sake of present life and future culture. Thus, Nietzsche famously outlines three different ways history is properly done that produces life:[102] the *monumental* which imitates great deeds; the *antiquarian* which reverences tradition and preserves life; and the *critical* which condemns and destroys a past by treading "all pieties under foot.[103]

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[101] *OTA*, 12.
[102] *OTA*, 14-22.
[103] *OTA*, 22.

However, the problem with modern historical scholars is that, unlike scholars who might employ these three proper modes of doing history, they lack the proper reverence for the unhistorical forces and powers that drive human action, life and culture. Due to the Enlightenment's reduction of man to reason, the modern historian tends to focus on the injustice and arbitrary nature of all the unconditional loves and faiths that have produced the great deeds of the past. The historian does this by uncovering "the mania, the injustice, and the blind passion"[104] that motivates all great deeds. History then destroys the "dark horizon" or "mist" of pious illusion that produces the forgetfulness necessary for the great passion that produces great deeds. In this way, an excess of history, like an excess of knowledge, destroys life.[105]

Two Examples: Christianity and German Music

In section seven Nietzsche illustrates how an excess of history destroys life with two interesting examples in religion and art. First, he argues that any religion known in a scientific way and reduced to historical knowledge will be destroyed completely. This is because excessive history destroys the "pious illusion" that upholds the religion by exposing everything behind its veil that is, "false, crude, inhuman, absurd, violent."[106] According to Nietzsche, man can only be creative in the realm of religion if religion is surrounded by an illusion of love and with an "unconditional faith in something perfect and righteous."[107]

Nietzsche uses the deterioration of Christianity by means of history as an example. He points out that recent liberal theologians have quite innocently applied the study of history to

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[104] *OTA*, 14.
[105] *OTA*, 14.
[106] *OTA*, 39.
[107] *OTA*, 39.

Christianity with the intention of helping it. However, Nietzsche argues that they are unknowingly putting themselves in the service of Voltaire's project of crushing the Church (*Ecrasez l'infâme*).[108] For the liberal theologians took Christianity as a natural living reality and reduced it to "pure knowledge about Christianity" and so have thus annihilated it.[109] They do this by making a Hegelian distinction between the "'Idea of Christianity'" and its different less perfect "'forms of appearance.'"[110] In this regard, Nietzsche points to the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), whom he calls "the greatest theologian of the century."[111] Schleiermacher, according to Nietzsche, holds that Christianity has such an amorphous and abstract nature as a religion that it can be found in all existing and future possible religions. Therefore, Schleiermacher holds that the true Church is a "flowing mass" with no contours which appears here, there and everywhere.[112] Nietzsche argues that such a historical treatment of Christianity has denatured Christianity and transformed it into a kind of lifeless historical knowledge and not a living reality.[113]

Nietzsche concludes from this example that history denatures everything to which it is applied. He says:

> All this one can study in everything that has life; that it ceases to live when it has been dissected completely and lives painfully and becomes sick once one begins to practice historical dissection on it.[114]

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[108] *OTA*, 39.
[109] *OTA*, 40.
[110] *OTA*, 39.
[111] Schleiermacher was friends with F. Schlegel and Novalis and is often considered an early German Romantic theologian. Even though Schleiermacher is influenced by the Romantics to emphasize the integrity of religious feeling he is still nonetheless imbued on a deeper level with an Enlightenment rationalist spirit that reduces the living reality of Christianity to an abstract knowledge of Christianity.
[112] *OTA*, 40.
[113] *OTA*, 40.
[114] *OTA*, 39.

Historical dissection has made Christianity blasé according to Nietzsche and is in the process of being annihilated by history just like ancient paganism was annihilated by Christianity.[115]

A second example that Nietzsche uses is the modern dissection of German music, which for Nietzsche is the most lively element in the German culture.[116] When historians fix their gaze on all the little details of biographical information about Mozart and Beethoven in order to understand their music and its development, they end up reducing the music to historical concepts and causes. Nietzsche says that Mozart and Beethoven "get buried under the whole learned rubbish of biography and are forced to answer a thousand impertinent questions by the systematic torture of historical criticism."[117] According to Nietzsche, the scholars are looking for intellectual problems in the lives of the great composers when they should just be immersing themselves in their music and forgetting all their problems.[118] In a certain, patently absurd, way they turn music into a problem of knowledge.

Nietzsche asks what would have happened to the greatness of Christianity, or Luther's reformation, if these meddling biographers were there right at the beginning? Nietzsche argues that their "sober pragmatizing curiosity" would have killed those movements from the very beginning like an animal kills a mighty oak tree by the simple swallow of an acorn.[119] The problem in both of these instances is that historical dissection dispels the atmosphere or the

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[115] *OTA*, 39.
[116] *OTA*, 40.
[117] *OTA*, 40.
[118] *OTA*, 40.
[119] *OTA*, 40.

"mysterious circle of mist" that all great living things like religions, arts and creative geniuses need to stay alive.[120]

Nietzsche's Ambivalence toward the Enlightenment in OTA

Ultimately, Nietzsche's criticism of history here is also a criticism of the Enlightenment project to build a culture on the basis of pure reason alone. As noted above, Nietzsche, at times, shows a certain ambivalence in this criticism because he thinks that the scientific positivism of the Enlightenment is a technically true reflection of existence as pure flow. In this regard, Nietzsche is somewhat positive toward the Enlightenment when he says: "One even sees cause to triumph in the fact that 'science now begins to rule life.' Perhaps this will be achieved."[121]

Yet, contrary to the preponderant progressive optimism of his times, Nietzsche says that even if this is achieved, the scientifically based culture will, in reality, be worse than the cultures it wants to replace. He says:

> But surely a life ruled in that way [by science] is not worth much because it is much less life and guarantees much less life for the future than the life which used to be ruled not by knowledge but by instinct and powerful illusion.[122]

For Nietzsche the Enlightenment's attempt to have science rule life and thereby produce a more peaceful culture is based on a hubristic anthropological error. It is impossible for science to rule life because humans are not moved to action by knowledge but by faith, love and instinct based on pious illusions and noble myths created by artists and religion. Thus science is simply unable to properly rule life because it kills it by dissection.

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[120] *OTA*, 40.
[121] *OTA*, 41.
[122] *OTA*, 41.

In this regard, Nietzsche says that modern culture based on science is "no real culture at all, but only a kind of knowledge about culture, it stops at cultured thoughts and cultured feelings but leads to no cultured decisions."[123] Modern culture for Nietzsche ultimately will be dissolved into barbarism. He says,

> The culture of a people in contrast to that barbarism has once been designated, with some justification I believe, as unity of artistic style in all expressions of the life of a people.[124]

However, the attempt to have science become the basis of culture and replace different pious illusions and myths about reality with abstract rational ideas disintegrates the living unity of a culture.

Thus, for Nietzsche, as was said above, any culture based on instinct and powerful illusion, even if technically based on falsity, is preferable to the scientific pseudo-culture of the Enlightenment. In this way, for Nietzsche even medieval Christianity is preferable to the Enlightenment because it at least touches the deepest human powers. Nietzsche here provides a rare compliment on his part for Christianity when he says,

> A religion which, of all the hours of a human life, takes the last one to be the most important, which predicts an end to life on earth as such and condemns the living to live in the fifth act of the tragedy surely stimulates the deepest and noblest powers.[125]

Thus, Nietzsche for the sake of life and culture condemns the truth of science and embraces the darkness of myth and pious illusion created by art and religion. For, Nietzsche sees an irreconcilable contradiction between science, on the one hand, and art and religion, on the other. This is because science can only see becoming and thereby cannot do anything but throw man

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[123] *OTA*, 24.
[124] *OTA*, 25.
[125] *OTA*, 44.

into what he calls an "endless light-wave sea of known becoming."[126] Nietzsche, following the Romantics, chooses art and religion over science here because they can see eternal being. In fact, art and religion are "eternalizing powers" which create faith in eternal being through a myth-making power.[127] This myth making creates a foundation upon which human beings can truly live, according to Nietzsche.

Knowledge Ruling Life vs. Life Ruling Knowledge

In the conclusion of his essay Nietzsche makes a very interesting reference back to the Goethean criterion which he established at the beginning of the essay by laying out a stark choice between life ruling over knowledge or knowledge over life. Nietzsche frames this choice as between the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* and Nietzsche's own *vivo, ergo cogito*. This choice determines whether thought or life is the primary ground of human existence.[128] Nietzsche, of course, is urging his readers to choose his *vivo* over modernity's *cogito* and his solution for moving forward in the future is to have a "*hygiene of life*" which will serve as a kind of higher power that watches over science and history and directs it toward life.

This higher power ends up being the Goethean principle itself which Nietzsche asks a youthful generation to embrace in order to form a genuine life-giving culture. However, Nietzsche leaves this life and culture somewhat undefined because it is something he cannot in principle describe. He simply lays out the Goethean principle and leaves it to the energy of the young to create a new human nature through a new religion and new art forms.

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[126] *OTA*, 62.
[127] *OTA*, 62.
[128] *OTA*, 61.

How the Greeks Forged Culture: an Exemplar for Germany

Nevertheless, at the very end his essay Nietzsche provides a clearer glimpse of what a future life-giving culture in Germany could look like. He does this by means of an important comparison between modern German culture and the early Greek culture. Nietzsche argues that like the modern Germans the Greeks were also at one time inundated with a chaotic influx of Semitic, Babylonian, Lydian and Egyptian "*Formen und Begriffen*."[129] Thus the Greek religion was a "struggle of oriental gods" or a "*Götterkampf*".[130] Yet, the Greek culture did not simply succumb and become an "overloaded heir" or "aggregate" of oriental elements, but through a "great struggle with themselves" the Greeks forged a unique living and life-giving culture out of the mix.[131] This makes the Greeks, according to Nietzsche, the "firstlings" and "model" of all cultured people.[132]

How did the ancient Greeks accomplish this great feat of culture creation? Nietzsche argues that the Greeks forged Hellenic culture from a cultural chaos by following the motto of the Delphic Oracle: "know thyself." The Delphic saying made them focus on, according to Nietzsche, "their genuine needs and letting sham needs die out."[133] One of the things Nietzsche seems to be implying here is that the Greeks interpreted Delphic self-knowledge, not in an introspective way, in the Christian sense of personal awareness of one's sins and proclivities as an individual. Rather, the Greeks took the Delphic oracle as a call to awareness of the needs of

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[129] *OTA*, 64.
[130] *OTA*, 64.
[131] *OTA*, 64.
[132] *OTA*, 64.
[133] *OTA*, 64.

human nature understood as an amorphous, and at times, tragic middle state between beasts and gods.[134]

The Greeks, according to Nietzsche, were thus able to create a strong "ethical nature" which gave them victory over all other cultures because they recognized that human nature was an amorphous indeterminate entity needs to be formed and perfected by a true life-giving culture. This culture cannot be based on second hand thought which creates an inauthentic culture understood as a "decoration of life" in the Roman sense of culture. Genuine culture must be based on a first hand experience of life which creates a true culture. Nietzsche defines culture as a new and improved human nature that carries "a unity of life, thought, appearing and willing."[135] A transformation of the human being that both unifies and satisfies all his many functions of feeling, willing and knowing which creates a deeper accord of life and thought, especially as the latter are expressed in art, is Nietzsche's understanding of true culture.[136]

So here we see Nietzsche connect the end of his work with the beginning. In the conclusion of his essay Nietzsche implicitly sets up his Goethe quote at the beginning of the essay as a kind of new Delphic oracle for the Germans. Just as the "practical interpretation" of the Delphic oracle produced a genuine culture for the Greeks, so also the Goethean criterion will produce a true culture for the Germans because both focus on the need of human nature for life to rule knowledge and not vice versa.

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[134] *OTA*, 64.
[135] "…der Kultur als einer Einhelligkeit zwischen Leben, Denken, Scheinen, und Wollen." *Vom Nutzen*, 148.
[136] This notion of human nature needing to assimilate itself and create a unity among all its different functions on both the level of knowledge and creativity is very much close to Gilson's notion of human nature in the *Essai sur la vie intérieure* which we will analyze below. Also Gilson recognized the need for a encompassing culture for human nature to be perfected. Gilson also uses the terms and concepts very similar to Nietzsche's notion of the need for a hygiene of life when he argues that art is the hygiene of sensibility, morality the hygiene of the will and religion the hygiene and creator of personality.

Nietzsche's Improvements on the Romantic Critique of Modernity

In *OTA* Nietzsche improves on the Romantic critique of Enlightenment rationalism in three important ways: First, Nietzsche streamlines the critique by showing that a genuine culture can only come from the direct experience of life which in turn can only be sustained by an unconditional love generated by faith in a certain pious illusion or mythical ideal. Thus, it is simply impossible to build a culture on pure reason that presents a picture of nature and being as a pure flow of becoming. For picture of nature does not present any definable goal to stir the passions necessary for the authentic experience of life. To think otherwise is based on an anthropological error: thinking humans can be motivated by reason alone without faith and feelings. In this way, Nietzsche subscribes to the 'aesthetic holism' of Hamann and Herder that refuses to reduce man to knowledge.[137]

Second, Nietzsche extends the Romantic critique of rationalism to historicism. This ironic because historicism was actually started by certain early Romantics themselves, such as Herder, for the sake of protecting the integrity of particular cultures like the German *Volk* culture against the dismissive arrogance of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. Whereas *philosophes* thought these cultures and languages were based on superstition and immature feeling, the Romantics cherished them as particular sources of revelation of the divinity. In this regard, Nietzsche shows that scholarly knowledge of past cultures can never be the basis of a genuine culture because it is bereft of any authentic experience of life or passion that is the primary source of the generation of culture. In this way, although German historical education fancies

[137] This is very similar to Gilson in the *Essai* where he argues that man refuses to be reduced to only what he knows.

itself as the height of culture, in reality it is retrospective pseudo-culture that actually kills life and culture.

Third, Nietzsche also, for lack of better word, 'perfects' the Romantic critique of modernity by accurately foreseeing its cataclysmic ramifications. Many Romantics deplored the fragmentation of society due to rationalism and the concomitant cultural weakness due to the implosion of the religious impulse in Europe. None of the Romantics, however, went to the extreme of making such dire predictions as Nietzsche did who prognosticated, from the beginning of his literary career, with louder and louder warnings, that the modern cultural vacuum would inevitably be filled by a novel brand of political savior unrestrained by religious ideals and one who would bring about as yet unseen levels of violence and political oppression.[138] In fact, Nietzsche's prediction is one of the reasons why he was dismissed as an unserious even fanatical thinker by his contemporaries, but also why he is now so famous among historians and philosophers for being one of the few thinkers who was able to foresee with an astonishing accuracy the cataclysms of the twentieth century.[139]

A Romantic Critique of Nietzsche's Solution of Myth-Creation

However accurate Nietzsche's criticism of modern culture may be, and however "prophetic"[140] his predictions of a coming terror may seem looking in retrospect at two world wars and several totalitarian states in the twentieth century, his solution to the problem is less convincing. For the early Nietzsche in both *BT* and *OTA* proposes nothing less than a self-

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[138] *Mod. Tim.*, 48.
[139] *Mod. Tim.*, 48.
[140] *DAH*, 93.

conscious re-embrace of the darkness of myth and the creation of pious illusions for the sake of life. Nietzsche believes that history demonstrates that all the goals and beliefs of past vibrant cultures have been consciously created as a kind of necessary vital falsehood by certain poetic and philosophical geniuses. For instance, as seen above, the Greeks forged a stronger ethical culture by retooling the ideas and gods of the surrounding Babylonian and Egyptian cultures.

Nietzsche's odd solution to return to myth-creation is closely connected with his "in house disagreement" with the Romantics about how a culture will arise. Romantics, in general, rejected the picture of nature as something dissected into smaller and smaller particles. Again they are aesthetic holists in this regard. In the face of the reductive claims of modern science the Romantics still held that nature was itself Divine or Spirit-filled beyond what reason and scientific instruments could perceive. Thus the job of the Romantic poetic-philosophical genius, like a natural priest, was to mediate this divine life of nature through art, music and writing that was beyond the measurements of scientific instruments and the sense based perceptions of reason. The Romantic orientation of the poetic genius toward nature was fundamentally then receptive and revelatory. Along with this receptive attitude there was an inevitability or necessity to the blooming of culture that comes about through the will of God or Nature or an immanent Infinite Life understood as a divine principle.

Nietzsche, however, rejects the Romantic idea that nature is divine and accepts the picture of nature as reduced to pure flow provided by modern science. Therefore, quite differently from the Romantics, Nietzsche sees the poetic-philosophical genius as having an active and creative orientation toward nature and not a receptive one. The poetic genius does not mediate what he hears from the Divine in nature but actively and consciously creates a powerful

picture of nature and the divine for other human beings to base the meaning of their lives upon. Therefore, the creation of culture for Nietzsche must come from the creative will and minds of human beings who create cultural goals and ideals. Nietzsche's solution remains unconvincing from a Romantic perspective because it makes an anthropological error of underestimating the human passion and need for truth in his self-creation.

CHAPTER II

Nietzsche's Return to Philosophy as a Way of Life

The Modern Revival of Philosophy as a Way of Life

The theme of philosophy as a way of life is a lesser known motif in the history of philosophy as compared with the systematic-doctrinal view of philosophy. This is especially the case after the thought of Descartes who deliberately separated tradition, religion and all existential life considerations from philosophy and restricted it to the zone of knowing clear and distinct ideas.[1] This more technical approach to philosophy was even further bolstered by Kant who, although personally motivated by philosophy as a way of life, presented philosophy only as a theory of abstract ideas free from any personal or autobiographical elements.[2] Despite the growing tendency of philosophy away from life toward theory, and its decisive shift in this direction in the early modern period, one can still consistently locate the attempt to return to the ancient idea of philosophy as a way of life in different philosophical circles and at different times within the modern period. For the sake of clarity it is important to mention a few influential

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[1] On the one hand, Foucault claims that it was Descartes who ended the practical aspect of philosophy with the *cogito* which made philosophy no longer focus on the need for a personal transformation needed to see a deeper truth. Truth for Descartes as clear and distinct is universal and accessible to all regardless of one's way of life or purification level. Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures At the Collège De France, 1981-82,* trans. by Graham Burchell, ed. Arnold I. Davidson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 14-19. [Hereafter cited as *HS*]. Hadot, on the other hand, blames Christianity for making philosophical discourse the handmaid of theology and confining its other spiritual exercises to the asceticism of the monastery. Hadot, who explicitly follows Gilson on the matter, sees Descartes as inheriting the scholastic reduction of philosophy to its conceptual content. Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase, (Cambridge: Belknap, 2002), 272. [Hereafter cited as *WAP*]. Alternatively, some Straussian thinkers, like Michael Davis, actually make a quite compelling case that Descartes is making a conscious return to the philosophical life on a personal level, especially in the *Passions of the Soul*, Part III, Articles 149-56. Michael Davis, *The Autobiography of Philosophy,* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 1999), 8 n.7. [Hereafter cited as *The Autobiography*]. Nonetheless, this makes the philosophical life rather private and esoteric, and the rationalist principles upon which Descartes rests modern philosophy indeed launches philosophy in a markedly systematic direction that leaves very little room for the existential dimension of the care of the self.

[2] James Miller, *Examined Lives: From Socrates to Nietzsche,* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 9. [Hereafter cited as *EL*]. Hadot, on the other hand, takes Kant as one of the best models of a philosopher who demonstrated living out the philosophical life in a Stoic-Epicurean model. For regardless of Kant's disagreements with them doctrinally he lived their practices. *WAP*, 263-70.

figures in this movement prior to Nietzsche whose example and thought certainly influenced the young Nietzsche to make his turn to the philosophical way of life. This also shows that Nietzsche is part of a pattern, or movement within the history of philosophy that begins with Montaigne, continues through Romanticism and Nietzsche, and is passed down to Étienne Gilson.

Modern Life-Philosophers Prior to Nietzsche

Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) is generally regarded as something of an outlier in the history of philosophy mainly because he purposely did not create an influential system of thought. Montaigne chose rather to focus on himself as the subject of his writings much like Maine de Biran after him. He must be mentioned here as the first thinker in the modern period, after the Renaissance, to explicitly try to live the philosophical life in imitation of the ancient Stoics, Epicureans and Skeptics which he documents in his autobiographical *Essays*.[3] Montaigne following Cicero and Socrates believes that philosophy is really nothing other than a way to get ready to die and that all the various religious and philosophical wisdoms in the world comes down to one conclusion: to not be afraid of death. Montainge says, "In truth either reason is joking or her target must be our happiness; all the labor of reason must be to make us live well, and at our ease as the Holy Word says."[4] For Montaigne the knowledge of philosophy was ordered toward overcoming the fear of death so as to enjoy the pleasure of life. Montaigne had a deep impact on Rousseau, Nietzsche and Gilson and it could be argued that he is the founder of the modern way of living the philosophical life.

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[3] Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays: A Selection,* trans. M. A. Screech, (New York: Penguin, 2004).
[4] Montaigne, 17.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) shows himself to be deeply influenced by Montaigne and mentions him twice in his *First Discourse* (1750).[5] Rousseau swims against the tide of his times by criticizing the letters, arts and sciences of the Enlightenment for having a corrosive effect on morality and calls for a return to the true simplicity of the philosophical life which for him is a true source of virtue. In his *First Discourse* Rousseau argues that, when properly lived after the manner of Socrates, philosophy tends to foster virtue, but when philosophy gets reduced to a formalized study by "prideful ratiocinators" who merely argue about the good, virtue and vice it tends to have the opposite effect and corrupt virtue.[6] Intriguingly, Rousseau blames the Greeks for this loss of virtue for it was actually the invasion of the Greek orators and philosophers that corrupted traditional virtues in Rome. He says, "until then the Romans had been content to practice virtue; all was lost when they began to study it."[7] In the same way, Rousseau argues, the arts and sciences of the Enlightenment also have had a corrupting effect on human life.

Rousseau even goes to the extreme of arguing, that knowledge itself is incompatible with virtue and to praise certain cultures who shunned learning like the Spartans; or the Native Americans who simply lived in the "happy ignorance in which eternal wisdom had placed us."[8] Despite this apparent exaggeration Rousseau recognizes that a total return to ignorant simplicity

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[5] Rousseau refers to Montaigne's preference for a practical philosophical way of life twice in his very important footnotes in the *First Discourse*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Sciences and Arts or First Discourse" In *Rousseau: The Discourses and Other Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8-9; 11, §14; 22. [Hereafter cited as *FD*].

[6] *FD*, 11; § 23; 13; § 31. Rousseau says, "O virtue! Sublime science of simple souls are so many efforts and so much equipment really required to know you? Are not your principles engraved in all hearts, and is it not enough in order to return into oneself and to listen to the voice of one's conscience in the silence of the passions? That is genuine Philosophy, let us know how to rest content with it; and without envying the glory of those famous men who render themselves immortal in the Republic of Letters." *FD*, 28; § 61.

[7] *FD*, 13; § 31.

[8] *FD*, 14; § 34.

is impossible but holds that the philosophical life still makes the attempt and similar to Montaigne he documents his personal attempt to live the simple philosophical life of intense introspection in *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* and *Confessions.*

It is worth noting at this point that Nietzsche is explicitly critical of Rousseau in much of his work,[9] but both thinkers certainly share the Romantic or pre-Romantic thesis that knowledge guided primarily by rationality can have a corrupting influence on human life. Thus, both Rousseau and Nietzsche both agree that philosophy must be focused on fostering life more than obtaining objective scientific knowledge.

Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), already mentioned above,[10] are both important forerunners of this movement because they both criticize the rationalistic systems of the Enlightenment for taking the life out of history and human culture and replacing it with abstract universal concepts.

Hamman was from Königsberg and in contrast to his fellow townsman and friend, Kant, he purposely was not a professorial philosopher in the university but lived a radical intellectual life while working in the world. Herder, on the other hand, is more mitigated in his criticism of Enlightenment rationalism and tries to fuse certain elements of Hamann's thought into Kant's project. Neither of these thinkers make the return to the philosophical life an explicit theme in their body of work nor do they document in detail a personal attempt to return to the philosophical life in the manner of Rousseau in *Reveries of a Solitary Walker* or of Thoreau in *Walden*. However, as shown above, they were both very influential in the Romantic movement and recognized the rupture between thought and life that resulted in the Enlightenment.

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[9] *SAE*, 150-1.
[10] See Chapter I above.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) just like Montaigne and Rousseau also appreciates the simple life of the Native Americans and attempts to live the philosophical life when he goes to live in the solitude of the woods on Walden pond for over two years (1845-1847).[11] In the early pages of his journal reflecting on his life of solitude Thoreau interestingly takes the time to reflect on what was then the state of academic philosophy in mid-nineteenth century.[12] He says, "There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet, it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live."[13] With a bold declaration in the first sentence and a subtle play on the words 'profess' and 'professor' in the second sentence, Thoreau is here criticizing modern day scholars because they lack what he calls the "manly" virtues of the ancient Greek, Chinese, Hindu and Persian philosophers whom they study.[14] They are indeed properly called "professors" because they merely "profess" to be something which in reality they are not. In other words, what Thoreau is saying is that these modern scholars are pretending to

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[11] In this regard it is important to note that the discovery of the Americas and the simple way of life of the native peoples there by the Europeans had a big impact on the modern revival of the philosophical life especially with its emphasis on simplicity and reverence for nature.

[12] Thoreau says that he wrote most of *Walden* while he was in the woods in 1845-1847. As he says, "When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods.", Henry David Thoreau, "Walden," In *Walden and Disobedience*, ed. Paul Sherman, 1-227, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), 1. However, he did not publish *Walden* until 1854 which is a highly polished reworking of his daily record from his time on Walden pond. Walter Harding, "Thoreau's Reputation," In *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Joel Myerson, 1-11, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3. Therefore, it is hard to say exactly when he made this reflection on academic philosophers. Thoreau graduated from Harvard in 1837 and published Walden in 1854 so his reflections on the professors of philosophy relates to this time span. Regardless of when the critique of professors was written, the dramatic picture presented by *Walden* is of a thinker immersed in solitude who is standing outside the conventional habits of modern society and is thereby able to get a clear perspective on the problem of modern academic philosophy and present this critique. In other words, because he is really living philosophy he is able to critique the professors of philosophy.

[13] Thoreau, 9.

[14] Thoreau, 9. One of the main characteristics of *Walden* that is sometimes overlooked is that Thoreau filled this particular work with many humorous (at times tedious) puns and plays on words like in this instance with the words 'profess' and 'professor.' Thoreau was not just trying to be witty and lighten the mood of his book but actually based his use of puns on a romantic theory of language that claimed that truth could be uncovered in language because all words and syntax were rooted in a common origin and Nature itself. Richard J. Schnieder, "Walden," in *The Cambridge Companion to Henry David Thoreau,* ed. Joel Myerson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 95. This theory of the divine origin of language as we have seen comes from Hamann and Herder.

be philosophers because they have an abundance of knowledge about philosophy yet they still do not live it. Thoreau observes that the success of these scholars is a "courtier-like success, not kingly, not manly."[15] Just as a nobleman or servant at court may be deeply admired for being near a king, the professor of philosophy is also admired for "professing" philosophy because he appears close to the those who truly lived philosophy. According to Thoreau professors of philosophy, just like courtesans, receive a cheap form of overflow admiration.

The main point of Thoreau's provocative criticism is not so much to make fun of academicians as to make a more positive statement about the true essence of philosophy as being primarily a way of life. In this regard, Thoreau says,

> To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not theoretically, but practically.[16]

Philosophy, then for Thoreau, is not an academic subject or systematic body of knowledge, or even primarily a theoretical activity, but a practical way of life. More specifically, this means a radical life lived not in conformity with the conventions and luxuries of modern society, but according to the simplicity of being in communion with nature. For him the truly philosophical life results in a rather strict form of voluntary poverty demonstrated by Thoreau himself living frugally in the woods.[17] However, the true nature of philosophy as primarily a practical way of life has simply been forgotten and hence there are no more true philosophers but only "professors" who pretend or merely profess to be philosophers.

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[15] Thoreau, 9.
[16] Thoreau, 9.
[17] Thoreau, 9.

The professor's self-contentment with theory alone is evidenced for Thoreau by the fact that they live in conformity to the conventions of society and no different from other people.[18] He says, "The philosopher is in advance of his age even in the outward form of his life. He is not fed, sheltered, clothed, warmed, like his contemporaries."[19] Thoreau drives this point home when he asks: "How can a man be a philosopher and not maintain his vital heat by better methods than other men?"[20] This astonishing question shows the practical depths that true philosophy reaches for Thoreau.

It is well known that Nietzsche, like Gilson, was strongly influenced by the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) which he read in German translation quite early in his career probably before 1874. But it is uncertain whether Nietzsche, who indeed read widely, was aware of the work of Emerson's close friend and protégé Thoreau or whether he ever read *Walden*.[21] It would seem, then, a more sound procedure to focus on Emerson in this survey rather than Thoreau. Although Emerson is indeed a philosopher more focused on life than doctrine, Thoreau's attempt to actually live the philosophical life preached by Emerson's circle—a move Emerson himself disapproved of as socially irresponsible—makes Thoreau more of a forerunner of the post-modern return to the philosophical life. For, like Montaigne and Rousseau, Thoreau also carefully documents his concrete steps in his attempt at living a radical philosophical life.

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[18] Pierre Hadot points out this sense of contentment with theoretical discourse as expressed in Thoreau's *Walden*. Pierre Hadot, "There Are Nowadays Professors of Philosophy, But Not Philosophers," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 19, no. 3 (2005): 229-237; 230.
[19] Thoreau, 9.
[20] Thoreau, 9.
[21] Goodman, Russell, "Ralph Waldo Emerson", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/emerson/>. Nietzsche quotes Emerson in 1874 in *SAE*, 129; 193.

Furthermore, Thoreau is worth a special focus here because he, like Nietzsche, was influenced both by Romanticism and Emerson to return to the philosophical life.

Søren Kiekegaard (1813-1855) and Nietzsche both call for a return to the philosophical life as modeled by the ancient Greeks in markedly similar ways. Both do this precisely in reaction to the claim by the neo-Hegelians that Hegel's philosophical system is a real science that can, in principle, explain everything that has happened or could happen in history and so brings the age-old search of philosophy for wisdom to a decisive close.[22] Furthermore, similar to Thoreau, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are also both reacting to the increasing professorial status of philosophy established by the example of Kant and especially Hegel.[23]

With his characteristic humor, Kierkegaard says that the "existence dialectic" of the ever-questioning Socrates wherein the Greek sage begins with being and not knowledge would set the ever-lecturing professor Hegel into a profuse "sweat."[24] This is precisely because the non-abstract existential orientation of the Greek approach to philosophy gives no predetermined reassurance that all answers will be clear in the final conclusion.[25] For beginning with knowledge, as the Hegelians do, guarantees knowledge. However, beginning with being does not guarantee comprehensive knowledge. Kierkegaard wants to revive this ancient existence-dialectic by turning to what he calls "subjective thinking" that is not focused on an abstract thought system that sees an *a priori* identity between being and thought and therefore can in

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[22] Catherine H. Zuckert, *Postmodern Platos,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.
[23] *DAH*, 96-7.
[24] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Post-Script to the Philosophical Crumbs,* trans. & ed. Alastair Hannay, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 279.
[25] Kierkegaard, 279.

principle explain the whole of being; but is rather oriented to actual existence and a way of life.[26] Since the existential level of being resists abstract thought, the primary task of the subjective thinker is to follow what he calls the Greek and Christian principle to "understand himself in existence."[27] Kierkegaard summarizes his view of philosophy in the following way:

> To understand oneself in existence was *the Greek principle*, and however little content there may at times have been in a Greek philosopher's teaching, the philosopher had one advantage: he was never a comic. I know very well that if someone nowadays were to live like a Greek philosopher, i.e., expressing existentially what he would have to call his life-view, and entering existentially into it, he would be considered a lunatic.[28]

On the other hand, the modern day more respectable professor of philosophy still indeed speculates on existence problems, but "never remembers to ask himself who in all the world it could concern, least of all that it might be himself."[29] Kierkegaard holds that due to the modern objective way of doing philosophy there has been a forgetting of the existential level and a loss of philosophy as a lived reality. Kierkegaard describes this situation in the following way:

> In Greece, to philosophize was an action, and the philosopher therefore some one existing. He knew but little, yet the little he did know he knew to some purpose, because he busied himself with the same thing from morning to night. But what is it nowadays to philosophize, and what is it nowadays that a philosopher genuinely knows anything about?—for that he knows everything I do not deny. The philosophical proposition of the identity of thought and being is precisely the opposite of what is seems; it expresses the fact that thought has abandoned existence altogether, that it has emigrated and found the sixth continent where it is absolutely sufficient unto itself in the absolute identity of thought and being.[30]

A key feature of Kierkegaard's return to philosophy as a way of life is a premise that he shares with Nietzsche that, in principle, concrete existence cannot be exhausted by the concepts of

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[26] Kierkegaard, 279.
[27] Kierkegaard, 294; 296.
[28] Kierkegaard, 295.
[29] Kierkegaard, 295.
[30] Kierkegaard, 277.

rational thought. Similarly, Nietzsche also critiques the Western philosophical tradition beginning with Plato as a flight from reality to an abstract world of ideas. This common approach makes Kierkegaard and Nietzsche the fathers of existentialism. George Brandes recommended that Nietzsche read the work of Kierkegaard in 1888 but he had his mental break in 1889 and was not able to study him in depth as he intended to do.[31]

Nietzsche's Recovery of Philosophy as a Way of Life

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1899) stands as the central turning-point in the modern recovery of philosophy as a way of life because he directly influences and inspires almost all the twentieth century thinkers in this movement who come after him. While Nietzsche's works were often ignored or not taken seriously during his productive years while he was still sane, by 1900 he was widely read and became possibly the most famous philosopher in the world.[32] Due to this huge readership Nietzsche influenced a great variety of different thinkers and intellectual movements like Heidegger, existentialism, Freudian psychology and even Catholic *Communio* theologians like Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger.

Nietzsche also influenced a lesser known but identifiable movement focused on returning to philosophy as a way of life that includes twentieth century intellectuals such as Henry Adams, and philosophers such as Leo Strauss, Michel Foucault, Pierre Hadot and Étienne Gilson and their followers. In this regard, Nietzsche also shifts the ground of the return to philosophy as a way of life from a modern to what could be called a 'post-modernist movement' by permanently

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[31] Wicks, Robert, "Friedrich Nietzsche", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/nietzsche/.
[32] *EL*, 318.

inserting his critique of modern rationalism as an essential component part of the return to philosophy as a way of life. Also closely related to this critique, Nietzsche, by his personal example, provided a distinctive model of how to live the philosophical life as a writer with a special focus on the whole history of philosophy. Nietzsche attempts to overcome modern philosophy by going back to ancient philosophy and sets up a model of 'going back' to the original sources of wisdom. We can also see this 'going back' model in both Montaigne and Rousseau; Nietzsche, however, provides a much richer and more sympathetic reading of the ancients, especially in *The Birth of Tragedy*, that shows 'going back' is indeed a real possibility. This model of the philosophical life through a sympathetic reading of ancient sources which Nietzsche establishes is directly imitated by Adams, Strauss, Foucault, Hadot and Gilson.[33]

In this section in order to understand Nietzsche as the founder of this movement, we will first mention some significant philosophical influences on the early Nietzsche and then move on to an attempt to understand Nietzsche's own articulation of his vision of the philosophical way of life. For Nietzsche this is a two-fold process that begins initially as an inward search for the true self in an attempt to be free from the demands and fears of societal convention. This inward oriented pursuit of true life and freedom remains incomplete, however, without the creation of a life-giving culture. Therefore, the true philosophic way of life, according to Nietzsche is compelled to take on a more outward orientation whereby the philosopher becomes a kind of 'prophetic-legislator' in the world and a creator of values or myths. This inward-outward tension in the philosophical life between hermit and legislator basically stayed the same for Nietzsche in

[33] Heidegger could also be mentioned here because he imitates Nietzsche and provides an even more sympathetic reading of the texts of Aristotle, Plato, Heraclitus, and Parmenides. While Heidegger, following Nietzsche, influences Strauss, Foucault and Hadot to use this model, such is not the case for Gilson or Adams, who are not influenced by Heidegger but by primarily by Nietzsche in this regard.

his early and late periods. However, in his later period there does seem to be a marked tilt in this balance toward philosopher as legislator-prophet and this tilt mirrors Nietzsche's shift in concern from reviving ancient Greek philosophy as a way of life found in his early works, to a more urgent need in his later works to replace Christianity by means of the preaching of a new prophet-philosopher in the figure of Zarathustra.

Philosophical Influences on the Early Nietzsche

The key to understanding Nietzsche's revival of the philosophical life is knowing his early philosophical influences and also his autobiographical account of these early influences. In his short biographical sketch, James Miller points out that one of the biggest and earliest influences on the young Nietzsche during his undergraduate studies was his reading of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.[34] According to Nietzsche, Diogenes Laertius truly "breathes the spirit of the philosophers of antiquity" because he presents not only their doctrine but the way they actually lived.[35] By contrast, modern historians of philosophy demonstrate their misunderstanding of the philosophers they study because, according to Nietzsche, they simply present philosophy as a series of "fifty systems" side by side "fifty critiques."[36]

Of all the ancient philosophers presented by Diogenes Laertius the young Nietzsche was particularly taken with both Heraclitus and with Diogenes the Cynic.[37] Nietzsche appreciated Heraclitus because the point of departure for his philosophy was not based on logic, or extensive

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[34] *EL*, 322.
[35] *SAE*, 186-7.
[36] *SAE*, 187.
[37] *EL*, 322.

learning, but on faith in a metaphysical revelation or the "mystical intuition"[38] of a single idea.[39] Heraclitus confirms Nietzsche's theory that all philosophy begins not with reason but rather with instinct or faith.[40] Nietzsche says, "Reason is only a tool" and "One must follow instinct but one must also persuade reason to help out the instincts with good arguments."[41] Nietzsche also holds that whereas Socrates started out wanting to base his life on reason he realized secretly that it was actually based on instinct.[42]

At the same time, the young Nietzsche was also inspired by the rugged and radical way of life of Diogenes the Cynic especially his disturbing "dog-like" style toward all human conventions.[43] In fact, Nietzsche's criterion that a true philosopher must be socially disturbing is based on the account of Diogenes's question when a certain philosopher was praised in his presence: "How can he be considered great, since he has been a philosopher for so long and has never yet disturbed anybody?"[44] Similarly, the fact that the university philosophers of his day did

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[38] *EL*, 322.

[39] According to Diogenes Laertius, Heraclitus says, "Abundant learning does not form the mind; for if it did, it would have instructed Hesiod, and Pythagoras, and likewise Xenophanes, and Hecateaus. For the only piece of real wisdom is to know that idea, which by itself will govern everything on every occasion." Diogenes Laertius, *The Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers,* trans. C.D. Yonge, (London: George Bell and Sons, 1901). 376 [Hereafter cited as *Lives*]; Along these lines, Rosen speaks of "the unmistakable Nietzschean intention to present the human race with a new revelation." This new revelation, according to Rosen, is the coming of the superman through a creative revolution counterbalanced by the circle of the eternal return. Stanley Rosen, *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche's Zarathrustra*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xvi.

[40] *BGE*, 103-4.

[41] "Man muss den Instinkten folgen, aber die Vernuft überreden, ihnen dabei mit guten Gründen nachzuhelfen." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse zur Geneologie der Moral*, (Berlin: Gruyter, 1988), 112. [Hereafter cited as *Jenseits*].

[42] *BGE*, 104.

[43] *EL*, 322; *SAE*, 194. Nietzsche seems to model his famous philosophical character Zarathustra partially upon the wandering Diogenes both of whom carry around lamps in the daylight. See *Lives*, 231; Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science," In *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kauffman, 93-102, (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 95. [Hereafter cited as *GS*]. Nietzsche also bases Zarathustra on Zoroaster who is also mentioned by Diogenes Laertius as not a philosopher but a Persian Magi. *Lives*, 5; 8. The fact that Nietzsche bases his philosophical hero on two figures found in Diogenes Laertius is evidence of the deep influence that this work had on Nietzsche's understanding of the philosophical life.

[44] *SAE*, 194.

not challenge anyone and especially the power of the state, disqualified them in Nietzsche's eyes as being considered true philosophers.[45]

Thus, in a certain way, the philosophical life for Nietzsche was a kind of interesting intersection of free spirited Heraclitus' mystical instinct with Diogenes the Cynic's radical way of life based on rational criticism. Nietzsche himself points to his version of a balance of faith and reason when he speaks of:

> That genuinely philosophical combination, for example, of a bold and exuberant spirituality that runs *presto* and a dialectical severity and necessity that takes no false step is unknown to most thinkers and scholars from their own experience.[46]

Miller observes that throughout his life Nietzsche emulated both of these Heraclitus and Diogenes Laertius by, on the one hand, beginning his philosophy not on the grounds of pure logic but on mystical insight; and on the other hand, by living a life that is rationally purified from all superstitions and human conventions in such a way that it creates a markedly disturbing effect others.[47]

Besides Heraclitus and Diogenes the Cynic, Miller also points to the great influence of Montaigne on Nietzsche. Like Montaigne, who left public service, Nietzsche, after much deliberation, finally decided to give up the life of an academic scholar in 1879 and dedicate himself totally to the philosophical life. For ten years, like a modern day Diogenes, Nietzsche wandered around Italy, Switzerland, and Germany writing in extremely productive manic spurts

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[45] *SAE*, 194.
[46] *BGE*, 139. "So ist zum Beispiel jenes ächt philosophische Beieinander einer kühnen ausgelassenen Geistigkeit, welche presto läuft, und einer dialektischen Strenge und Nothwendigkeit, die keinen Fehltritt thut, den meisten Denkern und Gelehrten von Erfahrung der unbekannt…" *Jenseits*, 147.
[47] *EL*, 327.

and living off of a very small pension from his professorship at Basel until his mental break in 1889.[48]

Furthermore, as is quite well known, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) was also a major influence on the young Nietzsche. Nietzsche had a kind of personal epiphany in 1865 when he felt inspired in a second hand bookstore to pick up Schopenhauer's *World as Will and Representation*. Nietzsche claims that he was told by the voice of a Socratic *daemon* to "take it and read it."[49] Nietzsche relates that after reading one page of Schopenhauer he "trusted him at once" and became certain that he would go on to peruse every page believing and obeying "every word he ever said."[50] As a result of reading Schopenhauer, Nietzsche recounts later how Schopenhauer delivered him, from the Kantian "depths of skeptical gloom" by introducing him to "the heights of tragic contemplation."[51]

By contrast, as Nietzsche points out, the gloom of the Kantian depths consumed the German Romantic poet-philosopher Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811) and lead him to a despair of truth and ultimately to suicide.[52] Although Nietzsche never met Schopenhauer he found in him the "true philosopher" whom he had been searching for all his life in whom he could place all his trust and saved his life from the fate of Kleist.[53]

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[48] *EL*, 322; 336. Miller points out that Nietzsche wrote the first three parts of Zarathustra in three ten day spurts in a feverish trance. EL, 338.
[49] *EL*, 321. Nietzsche here is compares himself to Augustine (who in this instance compares himself to St. Anthony of the desert) who also heard the voice of a little child say "take and read." Augustine then opened his Bible to St. Paul and was converted to Christianity. Cf. *Confessions*, Book VII chapter XII.
[50] *SAE*, 133.
[51] *SAE*, 140.
[52] *SAE*, 140.
[53] *SAE*, 130.

Philosophy As a Way of Life in The Birth of Tragedy (1872)

To deal with the tragic implications of this crisis of meaning caused by Kantian skepticism, Nietzsche goes back to the origins of philosophy in Plato and Socrates in his first work *The Birth of Tragedy* in order to examine the beginnings of the dogmatic project of philosophy, which was to formulate an abstract articulation of the truth of being. In a very novel and shocking way, Nietzsche believes that Socrates willy-nilly created the doctrinal vision of philosophy as a useful illusion to distract the human race from expending their energies on the horrors of practical pessimism that result from a revelation of the absurdity of existence. By providing the promise that philosophers can clarify being through abstract concepts Socrates presented a vital myth, or a kind of distracting veil over reality that makes humanity embark on a search for the truth which avoids the dire consequences of nihilism.

However, the Socratic veil has come unraveled because this dogmatic project in the search for truth has now come to an end in the Kantian realization it cannot be completed. The history of philosophy since Socrates has been essentially de-mythologized by Kant and so, in order to avoid practical pessimism, Nietzsche calls for a new round of myth-making by philosophers who are the true legislators of the world. Philosophy, then for Nietzsche, in its essence, is not about a doctrine of objective truth but is more about a never ending personal search for truth and personal meaning as well as the creation of a culture or world through life-giving myths. In this way, philosophy for Nietzsche, within this Kantian realization, is more of a way of life focused on human poetic creativity, than on a doctrinal reflection of reality.

In Sections 13-15 in *BT* Nietzsche presents a very dense argument that criticizes Socrates as the destroyer of the Dionysian element in ancient tragedy by setting an unprecedented value

on knowledge over instinct. Nietzsche, here, is one of the first modern historians to take Aristophanes' criticism of Socrates in his comedy *The Clouds* seriously.[54] Nietzsche even sides with Aristophanes' criticism of Socrates as a culture destroying sophist. Nietzsche, however, at the same time, also rediscovers in Socrates the true nature of philosophy, not as a doctrine, but as a way of life which delights more in the search for the truth than in the doctrinal truth itself.

Nietzsche's Criticism of Socrates in The Birth of Tragedy

According to Nietzsche Socrates is moved by a divine calling from the Delphic Oracle to conduct an examination of the great Athenian statesmen and poets. However, Socrates finds that these pillars of the city practice their art not by knowledge but by instinct.[55] Socrates, according to Nietzsche, believes it is his duty to correct this lack of insight and thereby correct existence itself by means of knowledge.[56] In other words, according to Nietzsche's interpretation, Socrates wants to shift the basis of Greek culture from passionate instinct to rational consciousness, from being to knowing.

Nietzsche further argues that this little experiment in cultural change would have been forgotten if the Athenians would have just exiled him, but Socrates, with uncanny foresight, actually forced the Athenians to execute him. Thus by facing his own death with resolution and

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[54] Nietzsche's sympathetic interpretation of Aristophanes in *BT* maybe the primary example that showed future life-philosophers that going back to the original sources was a real possibility.
[55] *BT*, 87.
[56] *BT*, 88.

calm, Nietzsche says, "the dying Socrates became the new ideal" for noble Greek youths and replaced Achilles as the ideal of Greek virtue.[57]

Furthermore, according to Nietzsche, one of these noble Greek youths, Plato, continued to promote the death of Socrates as the new Greek hero and thereby destroyed the Dionysian element in Greek tragedy because Socratic knowledge enlightens the tragic presentation of reality. Socratic philosophy sees tragic reality in the following way:

> Something unreasonable, full of causes apparently without effects and effects apparently without causes; the whole, moreover, so motley and manifold that it could not be repugnant to the sober mind, and a dangerous tinder of sensitive and susceptible souls[58]

Thus, not only is the life-giving and intoxicating Dionysian element destroyed by the Socratic enlightenment as something unreasonable, but also the Apollonian element is also swallowed up by Socrates in what Nietzsche calls a "cocoon of logical schematism."[59] Socrates, according to Nietzsche, presents a philosophy of optimism which at its center holds that virtue is knowledge and therefore happiness can be achieved by a clear comprehension of the whole.[60] Now, with the general cultural influence of the Socratic premium on knowledge the Greek tragic hero has to explain his actions by arguments. There also needs to be a necessary and visible connection between "faith and morality"[61] which was not originally there. According to Nietzsche this Socratic influence that requires a rationale for human behavior is seen in Euripides' plays.

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[57] *BT*, 89. "Der sterbende Sokrates wurde das neue, noch nie sonst geschaute Ideal der edlen griechischen Jugend…" Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt Der Tragödie* (Lexington, KY: n.p., 2015), 81. [Hereafter cited as *GT*]. See also *GS*, 101.
[58] *BT*, 89.
[59] *BT*, 91.
[60] *BT*, 91.
[61] *BT*, 91.

On the other hand, Nietzsche puts an interesting twist on his narrative by pointing out that Socrates, the "despotic logician" himself, may have actually anticipated Kant and recognized the limits of logic and doubted whether knowledge of the whole could actually be attained.[62] According to Nietzsche these misgivings about the power of logic are why Socrates practices poetry at the end of his life.[63] Nietzsche here wonders if an artistic or musical Socrates is possible because it points to a way of doing philosophy that also recognizes the limits of logic and uses art to create life-giving myths for the human race. This vision of a musical Socrates where art and science come together is the imaginal basis of Nietzsche's vision of the philosophical life.

Then setting aside for the time being the question of the possibility of a musical Socrates for the moment—which for him is really the question of the historical conditions of the philosophical life—Nietzsche moves on to speak of the influence that Socratic optimism has had on history in section fifteen. Nietzsche holds that Socrates, willy-nilly, set forth a kind of myth or illusion that thought could comprehend being: Nietzsche says:

> There is, to be sure, a profound illusion that first saw the light of the world in the person of Socrates: the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being but even *correcting* it."[64]

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[62] *BT*, 92. In addition to Nietzsche's sympathetic reading with Aristophanes his idea that Socrates actually anticipates Kant presents Socrates and the ancients as actually more wise than the moderns and so presents the need to give up on modernity and go back to the ancient sources for answers. Nietzsche's answer is not to go back to Socrates but to early Greek tragedy.
[63] *BT*, 93.
[64] *BT*, 95. " Wahnvorstellung, welche zuerst in der Person des Sokrates zur Welt kam, jener unerschütterliche Glaube, dass das Denken an dem Leitfaden der Causalität, bis in die tiefsten Abgründe des Seins reiche, und dass das Denken das Sein nicht nur zu erkennen, sondern sogar zu corrigiren im Stande sei." *GT*, 88.

This "metaphysical illusion" is the basis of faith in science and the ground of the passionate instinct that drives it.[65] It is hard to know whether Nietzsche thinks Socrates consciously, sub-consciously, or unintentionally created the promise of knowledge as a metaphysical illusion.

Yet, the Socratic scientific project, reaches what Nietzsche calls the "limit of its logic" especially in the Enlightenment.[66] These limits then make certain philosophers like Lessing and Nietzsche realize that what drives Socrates' "theoretical man" is not so much the truth itself, which cannot ultimately be comprehended by rational knowledge, but the pleasure of the search itself.[67] That is, the inner secret of Socratic science is that its motivating power is not so much a pleasure in the truth itself, but a distinctive pleasure in the act of uncovering the truth. In other words Socratic science is more concerned with the pleasure of the chase. Driven by this inner dynamic and the promise of a "common net of thought over the whole globe" and the "prospect of the lawfulness of an entire solar system,"[68] science spread out like wild fire in history according to Nietzsche.

As mentioned before, this metaphysical illusion of a common net of thought was very useful because it kept the energy of people focused on a constructive pursuit of knowledge instead of more destructive "egotistic aims of individuals."[69] For, according to Nietzsche the chaos of a practical pessimism, always arises when there is not art, science or religion.[70] For

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[65] *BT*, 95.
[66] *BT*, 93.
[67] *BT*, 95.
[68] *BT*, 96
[69] *BT*, 96.
[70] *BT*, 96-7.

Nietzsche science, religion and art all serve as a kind of remedy, or distracting veil, that keeps humans from gazing into the horrors and absurdity of existence much like Hamlet.[71]

However, there are certain historical turning points where the function of art, religion and science starts to break down and tragic insight starts to peak through the veil. For, the Socratic ideal that dialectical judgment and logic would eventually lead to happiness—an ideal that has driven much of Western culture up till now—is suffering "shipwreck."[72] The shipwreck of Western culture is due to the fact that the tragic insight of Hamlet that the world is a chaos is being magnified on the cultural level. According to Nietzsche, Hamlet's tragic insight will "kill action" which always "requires veils of illusion."[73] With the end of the promises of science there are no longer any veils of illusion left to sustain the core of the Western cultural ethos. Hence, there is a risk that the whole world will see the absurdity of existence, and be influenced by the doctrine of Hamlet and will share "Ophelia's fate."[74] The culture therefore, according to Nietzsche, on the edge of Ophelian despair, stands in need of an major artistic remedy for its salvation.[75]

So Nietzsche's solution to this crisis in modernity is the hope of another Socrates who also practices music in his philosophy. This for Nietzsche is another way of proposing a way of doing philosophy that now consciously becomes an art. This image of the musical Socrates defines the early Nietzsche's vision of the new form of the philosophical life.[76] For Nietzsche

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[71] *BT*, 60.
[72] *BT*, 98.
[73] *BT*, 60.
[74] *BT*, 60.
[75] *BT*, 60; 98.
[76] *BT*, 93. The image of the musical Socrates for the philosophical life later in his later period is replaced by the image of Zarathustra. It is important to see that Nietzsche evolves his image of the modern day philosopher from a Greek poet-philosopher to a wandering biblical prophet for the philosophical life.

the history of philosophy, beginning with the Greeks, began in art and poetry and now again returns to its origins in art and poetry. With the supposed collapse of science Nietzsche sees a great need for the revival of art as a remedy and a new more artistic form of the philosophical life.

However, Nietzsche is unsure if a musical Socrates will come into being. In this regard Nietzsche ends his reflection in a state of uncertainty about the future:

> Will the net of art, even if it is called religion or science, that is spread over existence be woven even more tightly and delicately, or is it destined to be torn to shreds in the restless, barbarous, chaotic whirl that now calls itself "the present"?[77]

Despite this uncertainty, Nietzsche ends his reflections in *BT* by calling all those who see the precarious nature of the present situation to courageously move forward and "fight."[78]

The greatest challenge of the philosophical life for Nietzsche is that it must now do consciously what it once did unconsciously. In light of the tragic insight, philosophy must continue the search for the truth yet now it must continue burdened with the awareness that there is no final doctrine of truth. In addition, poet-philosophers must also artistically create myths that veil the absurdity of existence for other non-philosophers like Ophelia. This is the challenge of the musical-philosophical life to which Nietzsche calls an elite group, who, like Hamlet, have been privileged with the tragic insight; but unlike Hamlet decide to "fight" instead of surrender or let the situation be.

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[77] *BT*, 98.
[78] *BT*, 98. This is the original ending of *BT*.

Philosophy as a Way of Life in Untimely Mediations (1873)

In 1872 Nietzsche intended to write a treatise called "The Philosopher" but never did.[79] However, he does lay out his ideas on the philosophical life in *Untimely Meditations* especially in *OTA* and *SAE* which we will look at briefly.

In *OTA* Nietzsche reflects on the weakness and indifference of modern culture in general and one reflection of this weak condition is the way it treats philosophy. According to Nietzsche, the historical education that reflects and drives modern culture reduces philosophy to an "inwardly restrained knowing without effect."[80] This reduction to ineffectiveness makes philosophy a mere political, official, or church doctrine that is limited to "learned appearance."[81] The fact that modern culture is not just honest with itself, and does not just banish philosophy from its midst, is proof of its irresoluteness and cowardice, according to Nietzsche. Instead, modern culture is satisfied with "modestly draping her nakedness."[82] In other words, reducing philosophy to a mere doctrine allows the appearance of philosophy, but never allows the power of its lived reality to come forward. Nietzsche says,

> One does think, write, print, teach philosophically—all of this is more or less permitted; only in action, in so-called life all is different; only one thing is permitted here and everything else simply impossible: so historical education wills it.[83]

That is, under the system of historical education, one is permitted to look like a philosopher but never to live the philosophical life.

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[79] *EL*, 326.
[80] *OTA*, 30.
[81] *OTA*, 30.
[82] *OTA*, 30.
[83] *OTA*, 30.

Nietzsche believes that philosophy is primarily a way of life but it is tolerated by modern culture as long as it is reduced to an unnatural condition of being mere knowledge or official doctrine. Under the modern regime of historical thought, Nietzsche says:

> No one may dare to fulfill the law of philosophy in himself, no one lives philosophically, with that simple manful constancy, which compelled one of the ancients, wherever he was, whatever he was doing to behave like a Stoic if once he had pledged allegiance to the Stoa.[84]

This statement shows that Nietzsche sees philosophy as primarily a way of life and also that philosophy begins in the choice of a way of life that is indeed connected to joining a school of philosophy or entrusting oneself to a true philosopher. Nietzsche himself put his trust in Schopenhauer after reading only a single page of his writings.[85] Philosophical doctrine here is secondary for Nietzsche.

Philosophy as a Way of Life in Schopenhauer as Educator

Schopenhauer as Educator is a paean to Schopenhauer as the true philosopher, albeit, not because he taught Nietzsche the true philosophical doctrine. In fact, the specifics of Schopenhauer's philosophy are intriguingly no where to be found in the whole essay and Nietzsche even mentions that Schopenhauer has a few errors.[86] Nietzsche is not a disciple of Schopenhauer's doctrine therefore but of his way of life. Furthermore, Schopenhauer is the true educator because he liberated Nietzsche by helping him cast off the dark clouds of social

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[84] *OTA*, 29-30. Here we see Nietzsche presenting philosophy as primarily a way of life that has its source not in doctrine but in an allegiance to a school or a master. This comment by Nietzsche may be a possible source for Hadot's idea that philosophy begins with an existential choice to join a school that conducts a certain way of life and not at the end of a theoretical process. Only after this choice then does the philosopher devise a theoretical doctrine to bolster and justify the way of life that was chosen. *WAP*, 3.
[85] *SAE*, 133. Nietzsche says, "I am one of those readers of Schopenhauer who when they have read one page of him know for certain they will go on to read all the pages and will pay heed to every word he ever said." *SAE*, 133.
[86] *SAE*, 134.

convention and discover his "own true self."[87] Thus, for Nietzsche this experience self-discovery through liberation from convention is the first step in the philosophical life.

In the opening passages of *SAE* Nietzsche presents an image of human life reminiscent of Plato's cave as weighed down by the "fetters of fear and convention."[88] This cave situation makes human beings, according to Nietzsche, fundamentally lazy and timid so that they succumb to the demands by their neighbors to be conventional and follow the herd. However, there is another contrary voice coming from within that cries out for liberation, an inward conscious that says: "Be yourself! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself."[89] In the modern world this tension between the inward demands of conscience for individuality and the external demand for conventionality— complimented by private lassitude—is adumberated by the high value placed on public opinion in the present democratic age. For this reason, Nietzsche concludes that the present age, which finds its salvation in public opinion, will be the darkest and least known in later history; it is the least human portion of human history because it is ruled not by living men but by "pseudo-men dominated by public opinion."[90]

To be liberated from the dominion of public opinion, according to Nietzsche, the newborn philosopher must come to rediscover and know himself like the command of the Delphic Oracle.[91] To achieve self-discovery Nietzsche recommends against the common method of Cartesian introspection when he says: "it is a painful and dangerous undertaking thus to tunnel

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[87] *SAE*, 121.
[88] *SAE*, 127.
[89] *SAE*, 127.
[90] *SAE*, 128.
[91] *SAE*, 129.

into oneself and to force one's way down into the shaft of one's being by the nearest path."[92] Nietzsche sees this search for true nature as endless and dangerous because there is no true stable nature to discover. For, Nietzsche says, "Your true nature lies, not concealed deep within you, but immeasurably high above you."[93] In this way, Nietzsche is also departing from Montaigne, Rousseau, and Thoreau who inwardly search for a stable natural man by stripping away the layers of convention. For Nietzsche this creative up-ward process will never end.[94]

By contrast, using a directional metaphor, Nietzsche's method is to look outward and upward for self-discovery instead of inward. He says,

> Let the youthful soul look back on life with the question: what have you truly loved up to now, what has drawn your soul aloft, what has mastered it and at the same time blessed it?[95]

From this reflection on past experience and a sequence or order of loved objects the young philosopher can decipher a fundamental law of the true self. Hence, Nietzsche sees the philosophical life as beginning in the creative making of one's own true nature instead of an inner Cartesian discovery. The underlying premise of Nietzsche's creative approach is that nature is not a stable entity that one discovers and imitates, but rather nature is moody, step-motherly, merciless, cruel, incomplete and therefore in dire need of perfection by artists and philosophers.[96]

However, this philosophic self-creation is not simply based on arbitrary wish and whim, or something like a wardrobe change, but is a much more serious method based on what we

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[92] *SAE*, 129.
[93] *SAE*, 129.
[94] *SAE*, 129.
[95] *SAE* 129.
[96] *SAE*, 142.

might call "empirical revelation." For Nietzsche it is the past experiences coming from desires, loves and teachers which reveal the fundamental law of the true self. Like God giving Moses the law to create a nation, so the philosopher based on empirical self-revelation gives a law to himself. This self-mythification creates a kind of mystique of the true-self rooted in an external revelation. In this way, it is not arbitrary or constantly changing in appearance.

The most effective part of this empirical method of self-discovery, according to Nietzsche, is looking at one's teachers as liberators and revealers of the true self.[97] In order to demonstrate this Nietzsche uses his own personal autobiography. Nietzsche relates that he was always searching for a true philosopher "whom one could follow without misgiving" because one could put more faith in this true philosopher than in oneself. Nietzsche tried out different philosophers and noticed how weak the modern men were compared to the Greek and Roman men who unlike the German university actually taught a writer to write, an orator to speak, and a man to be a man.[98] Seeking an education in true virtue, Nietzsche found only scientific men living a "ghostly life,"[99] who were more bent on sacrificing themselves to the abstractions and mission of science, than focused on educating mankind for life. Nietzsche calls these men dedicated to pure science the "legion of the lost."[100] To his surprise, Nietzsche discovered that the reason the arts like oratory and writing were not taught is because there was simply no one who actually knew how to teach them.[101] In the context of his disappointment with the German university, Nietzsche continued to seek out the true philosopher who would liberate him from the

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[97] *SAE*, 129-30.
[98] *SAE*, 131.
[99] *SAE*, 144.
[100] *SAE*, 132.
[101] *SAE*, 132.

weaknesses of his scientific age and teach him to be simple and honest both "in thought and life."[102]

Finally, Nietzsche found the true philosopher in Schopenhauer because he taught more by moral example than by his teaching. In Schopenhauer, Nietzsche found an honesty, cheerfulness and steadfastness only matched in modern times by Goethe and Montaigne.[103] In this regard Nietzsche says,

> I profit from a philosopher only insofar as he can be an example. That he is capable of drawing whole nations after him through this example is beyond doubt; the history of India, which is almost the history of Indian philosophy, proves it. But this example must be supplied by his outward life and not merely by his books—in the way, that is, in which the philosophers of Greece taught, through their bearing, what they wore and ate and their morals, rather than by what they said, let alone by what they wrote.[104]

Schopenhauer for Nietzsche demonstrated this practical power of a true philosopher and proved to Nietzsche that philosophy was primarily a way of life.

Kant and Schopenhauer

In order to illustrate his understanding of philosophy as primarily a way of life Nietzsche makes a helpful contrast between Schopenhauer and Kant as the two primary examples of the philosophy in the modern age. On the one hand, Kant's example produces the philosophy professor:

> Kant clung to his university, submitted himself to its regulations, retained the appearance of religious belief, endured to live among colleagues and students: so

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[102] *SAE*, 133.
[103] *SAE*, 133-6.
[104] *SAE*, 137.

> it is natural that his example has produced above all university professors and professorial philosophy.[105]

On the other hand, Nietzsche says:

> Schopenhauer had little patience with the scholarly castes, separated himself from them, strove to be independent of state and society—this is his example, the model he provides—to begin with the most superficial things.[106]

In this regard, on a deeper level, Schopenhauer is the prime example of philosophy in the modern age especially because he, as Nietzsche says, "unlearned how to be 'pure science.'"[107] The modern men of learning lose sight of the fact that the goal of truth is life and end up mindlessly sacrificing themselves to fruitless knowledge. This results in "an unthinking and premature devotion to science" which makes modern men "crookbacked and humped."[108] In other words, to be free from pure science, for Nietzsche, is to no longer separate life from thought. To resist this temptation is a key stage in what Nietzsche calls the "liberation of the philosophical life."[109]

Nietzsche expounds more on this unthinking devotion to pure science when he describes the three fundamental dangers that threaten the revival of true philosophy. The second of these dangers is the "despair of the truth" that comes directly from a proper understanding of the implications of Kant's philosophy mentioned above.[110] According to Nietzsche, the hazardous results of Kant's philosophy are lost on most scholars because they are caught in the grip of science which makes them mere "calculating machines."[111]

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[105] *SAE*, 137.
[106] *SAE*, 137.
[107] *SAE*, 137.
[108] *SAE*, 132.
[109] *SAE*, 137.
[110] *SAE*, 140-1.
[111] *SAE*, 140.

However, a few vigorous and more sensitive souls like Nietzsche, Kleist and Schopenhauer are able to see the proper implications of Kant's philosophy. Kant undercuts any basis upon which human beings can make a decision and any basis to decide whether what they call truth is really truth or only the resemblance of truth. This lack of foundation leads to a human feeling of despair of ever knowing eternal truth. While most people don't see the dire implications of Kant's philosophy for humanity, others, like Kleist, feel wounded by it in the deepest and most sacred part of their hearts.[112] According to Nietzsche the wider impact of Kant's philosophy on the modern world will eventually become a "gnawing and disintegrating skepticism and relativism."[113]

Paradoxically, Nietzsche is on the one hand critical of Kant yet he still believes Kant is fundamentally right; and that entering the depths of Kantian skepticism is actually a necessary first step that one must take in regaining the philosophical life. For, only then will one have the tragic insight and the significance of Schopenhauer as the true philosopher will be understood properly.[114] Schopenhauer is the true philosopher precisely because he will lead those wounded hearts from the:

> …depths of sceptical gloom or criticizing renunciation up to the heights of tragic contemplation, to the nocturnal sky and its stars extended endlessly above us, and who was himself the first to take his path.[115]

Schopenhauer does this less by his doctrine and more by his example. For, he is a true philosopher: even though he is wounded by the Kantian insight that the absolute truth of nature cannot be known, he does not give up on the question of comprehensive truth. Despite Kant's

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[112] *SAE*, 141.
[113] *SAE*, 140.
[114] *SAE*, 141.
[115] *SAE*, 141.

doubt, Schopenhauer courageously still stirs himself to action and sets up his own picture of life and existence as a whole "in order to interpret it as a whole."[116] Whereas many other scholars in the wake of Kant give up the quest of philosophy, and pursue the particulars of existence in the special sciences, Schopenhauer still engages in philosophy and does not give up on truth.

Nietzsche compares Schopenhauer to Hamlet who after having the tragic insight still pursues a picture of life as "Hamlet pursues the ghost."[117] In other words, he realizes that the absurdity of existence, and the ineptitude of nature need not lead to resignation but demand a philosopher or artist to perfect this meaning by creating a picture of life. Schopenhauer creates a meaning of life for himself and from this picture others can learn the meaning of their own lives. This creation of meaning is the essence of all true philosophy according to Nietzsche.[118]

More specifically, according to Nietzsche, Schopenhauer teaches a way of life that demonstrates that the pursuit of money, honor or scholarship cannot lead the individual "out of the profound depression he feels at the valuelessness of his existence."[119] Rather, Schopenhauer teaches that after the tragic insight induced by Kant in the modern age the philosopher can only find meaning through an

> …exalted and transfiguring overall goal: to acquire power so as to aid the evolution of the *physis* and to be for a while the corrector of its follies and ineptitudes. At first only for yourself, to be sure; but through yourself in the end for everyone.[120]

In other words, the philosophical life consists in overcoming the tragic insight, and its temptation to resignation, by creating or perfecting the ineptitude of nature through art primarily

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[116] *SAE*, 141.
[117] *SAE*, 141.
[118] *SAE*, 141.
[119] *SAE*, 142.
[120] *SAE*, 142.

for oneself and secondarily for others. In this way, the philosopher becomes a creator of meaning, myth and culture like an artist. The philosophical life for Nietzsche, as we saw in *BT*, becomes a life of poetic myth-making for oneself and for the wider culture.

After explaining the three constitutional dangers to the philosophical life which Schopenhauer overcame—the second of which we just covered above— Nietzsche moves on to name three relative dangers to the philosophical life that are particular to modernity. The first of these dangers is especially revelatory of Nietzsche's understanding of how to revive the philosophical life in the modern age.[121] According to Nietzsche, the vocation of the philosopher is to become a judge of the value of existence and life. He says,

> Let us think of the philosopher's eye resting upon existence: he wants to determine its value anew. For it has been the proper task of all great thinkers to be lawgivers as to the measure, stamp and weights of things.[122]

The problem is that the philosopher must truly experience life and being in order to be its judge and this means he must encounter it within the context of a living and life-giving culture.

In the time of the Greeks this value judgment was much easier because they had "life itself before and around them in luxuriant perfection."[123] By contrast, modern philosophers are at a cultural disadvantage because they do not experience life directly like the Greek philosophers and hence have a difficult time making proper judgments on life. The moderns are especially confounded by an inner "discord between the desire for freedom, beauty, abundance of life, on the one hand, and on the other the drive to truth which only asks what is existence

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[121] *SAE*, 144.
[122] *SAE*, 144.
[123] *SAE*, 145.

worth as such?"[124] In other words, in modernity the question of truth has been separated from the question of the good.

Because modern philosophers stand in such need of experiencing "red-blooded healthy life" they also long for a culture or "transfigured physis" that will mediate this experience.[125] Thus modern philosophers are forced much more than ancient philosophers to be promoters and reformers of life and culture. In other words, modern philosophers are forced to become poets, prophets and lawgivers much more than ancient philosophers. Thus there is an inner tension in modern philosophers between being a reformer of life or creator of culture and being a philosopher in the more traditional sense of a judge of existence.[126]

Schopenhauer is the model of the philosophical life because he overcame this danger by striving against the modern age that provides a very poor experience of life. By conquering his age Schopenhauer rediscovered himself as a kind of genius. This made him experience life as transfigured *physis* and in a purer way than the modern age could offer. Thus, from this experience of true life in himself, Schopenhauer was able to affirm life and existence as such in a positive fashion and thereby offer it to others.[127] Schopenhauer experienced true life by living the philosophical life and also thereby liberated the philosophical life for others to do the same.

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[124] *SAE*, 145.
[125] *SAE*, 145.
[126] *SAE*, 145.
[127] *SAE*, 146.

The Philosopher as Prophetic Legislator in the Later Nietzsche

As Zuckert points out, Nietzsche throughout his life, always saw the philosopher as a prophetic-lawgiver.[128] However, in the Nietzsche's later period we see the prophetic aspect get more emphasis than the 'judge of existence' aspect just covered above. This shift in emphasis from the philosopher as judge to philosopher as legislator, from hermit to prophet, is interestingly also matched up with a shift in the object of Nietzsche's concern: from Socrates to Christianity and the need to replace the latter with a new philosophical religion. This shift is demarcated by Nietzsche's own revelation of the historical and cultural significance that, as he famously says, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."[129] The shift from concerns with Kantian skepticism and the collapse of science to the recognition of the significance that the Christian God is dead in the hearts of modern men has a huge impact on Nietzsche's view of the philosophical life.

In *BGE* it seems that this inner tension between judge and prophet mentioned above almost totally gives way to the prophetic aspect. In *BGE* Nietzsche again makes a familiar dichotomy between philosophical laborers, or scientific men, who imitate Kant and Hegel, and real philosophers. It seems that he is implying here that in fact Kant and Hegel are authentic philosophers to some degree by their moral influence. These philosophical laborers, according to Nietzsche, press into neat formulas all the past logical and political doctrines which are various creations of value that are taken to be truths at certain historical times.[130] These

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[128] Zuckert, 3.
[129] *GS*, 95.
[130] *BGE*, 136.

formulations make these past truths intelligible and very manageable and, like the other special sciences, this history of philosophy comes in handy for the genuine philosopher.

However, by contrast genuine philosophers "are *commanders and legislators*: they say, '*thus* it *shall* be!'"[131] Real philosophers take the useful work of the philosophical laborers and determine the purpose and goals of human life in their historical age.[132] In other words, the formulas and scholarship of the scientific men who imitate Kant become a tool or instrument for the authentic philosopher. The genuine philosopher, instead of looking to the past, looks to the future and "their knowing is *creating* and their creating a legislation, their will to truth is --*will to power*."[133]

So with the will to truth becoming a form of the will to power, in fact the most spiritual form of the will to power, the prophetic creative aspect of the philosopher becomes the mainstay of philosophical life for the later Nietzsche. The main concern of philosophy for the later Nietzsche is filling the vacuum left by the death of Christianity which for him is nothing but "Platonism for the people."[134] Thus the later Nietzsche shifts philosophy from a Greek model to a Biblical-religious model. Nonetheless, whether Nietzsche is concerned with overcoming the gloom of Kantian skepticism, or concerned with replacing Christianity with a more life-affirming religion, his overriding concern has always been the preservation of the philosophical life that is directed by an authentic form of thought that leads to the experience of true life.

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[131] *BGE*, 136.
[132] *BGE*, 136.
[133] *BGE*, 136.
[134] *BGE*, 2.

PART II: THREE LIFE-PHILOSOPHERS AFTER NIETZSCHE

INTRODUCTION TO PART II

Three Models of the Philosophical Life

Part II consists of three brief sketches, or what we may call 'portraits' of three thinkers who under the influence of Nietzsche present three distinct paradigmatic models of a return to the philosophical life. In other words, all these thinkers accept Nietzsche's essentially Romantic critique of modernity's life-destroying tendency to reduce everything to scientific knowledge and so return to a focus on the philosophical life instead of a focus on the attainment of a systematic philosophical doctrine. However, each thinker presents a different model of the philosophical life that is specified by what historical period they choose to return to in the history of philosophy.

Henry Adams, following his disillusionment with modern science reneging on its promise to discover a more certain basis of unity upon which human life and peace could be built, discovers what he sees as the unmatched beauty of the Gothic churches in France and decides to return to the Medieval cultural synthesis of faith and reason as his basis for the philosophical life and the foundation of a true life-giving culture.

Leo Strauss, disillusioned with twentieth century European political fanaticism, as well as with the renewal of religious orthodoxy, chooses to follow the example of Nietzsche and returns to the ancient Greek philosophical life. However, instead of returning to the model of Diogenes the Cynic, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, he returns to the much more moderate Socratic model of the philosophical life.

Pierre Hadot, in a personal journey of searching for an authentic mystical experience, first in the Christian mode and then in the neo-Platonic mode, eventually decides to return to the

more earthly and practical spiritual exercises of the Epicurean and Stoic schools of philosophy. Hadot focuses on the popular philosophical schools from the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods as the model for a revival of a more spiritual and practical version of the philosophical life.

Examining these three different models of the philosophical life—the medieval, the Socratic and the Stoic/Epicurean—helps us better understand Gilson's own version of the philosophical life in at least two ways. First, by comparing and contrasting Gilson's Christian model with these other models helps bring Gilson's version of the philosophical life into stark relief by clearly seeing its commonality with other models along with its important differences. Second, by showing three different models of the philosophical life influenced by Nietzsche and Romanticism's critique of modernity will also help contextualize Gilson's notion of the philosophical life within a contemporary movement and a current within the history of philosophy.

That is, we hope to show how Gilson, like Henry Adams, chooses the medieval model of the philosophical life but for reasons different from those of Adams. Gilson, at first, chooses Medieval Christian philosophy, not because he is Catholic or nostalgic, but because he sees it as solving perennial philosophical and metaphysical problems better than Descartes and modern philosophy with the help of the light of faith and revelation. Adams, on the other hand, chooses the medieval model because he sees the Gothic cathedrals as the expression of the single high-point of human intellectual and religious culture and sees the synthesis of faith and reason, and the delicate balance of passion and thought, at the root of it. In this way, Adams' model wants to lead his readers not just to an appreciation of Medieval art but to see the Force, Power, or life-

giving Energy behind Medieval art. Another important difference between Gilson and Adams is that Gilson remains an orthodox believer his whole life whereas Adams breaks from his Unitarian upbringing and remains an agnostic despite embracing the Middle Ages as the historical peak of human energy and life. Nonetheless, Gilson seems to be deeply influenced by the thought of Henry Adams and owes much to his holistic approach to the Middle Ages. They both saw the Middle Ages as the apex of human culture and the model the modern age needed to overcome its crisis of meaning.

Strauss, on the other hand, presents a Greek Socratic—often *aporetic*—philosophical life that is purposely distinct from faith and religion. This neo-Avveroistic separation of faith and reason make's Strauss's model very different from Gilson's model. Despite this disagreement about the role of faith in the philosophical life, both Gilson and Strauss have a very similar vision of the actual concrete practice of the philosophical life which for them is a very intellectual engagement in original texts from the history of philosophy in order to enter into the 'Great Conversation' of western philosophy. Also, in their model of the philosophical life both were primarily focused on understanding the author as he understood himself which calls for extensive historical, linguistic and textual knowledge. However, Strauss and Gilson would disagree about the role of Christian theology in the history of philosophy with Strauss, for the most part, leaving it out of the conversation while Gilson includes it and insists on its importance for the understanding of philosophy's own identity and history.

Hadot provides an interesting and important contrast to the much more intellectual—even sometimes heady—approach to the philosophical life of Gilson and Strauss by presenting a much more practical—even at times physical—version of the philosophical life as a series of spiritual

exercises that transform the thinker for the sake of better perceiving and living the truth. In this way, Hadot is more akin to Thoreau, and the Stoic and Epicurean schools with his focusing on personal spiritual transformation and life-changing experiences. Nevertheless, Hadot shows the deep influence on his own thought by Gilson's concrete approach to existence and to philosophy.

In this regard, Hadot does two important things. First, he seems to make explicit what often remains only implicit in Gilson's thought by focusing on 'philosophy as a way of life' as his major theme in a manner that Gilson did not always make explicit. In this way, Hadot provides an important clarifying distinction between philosophy as a way of life and philosophical discourse that helps illuminate the thought and life of Gilson. Second, more than any other modern thinker, Hadot provides an important historical proof that philosophy, from its origins in ancient Greece, was always primarily a way of life. Furthermore, he shows that if this practical aspect is overlooked, as it often is in modern studies on modern philosophy, then there is a distortion and loss of the true nature of philosophy.

In this way, these portraits of three different models of the philosophical life based on different historical time periods help us to better understand the influences and distinctiveness of Gilson's approach to the philosophical life and prepare us for a more informed and focused look at Gilson's notion of the philosophical life.

CHAPTER III

Romanticism in the Thought of Henry Adams: The Medieval Model

Henry Brooks Adams (1838-1918) was an American intellectual turned medievalist from the Adams political family. He wrote two late works *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres* (1904) and *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907) which accept Nietzsche's essentially Romantic critique of the science-based culture of the modern age.[1] Adams, however, does not embrace Nietzsche's solution of self-conscious myth-making on the model of the Early Greek poets; although, at times, he seems to be strongly tempted in this direction.[2] Surprisingly, considering the colonial, puritanical roots of his family, and his personal agnosticism, Adams rather turns to the mystery and symbolism of medieval Christianity for answers about true culture, art and the education for life that he felt were not given to him at Harvard. Adams indeed presents the perceived personal presence of the Virgin Mary as the life-force behind the art and scholarship of the High Middle Ages which created what he contends is the deepest unity ever achieved by any human culture. This is why Adams, at times, proudly calls himself the "Virgin's pilgrim."[3]

Adams argues that an antagonistic balance or healthy tension between faith and reason was a necessary component in sustaining the creative energy of the Virgin Mary. He sees this

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[1] Adams mentions Nietzsche and his critique of modern culture explicitly in *The Education of Henry Adams,* In *Henry Adams: Novels, Mont St. Michel, the Education*, ed. Ernst Samuels, and Jayne N. Samuels, 715-1192 (New York: Library of America, 1983). [Hereafter cited at *EHA*]. Adams also shows himself to be very familiar with, and deeply influenced by Nietzsche's thought especially in *EHA* 1137-1141. In this section Adams presents his own version of a watershed moment when he realizes that 'God is dead' and its cataclysmic significance for human culture. For more on the influence of Nietzsche on Henry Adams see Julika Griem, "The Poetics of History and Science in Nietzsche and Henry Adams." In *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought*, ed. Manfred Pütz, 41-64, (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995).

[2] *EHA*, 1139.

[3] *EHA*, 1150. Adams remains an agnostic and does not explicitly convert to Christianity in his memoir as one might be lead to expect from his love of the culture of the Middle Ages and his excessive praise of the Virgin Mary; remarkably enough, Adams does at times directly invoke the person of the Virgin Mary with such tenderness and speak about her in such personally affectionate terms that it seems to go beyond the point of irony, e.g. *EHA*, 1110-1111. Furthermore, in contrast to Nietzsche, Adams also seems to personally hold on to hope for eternal life. *EHA*, 1081; 1181.

tension reflected in the transition point between the Gothic and Romanesque architectures. He also sees this fruitful tension presented in the writings of certain mystics like Bernard of Clairvaux and Francis of Assisi, representing emotion, on the one hand, and certain philosophers like Abelard and St. Thomas Aquinas, representing science, on the other hand. According to Adams once the balance of faith and reason tilted in favor of reason in the late Middle Ages the forces of rationality, and the technology it produced, started to slowly move the culture from a unity to a multiplicity which was perfected in 1900 with the discovery of the instability of the uranium atom.

Henry Adams's criticism of the culture-dissolving aspects of reason, his views on aesthetics, as well as the rediscovery of the High Middle Ages in response to the crisis of modernity, all set him squarely in Romantic school. In addition to this, his emphasis on the balance between faith and reason as the key to cultural unity makes him a unique and interesting precursor to Étienne Gilson, who provides a similar answer and seems to be deeply influenced by Adams directly.

Furthermore, Adams is clearly approaching philosophy as a way of life. For EHA is a fascinating autobiographical description of his search, not for a doctrine, but for unity, truth and an authentic education that would teach him how to really live well. In other words, Adams was seeking out a truly life-giving way of life. He does not find this true education or unity in Boston with his Grandfather John Quincy Adams, nor at the Unitarian Church, nor at Harvard, nor in America, nor in Germany, nor in England but finally in the Gothic churches of Medieval France.

In this chapter, we will first look at Adams's interesting critique of modernity. The we will look at his turn to the High Middle Ages as the height of human culture. Finally, we will discuss the influence of Henry Adams on Gilson.

Henry Adams' Critique of Modernity

Adams' critique of modern science based culture surfaces in many places throughout *Mont St. Michel and Chartres* and *EHA* but especially in their structure and interrelatedness. On the surface these are two separate works with totally different contents, styles and goals: *Mont St. Michel and Chartres* is a travel book for his niece or any future "nieces in wish" who will be touring the Romanesque and Gothic churches of France.[4] *EHA* is a personal memoir explicitly modeled on Rousseau's *Confessions* focused on his search for an education that would provide a meaningful way of life to meet the challenges of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[5]

However, *MSC* and *EHA* cannot be properly understood without one another and could be considered two volumes of a single work. For, *EHA* is focused on a search for a theoretical and practical model that will give him an effective way of living in the context of his own culture and times. To discover how to live effectively in his own time Adams thinks he needs to understand it in proper relation to another time.[6] Adams decides in Paris in 1902, after ten years of study, to choose the High Middle Ages to use as a fixed vantage point or foil for his own times. Adams seeks to understand and overcome the multiplicity and chaos of his own time by

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[4] Henry Adams, "Mont Saint Michel and Chartres." In *Henry Adams: Novels, Mont St. Michel, the Education*, ed. Ernst Samuels, and Jayne N. Samuels, 337-714, (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 341. [Hereafter cited as *MSC*].
[5] *EHA,* 721.
[6] *EHA*, 1117.

comparing it to the grand unity and order of the medieval period.[7] Adams' one-time doctoral student at Harvard, Henry Cabot Lodge, points out that whereas Augustine in his *Confessions* works from multiplicity to unity, Adams works from unity to multiplicity.[8]

Adams, in other words, puts the Enlightenment narrative on its head. Instead of seeing history as a march of progress from the illusion of superstition and religion to the clarity of reason and modern science, Adams sees history as a kind of devolution, or dissolution, from the peak of cultural unity in the High Middle Ages to a societal breakdown into multiplicity in modern times. Adams sees a breakdown of the old universe into what he calls a "new multiverse."[9]

It should be noted that this notion of moving from unity to multiplicity has a strong resemblance with Nietzsche's image that the modern world is a broken up ice-flow of the glacier of the Middle Ages due to the decision in the Reformation to create domains in life where religion does not hold sway. In this regard, Nietzsche says,

> We have still to learn; we are, in any case, even now still in the ice-filled stream of the Middle Ages; it has thawed and is rushing on with devastating power. Ice-floe piles on ice-floe, all the banks have been inundated and are in danger of collapse. The revolution is absolutely unavoidable, and it will be the atomistic revolution.[10]

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[7] *EHA*, 1117.
[8] *EHA*, 719.
[9] *EHA*, 1138.
[10] *SAE*, 150.

The Dynamo and the Virgin

To demonstrate a similar point Adams uses another image of contrast between the "dynamo and the Virgin" to demonstrate the cultural loss of unity brought on by modern science.[11] Cultures, according to Adams, are determined or driven by what he calls certain attractive "forces" like religion and technology.[12] The culture of the High Middle Ages in France is captured by the Virgin Mary whereas the culture of America is captured by the dynamo. Adams relates two illuminating experiences in France in 1900 to demonstrate his point. First, Adams is seeking knowledge at the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris with Samuel P. Langley (1834-1906) an American astronomer, inventor and early aviator. Langley completely ignores the art exhibits at the Louvre and leads Adams to "great hall of dynamos" which Langley considers to be the true "forces."[13] Adams points out that Langley is simply fascinated by the dynamo's ability to convert coal into electricity. For Langley the dynamo is a "symbol of infinity."[14] Adams stands in front of a line of several forty-foot tall dynamos with their huge wheels spinning with a soft murmur which he felt as a "moral force" just as the early Christians felt the cross as an occult force.[15] The immense power of the dynamos made Adams feel compelled even to pray to it as one would pray to the cross.[16] The dynamo thus takes the place of the cross in modern culture as a symbol of unlimited energy.[17]

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[11] *EHA*, 1066-76.
[12] *EHA*, 1153.
[13] *EHA*, 1066-7.
[14] *EHA*, 1067.
[15] *EHA*, 1067.
[16] *EHA*, 1067.
[17] *EHA*, 1067.

From this experience Henry Adams now sees "lines of force" where he once saw personal "wills" and sees history as determined not so much by ideas, thoughts or great wills but by a series of religious forces and energies that capture the religious impulse of human beings.[18] Through the lens of force, very similar to Nietzsche's lens of power, Adams sees certain milestones of history where new forces capture human beings and thereby create whole new cultures and ways of life. For example, Constantine discovered the occult power of the cross in 310 A.D. to win the battle at the Milvian bridge whereas Columbus discovered the new world in 1492 and both men created whole new cultures. Now in 1900 these "rays of mystery" coming from the dynamo amount to a new force that inspires a religious awe at the center of modern scientific-technological culture.[19]

Adams also relates how his and Langley's American minds were especially attracted and moved by the power of the dynamo, but were simply unable to feel (or even, in Langely's case, to aesthetically appreciate) the power of the Virgin Mary present in the art of the Louvre or sanctuaries of Chartres. For Henry Adams the Virgin Mary was the:

> highest energy ever know to man, the creator of four-fifths of his noblest art, exercising vastly more attraction over the human mind than all the steam-engines and dynamos ever dreamed of; and yet this energy was unknown to the American mind.[20]

Thus the contrast demonstrates the cultural loss in the move from the culture and art created by the Virgin and the culture and art created by the dynamo.

A second revelatory experience for Adams that points to a cultural loss is when he goes to the Cathedral at Amiens with the famous American sculptor, and his personal friend, Augustus

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[18] *EHA*, 1109.
[19] *EHA*, 1069.
[20] *EHA*, 1071.

Saint-Gaudens (1848-1907). Interestingly, Adams turns his attention away from the Cathedral itself to Saint-Gaudens' reaction to it. He notes that Saint-Gaudens is not affected by the hatreds of the French revolution or the nostalgia of the Romantics when looking at the art of the Cathedral. Saint-Gaudens as an American Renaissance artist is beyond these prejudices and simply appreciates the monuments themselves for their line, unity, scale, proportion and use of light and shadow. Yet, Saint-Gaudens still remains totally unaware of the force and energy that created all the art which is the Virgin and her promise for a share in eternal life.[21] Referring to Saint-Gaudens Adams says, "The art remained, but the energy was lost upon the artist."[22]

Adams says that he and his friend Saint-Gaudens as Americans find it much easier to experience the horse or railway station as power instead of the Virgin.[23] Yet, the railway and steam engine, taken as the primary attractive forces of the modern world, do not produce great art and culture like the Virgin did in medieval France. Adams says, "All the steam in the world could not, like the Virgin, build Chartres." He believes the art of the Gothic cathedrals proves that the symbol and energy of the Virgin is the "greatest force the western world ever felt, and had drawn man's activities to herself more strongly than any other power, natural or supernatural, had ever done."[24] Once again this experience at Amiens shows Adams the cultural loss that took place in the so-called 'progress' from the Middle Ages to modern America.

These revelatory experiences with both Langley and Saint-Gaudens revealed to Adams what he calls the "eternal mystery of Force" that determines human history.[25] He speculates that

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[21] *EHA*, 1073.
[22] *EHA*, 1073.
[23] *EHA*, 1074.
[24] *EHA*, 1075.
[25] *EHA*, 1110.

'Force' manifested itself in the Middle Ages as simply the love for God and the desire of eternal life especially through the symbol of the Virgin Mary.[26] However, after 1500 this attitude began to decline due to an inundation of a multitude of new forces that captured human attention like gun powder, the compass, the new world, etc.[27] After discovering the mystery of force Adams in imitation of St. Bernard of Clairvaux asks the Virgin at Chartres to show him "Force" or what Pascal calls "God."[28] In the dramatized exchange between Adams and the Virgin of Chartres, she says he can only offer him Love, Christ and his Church, but recommends to Adams that if he wants knowledge he must turn to Thomas Aquinas and the medieval schoolmen.[29]

Adams then takes the Virgin's advice and discovers quite to his surprise that Thomas Aquinas' account of the unity of nature grounded in a personal God is actually more scientific than the account of unity given by modern science. For, as a living personal God omnipotent and omniscient, the idea of God unifies both thought and life. The problem with modern science is that it provides no proof for, or connection between, its forces and particles.[30] Nor does it give any account of a reconciliation between thought and mechanics or, in other words, a real account in science of the scientific knower.[31] Saint Thomas, on the other hand, links together the "joints in his machine" by holding that an intelligent prime mover as the primary mode of force in nature and the "cause of all form and sequence in the universe."[32] Adams at this point realizes from St. Thomas that 'Force' understood as an intelligent person is the only guarantee for unity

[26] EHA, 1110.
[27] EHA, 1110.
[28] EHA, 1110.
[29] EHA, 1110-1.
[30] EHA, 1111-2.
[31] EHA, 1112.
[32] *EHA*, 1112.

and order in the universe and also therefore the only hope for unity and order in society.[33] Adams concludes that "Mind and Unity flourished or perished together."[34] This means the only hope for real unity lies in the belief in a personal God.

Adams' Dilemma: The Church, Science or Anarchy

Henry Adams, in his search for education which is also a search for the true unit of force, faces a dilemma to either assert unity or deny it.[35] To assert unity means one of two things. Either join the Church, which he is very hesitant about due to his personal concerns about its hostile rejection of pantheism and the role it played in historical violence.[36] Or, Adams could continue to trust in the promise of modern science for a ground of unity which now seems improbable due to recent discoveries.[37] To deny any force of unity and embrace anarchism would risk the punishment of modern society, if it is properly understood as the denial of order or as an embrace of anarchy. Another problem with choosing the option of denial is that, according to his study of the history of philosophy, it appears that no philosophers from the Greeks to Descartes to Hume to Hegel ever seemed to have fully denied unity, although some like the Manicheans have come close by asserting two principles.[38] This dilemma puts Adams at a loss and makes him feel like many thinkers in the past, caught in the "eternal dragnet of religion."[39]

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[33] *EHA*, 1112.
[34] *EHA*, 1112.
[35] *EHA*, 1112.
[36] *EHA*, 1112.
[37] *EHA*, 1112.
[38] *EHA*, 1114.
[39] *EHA*, 1112.

Modern Science Reneges on Its Promise

Before making his choice between anarchy and unity Adams again relates the history of thought as a search for "Unity."[40] He argues that all philosophers for thousands of years assumed there was Unity but in their search still had not found it.[41] The Church confidently claimed to have found it in a personal God and built a society on the assertion and fiercely protected it even to the point of great violence. However around 1450, due to new forces in the world, certain people in the universities had the courage, even though forbidden to do so, to seek "some new assumption of Unity, broader and deeper than that of the Church."[42] Adams says that, like most of his generation, he always simply trusted the "word of science" that its promised "Unit" was "as good as found" but it would not be an "intelligence" or a "consciousness" but still could serve as a basis of societal unity and culture.[43] Thus modern culture from the fifteenth century was built on faith in the promise of cultural unity and peace made by modern science.

However, in 1902 after sixty years of waiting Adams takes a look at the long promised "final synthesis of science" which holds that all matter is ultimately gas.[44] Yet, this kinetic theory of gases leads to a deeper analysis that shows the series of colliding atoms in gases are not solid units but are themselves a series of colliding particles and forces.[45] Following this deeper and deeper analysis Adams concludes that science presents all matter as ultimately motion. This conclusion comes from the aftermath of what he calls the "metaphysical bomb" dropped by

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[40] *EHA*, 1113.
[41] *EHA*, 1113.
[42] *EHA*, 1113.
[43] *EHA*, 1113.
[44] *EHA*, 1113.
[45] *EHA*, 1113.

Marie Curie in 1898 with her discovery of "radium" that is, radioactive uranium.[46] Curie conclusively showed that the radiation of a stream of particles came from the uranium atoms themselves, and not as a result of any exterior chemical reactions with their environment. This proved that the atom itself was not an indivisible unity but a motion of unstable particles.[47] For Adams then science had not found the unity of force it promised to build life upon.

Adams concludes from this that science presents a picture of nature not as an ordered sequence grounded in the unity of the atom but as a chaotic flow.[48] To those who hoped for unity modern science delivers multiplicity. This realization for Adams, at this point, makes him conclude that modern science simply reneged on its original promise of unity.[49] The denial of a true unit of force by science is, as he says, "well enough for science but meant chaos for man."[50]

In this way, Adams holds that modern science has now quite nonchalantly denied unity without fully appreciating the alarming cultural implications of this denial—almost forgetting the great promise it made in 1450. Indeed, the irresponsible nonchalance of science is seen in the statement of politician-philosopher Arthur Balfour (1848-1930) who, on the behalf of British science, says that "the whole human race lived and died in a world of illusion until the last year of the century."[51] From Adams' perspective the denial of unity by science means that all human ideas of unity, beauty, order, goodness, truth, being, form etc. were only creations of the human mind imposed on a chaos and not grounded in nature. For Adams, the kinetic theory of gas as

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[46] *EHA*, 1113.
[47] *EHA*, 1113.
[48] It seems that Adams gets much of his ideas and imagery from Nietzsche especially in *SAE* where Nietzsche argues that once the Church was the ground of unity in the Middle Ages but now we live in the age of atoms and the age of atomistic chaos. Nietzsche says, "the revolution is unavoidable, and it will be the atomistic revolution: but what are the smallest indivisible basis constituents of human society?" *SAE*, 150.
[49] *EHA*, 1114.
[50] *EHA*, 1114.
[51] *EHA*, 1138.

the final synthesis of science amounts to an "assertion of ultimate chaos" which means "Chaos is the law of nature; Order was the dream of man."[52]

Looking on the bright side, so to speak, Adams sees how the assertion of chaos has the benefit of clearly explaining why people invariably revolt when societies attempt to impose law, and also why human beings treat others so badly. Yet, this completely new situation leaves Adams with a staggering problem regarding the future. Modern culture now can only look forward to a "despotism of artificial order which nature abhorred."[53] Adams claims that this brought a completion to his search for education and that it was a journey he never wished he would have started, and he wishes he could go back to his essentially eighteenth century upbringing when, "God was Father and nature was mother" and "all was for the best in a scientific universe."[54]

Adams employs a helpful analogy to show the alarming situation of 1900 in history. He holds that, in the movement of history, men's minds were like a pearl oyster that secreted its own universe to suit its different conditions and forces that acted on it. Man would build up a "shell of nacre that embodied all its notions of the perfect."[55] This universe held true for man because it was his own work of art or what Adams calls "the Eden of his own invention."[56] The oyster can assimilate and change with the insertion of a small piece of sand, yet if a hurricane comes or volcano erupts and dislodges it from its oyster bed then it can not adjust but is doomed to

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[52] *EHA*, 1132.
[53] *EHA*, 1138.
[54] *EHA*, 1138.
[55] *EHA*, 1138.
[56] *EHA*, 1139.

perish.[57] This hurricane for Adams is the scientific discoveries of 1900 that matter is ultimately motion. In other words, Henry Adams sees the arch of human thought in its search for unity being moderately shifted in different ways in the past by various forces, but now with modern science's denial of unity in nature this arch of thought is totally "snapped" in a cataclysmic way in 1900.[58] This image of the oyster is very close to Nietzsche's notion of man giving an Apollinian structure to shield human beings from the Dionysian chaos.

Henry Adams, like Nietzsche, was alarmed about the future and sees that modern science's assertion of nature as a chaos, or matter as ultimately motion, is indeed an upheaval not easily dealt with by men who are used to believing in the truth of order in nature as the ground for culture, religion, society and law. Adams' realization that modern science has reneged on its promise of Unity is also an admission that 'Unity is dead' which is in parallel to Nietzsche's realization that 'God is dead'. Adams, like Nietzsche, is not as concerned with the truth of the matter as with the catastrophic cultural implications for human beings who cannot build a stable genuine culture on modern science. Thus Adams comes to a similar conclusion as Nietzsche that science has shown nature to be a chaos and that this has left culture and human life impoverished and could lead to catastrophic consequences such as future despotism.

Adams' Response to the Death of Unity

However, Adams, does not also stand with Nietzsche's response to the modern crisis. He provides another answer which is different than Nietzsche's response in three ways.

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[57] *EHA*, 1139. Also Adams' talk of assimilating new realities is very close the thought of Gilson in the *Essai* who talks about the role of reason being to helping the law of the personality assimilate new realities and experiences with its own identity and having to change.
[58] *EHA*, 1137.

First, while Nietzsche presents himself as a committed atheist, Adams remains a slightly hopeful agnostic. Nietzsche takes the picture of nature presented by modern science as chaos as the final word on the matter. Adams is more unsure about the ultimate truth of modern science and remains more open than Nietzsche to the faith of the Church. For, after accepting the death of unity in a cultural sense and not seeing any way forward either with the Church or with modern science, Adams still does not totally despair in his education but holds on to a belief in what he presents as a quasi-divine "Force" that guides history. Adams presents his theory of Force at the end of *EHA* in a short philosophical treatise entitled "Dynamic Theory of History."[59] Adams holds that one can call this force that guides history 'God' or 'nature' and remains uncertain whether this verifiable force is personal or guides history and human beings toward a certain purpose or goal.[60] Adams also says in his treatise,

> There is nothing unscientific in the idea that, beyond the lines of force felt by the senses the universe may be,—as it has always been,—either a supersensuous chaos or a divine unity, which irresistibly attracts and is either life or death to penetrate.[61]

Here in this quote Adams shows himself to be ultimately agnostic about both God and eternal life.

However, by the end of the book Adams's agnostic resignation seems to begin to morph into a kind of personal surrender to providence and eternal life. For, after hearing of the death of his close friend John Hay (1838-1905), Adams explicitly compares himself to Hamlet in the final scene of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Adams imitates Hamlet's possible surrender to a special providence and a peaceful assent to a personal call to die. Adams seems here in this final

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[59] *EHA*, 1153-66.
[60] *EHA*, 1165.
[61] *EHA*, 1165.

passage to profess a glimmer of hope in eternal life and even the creation of a better world on earth when he relates that possibly he and his best friends Clarence King (1842-1901) and John Hay, who he "began life" with, may, by some grace, be able to return to earth and "find a world that sensitive and timid natures could regard without a shudder."[62]

So in response to the modern crisis, where Nietzsche calls for a more aggressive attitude of making and breaking values, human ideals and religious myths, Adams takes on an attitude of peaceful surrender to the dynamic Force of history. Adams's personal philosophy of hope in the possibility of God in this regard is symbolized by the bronze statue he personally designed with his friend Saint-Gaudens of a ponderous veiled figure, based on Buddhist art, staring off into the distance called "The Peace of God."[63]

Second, Adam's attitude of resignation to Force as the true creator of history and culture makes Adams more of a traditional Romantic than Nietzsche. Whereas both accept the Romantic critique of a science based culture, Adams sees the energy and forces of nature as the source of history and culture while Nietzsche sees the creativity of human beings as the source of culture. Adams surrenders to this external divine-like force of nature the way the early pantheistic Romantics opened themselves to revelation from divine nature to create a whole new culture or even religion.

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[62] *EHA*, 1181.

[63]The St. Gaudens bronze figure was made for Adams' wife Clover's grave and eventually Adams' own grave and in Rock Creek Cemetary in Washington, D.C. The Bronze Figure became a popular tourist destination and Adams would go to Clover's grave just to watch the response of different types of people. Adams notes that most Asians or Indians would have immediately felt the inner meaning of the mysterious figure but most Americans just thought it was just a bust of a real person, while often the Catholic priests from nearby Catholic University of America would passionately deplore it as an image of atheistic despair. However, according to Adams the meaning of the bronze is the opposite of this and a demonstration of true faith. *EHA*, 1020-21.

Third, another aspect that makes Adam's response differ from Nietzsche is that, whereas Nietzsche turns to the Greek model of religious myth-making for inspiration, Adams turns to the High Middle Ages for inspiration. Therefore, let us look briefly at how Adams sees faith and reason as the energy that drives the High Middle Ages.

Adams' Turn to the High-Middle Ages

In *MSC* Henry Adams admires the French High Middle Ages for its energy and unity especially shown in the first crusade and its expression in art. Adams says, "Never has the western world shown anything like the energy and unity with which she then flung herself on the East."[64] He also says, "Baring her family quarrels, Europe was a unity then in thought, will and object. Christianity was the unit."[65]

Henry Adams tries to illustrate the raw energy of the High Middle Ages. While most modern historians through the lens of Enlightenment prejudices see the Middle Ages as a time of stillness, or a pause in thought and lack of intellectual and cultural progress, Henry Adams points to the great cultural energy that the French people put into the building of great Churches between 1170-1270. He points out that during this time eighty cathedrals and five hundred cathedral sized Gothic churches were built and every town large or small totally dedicated themselves to rebuilding their home church. For Adams the period between 1000-1300 shows an intensity of conviction and passion, loyalty or patriotism that is unparalleled in any historical

[64] *MSC*, 371.
[65] *MSC*, 371.

economic effort with the exception of war.[66] The whole economy of each town and the country of France was focused on building better churches out of devotion to the Virgin Mary.

Adams points out that most people past the 16th century mistrust the people of the Middle Ages, and look down upon them. Yet, in a certain way, Adams argues, the Middle Ages moved faster in its pursuit of art and ideas than the nineteenth century.[67] Adams says, "the nineteenth century moved fast and furious, so that one who moved in it felt sometimes giddy, watching it spin; but the eleventh moved faster and more furious still."[68] Adams focuses on the pointed arch which enabled the French to build churches higher and higher all for the sake of letting in showers of light through blue stained glass on their passionate worship.[69] The pointed arch was not only one among many styles in France but developed into a whole system of architecture that covered France in as little time as fifty years.[70] Adams marvels at the fact that there was more economic and cultural effort put into the building of these churches than in the building of the railroads in modern times. Adams also points out that the focus of the trade at the time was not on money making as much as it was on attaining ideas in philosophy, poetry and art.[71] For Adams the medieval dedication to both church building and new philosophical and theological ideas shows a richness of culture compared to the modern dedication to building railways and commerce.

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[66] *MSC*, 428.
[67] *MSC*, 470.
[68] *MSC*, 371.
[69] *MSC*, 432; 441.
[70] *MSC*, 432; 470.
[71] *MSC*, 470.

The Balance of Faith and Reason as Source of Cultural Energy

Adams argues that the highpoint of the Middle Ages is the point where Aristotle was first introduced and the schoolmen like Abelard started to seek God by reason and logic while at the same time the mystical monks like St. Bernard, who only wanted to seek God by faith, condemned this attempt by philosophers like Abelard as futile.[72] Adams does not choose the side of Bernard or Abelard but sees the moment of antagonism between faith and reason which they represent as the key to the great cultural energy of the Middle Ages.[73] There is a debate in medieval society over whether to reach God by reason or by faith and love. According to Adams eventually reason wins with Thomas Aquinas but it is the moment of doubt and uncertainty about which one is the best path to God that produces the greatest art, poetry, cathedrals and over all unity of life, thought and cultural expression.[74]

Adams interestingly connects this moment of doubt about the path of faith or reason with the transition from romanesque architecture dominated by the rounded arch and the Gothic style dominated by the pointed arch.[75] For Adams the rounded arch represents the love of God and faith and the newer pointed arch represents the logic of God and reason. He says,

> One may not be sure which one pleases most, but one need not be harsh towards people who think that the moment of balance is exquisite. The last and highest moment is seen at Chartres where, in 1200, the charm depends on the constant doubt whether emotion or science is uppermost; at Amiens, doubt ceases; emotion is trained in school; Thomas Aquinas reigns."[76]

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[72] *MSC*, 607.
[73] *MSC*, 631.
[74] *MSC*, 638.
[75] *MSC*, 610.
[76] *MSC*, 638.

So it is the balance between faith and reason, emotion and science, that creates the context for an unprecedented release of cultural energy and unity of the Middle Ages.

Attempting to account for Adams's medievalism, historian Ernst Robert Curtius sees Adams as a part of a movement of American medievalism, a movement seeking to go back beyond Puritanism to the origins in Puritanism in the Middle Ages in a Romantic way like going back to a mother.[77] Curtius interestingly points out that France and England were virtually unified politically and culturally in the High Middle Ages and it is not totally counterintuitive that the son of Puritans like Henry Adams would go back to the cathedrals of France to better understand his own America. For from Adams' perspective Medieval France is the source of the unity from his own American multiplicity or disunity unraveled itself.

Henry Adams and Étienne Gilson

In this way, Adams is a kind of precursor and inspiration for Étienne Gilson. Both accept Nietzsche's Romantic critique of modernity and see pure rationality as a corrupting force on culture. However, both also disagree with Nietzsche's solution of myth-making and turn to the Middle Ages for answers for cultural unity and life. In this regard, both Adams and Gilson are distinctive because they do not return to a single doctrine like that of Thomas Aquinas, in the fashion of the neo-thomists but to the whole cultural synthesis of the Middle Ages including its art, architecture and literature. This aesthetic holistic approach is seen in the curriculum of Gilson's PIMS which covered art, architecure, liturgy, and literature in addition to philosophy

[77]E. R. Curtius, 'The Medieval Bases of Western Thought', A lecture delivered on July 3, 1949 at the Goethe Bicentennial Convocation at Aspen CO, http://www.pro-europa.eu/index.php/en/library/the-spirit-of-europe/188-curtius,-ernst-robert-the-medieval-bases-of-western-thought.

and theology. Furthermore, Adams and Gilson also see the balance of faith and reason as the foundation of cultural unity in the Middle Ages. We see this throughout Gilson's work where he never exclusively allows reason or faith to be the dominating force, a point especially evident in his *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*.

These are just a few of the many parallels between Gilson and Adams, but the question still remains whether there is a direct influence of Adams on Gilson. The influence does seem to be there for several reasons. First, Gilson was impressed by and very familiar with the work of Henry Adams by 1937 for he begins lecture six of his Heloise and Abelard lectures at the Collège de France and says that Adams has a "perspicacity that borders on genius."[78] Gilson also mysteriously calls Adams' *Chartres* a "divinatory work."[79] Gilson also mentions that this book was published in 1905. The remark seems to indicate that Henry Adams gained his amazing observations out of nowhere, much like Chesterton received his philosophy out of nowhere, without study, which Gilson also marveled at. Also Gilson lived in the Henry Adams House on campus at Harvard when he gave the William James Lectures in the fall of 1936.[80]

Actually, we also can show that Gilson was quite familiar with Henry Adams's work by 1926. Referring to Henry Adams, Gilson says,

> On my arrival [to Harvard University] I was stupefied to learn that one of the greatest medieval scholars there ever was had been for years lecturing to a huge crowd of undergraduates. I expressed my surprise and said that in my own country, such a great master would have been left free to carry out his own work, with no other teaching duty than the formation of his own successors. But my friend Ralph Barton Perry answered me that was not the American view of the

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[78] Étienne Gilson, *Heloise and Abelard,* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2007), 87-8. [Hereafter cited as *HA*].
[79] *HA*, 184 n. 1.
[80] Laurence K. Shook, *Étienne Gilson,* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies), 228. [Hereafter cited as *EG*].

> situation. In a democracy, all students are equally entitled to have the best possible professors.[81]

We know this refers to Henry Adams because Adams mentions that he taught classes with hundreds of undergraduates which he did not very much like, preferring to teach seminars.[82] Also we know that Gilson continued to study Henry Adams throughout his career because in a letter Dorothy Thompson says to Gilson:

> Where will I find the letter from Henry Adams to Brooks, which you quote? I gather from the date and the content—although I am no authority on the brothers Adams—that Henry probably wrote the letter in comment on Brook's project which resulted in "The Law of Civilization and Decay," but I don't know where to find it. I am interested in it, because I have an extremely queezy feeling that Mr. Adams will prove to be right.[83]

Gilson calls Adams one of the greatest Medieval scholars ever in 1963 and was already familiar with his work before he arrived at Harvard in the 1920s and was reading Adams' personal letters in 1952. This all indicates that he was deeply immersed in Adams' thought for the whole span of his career and directly influenced by him.

It should also be noted that Adams was influenced by Bergson like Gilson was and had had a personal meeting with Bergson at one point.[84] It is also quite probable that Adams would have attended the same Bergson lectures that Gilson attended in the early 1900s because Adams spent much time in Paris during those days and it was fashionable for many intellectuals to attend these lectures. However, it is improbable that Adams and Gilson would have formally met; for at the time, Adams was sixty-seven years old and Gilson a young man of twenty-one.

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[81] *The Place of Graduate Studies in Higher Education*, an undelivered lecture for York University Toronto, 29 January 1963, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.
[82] *EHA*, 995-6.
[83] Dorothy Thompson to Étienne 26 February 1952, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's Library, Toronto.
[84] Ernst Samuels, *Henry Adams,* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1989), 275, 417; 456.

CHAPTER IV

Philosophy as a Way of Life in the Thought of Leo Strauss: The Socratic Model

Leo Strauss (1899-1973) is generally known as a conservative political thinker who attempted to revive classical political philosophy as initiated by Socrates.[1] Strauss was a Jewish refugee from Hitler's Germany, who responded to what he saw as the failure of modern science and its offshoots—logical positivism and historicism—to establish a stable form of political life, However much Strauss urgently wanted to revive ancient political philosophy in light of these difficulties, the inner core of his thought was actually much more concerned with the revival of a contemplative and intellectual philosophical life as envisioned by Socrates and Plato.

For this reason Michael Davis notes that "more than any other thinker since Plato," Leo Strauss made the philosophic life "the centerpiece of his thought."[2] Leo Strauss himself described the hard center of his thought rather cryptically as the "theological-political predicament."[3] Heinrich Meier argues that what Strauss meant by this was that his thought was focused primarily on the rational defense and justification of the philosophical life from the attack of the political community undergirded by both the poets, on the one hand, and Biblical faith on the other.[4] Whereas many of Strauss's contemporaries were turning to either political

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[1] Leo Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?: And Other Studies*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 38. [Hereafter cited as *WIPP*]. Strauss concludes that despite its conservative attempt to mitigate the radicalism of the absolutism of the French Revolution, "Historicism culminated in nihilism." Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 18; 33. [Hereafter cited as *NRH*].

[2] Michael Davis, *Wonderlust: Ruminations on Liberal Education,* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's, 2006), 132. [Hereafter cited as *Wonderlust*].

[3] Strauss says of himself: "The author was a young Jew born and raised in Germany who found himself in the grip of the theologico-political predicament." Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 1. [Hereafter cited as *SCR*].

[4] Heinrich Meier, *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem,* trans. Marcus Brainard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)., xii. *WIPP*, 94. Some people interpret this famous phrase by Strauss to refer only to the debate between philosophy and faith. However, Velkley points out that this is impossible because Strauss says he experienced this predicament as a young man in the debates between Jewish religious orthodoxy and

activism or religious orthodoxy (like his friend Franz Rosenzweig) in reaction to the loss of confidence in rational philosophy after the First World War, Strauss wanted to formulate a third way out of the crisis by a return to non-positivistic reason through the philosophical life based on the ancient model.[5] Strauss held that the Socratic model of the philosophical life was incompatible with both faith in Biblical revelation and ancient poetry. Interestingly, Meier holds that Strauss initiated this third philosophical way, not, by arguing against Biblical revelation and poetry as one might expect, but by purposely arguing very strong cases for both revealed religion, and poetry.[6] In this rather paradoxical approach, Strauss sought to test and more clearly delimit, the true nature of the life of philosophy and thereby strengthen it. So Strauss's frequent

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political Zionism before he ever discovered philosophy. Thus in a somewhat different way than Meier, Velkley interprets the theological-political problem as referring to the inherent tensions and problems in political life including debates over the common good and the tension between divine law, on the one hand, and the statesman's need for wiggle room in particular judgements, on the other hand. Richard L. Velkley, *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 12. Velkley seems to be saying that the problem with the modern philosophers, according to Strauss, is that they departed from the natural situation of philosophy in relation to law, understood as the web of religious, moral and political authority or *nomos*, by trying to use the intellectual power of philosophy to solve the inherent and unsolvable problems in this web. In other words, they tried to solve the theologico-political problem with optimistic reason. Velkley, 45. Part of this modern project involved the re-branding of all religious faiths, and anything based on them, as prejudice and creating a new philosophically based cave or a 'second cave.' This move involved modern philosophers in all kinds of puzzles and difficult entanglements that lead to an unstable nihilism in the 20th century. In response, Strauss wanted to acknowledge the unresolvable tensions in the theological-political order and simply re-establish the pre-modern relationship of philosophy to this nexus of law and religion. The philosophic life, in this pre-modern situation, is the realm of human freedom over against the realm of law. As Meier points out, philosophy in this more natural situation must justify and protect itself before the theological-political order which it both threatens and supports at the same time. Thus, part of Strauss' vigorous defense of religious orthodoxy against the criticisms of the modern philosophers is part of his overall project of rebuilding the more natural theological-political order and so re-establish the natural situation for philosophy in relation to law. In this way, philosophy only has one cave to deal with and not two. In this way Strauss's philosophical project in relation to the theological-political order is all for the sake of re-establishing the philosophical life as the proper realm of human freedom.

[5] Strauss, it seems, was at first open to the return to religious orthodoxy but was uncomfortable with the fact that it was a turn to any orthodoxy whatsoever and not to a particular faith. This seemed rather inauthentic so he turned to ancient rationalism as distinct from modern rationalism. Strauss says, "Other observations and experiences confirmed the suspicion that it would be unwise to say farewell to reason. I began therefore to wonder whether the self-destruction of reason was not the inevitable outcome of modern rationalism as distinguished from pre-modern rationalism, especially Jewish-medieval rationalism and its classical (Aristotelian and Platonic) foundation." *SCR*, 31.

[6] Meier, xiii.

defenses of religious orthodoxy, which make him sound at times like a believer, is merely to establish the freedom of the philosophic life in relation to Biblical revelation.[7] One could even go so far as to argue that Strauss's return to the ancient philosophic way of life was the main solution Strauss offered to the problems of modern culture in the twentieth century.

The Influence of Nietzsche on the Young Strauss

Strauss's understanding of the philosophic life is deeply indebted to Nietzsche.[8] Nietzsche's seminal influence on Strauss, however, is not always readily recognized by Strauss's readers for various reasons, not the least of which is Strauss's elusive writing style. However, this is also because Strauss, in a rather uncharacteristically emotional way, criticizes Nietzsche as rhetorically and politically irresponsible.[9] Yet, on the other hand, in a personal letter to Karl Löwith, Strauss relates that "Nietzsche so dominated and charmed me between my 22nd and 30th years that I literally believed everything I understood of him."[10] Lampert points out that Nietzsche is usually the single qualified exception to Strauss's broad criticisms of modern

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[7] Cf. Velkley, 47.

[8] Lampert argues that while Strauss fostered a public image of opposition to Nietzsche he was actually the best modern interpreter of Nietzsche and much closer to Nietzsche than is generally perceived. Laurence Lampert, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996)., 3. Richard Velkley also establishes that Nietzsche and Heidegger are the two philosophers to whom Strauss owes by his own admission "the greatest philosophic debt." Velkley, 62. To see the passages in Strauss's works that reveal the influence of Nietzsche see Leo Strauss, "The Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy (1940)," in *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) [Hereafter cited as *LIGP*]; Leo Strauss, *Socrates and Aristophanes,* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 6-8 [Hereafter cited as *SA*]; *SCR*, 1-31.

[9] Strauss says of Nietzsche: "He preached the sacred right of "merciless extinction" of large masses of men with as little restraint as his great antagonist had done." *WIPP*, 55. Lampert points out that the alleged quote of Nietzsche is nowhere to be found in the works of Nietzsche. Lampert, 8.

[10] Lampert, 5. Cf. Zuckert, 105. This is very similar to Nietzsche's comment about Schopenhuaer in *SAE* referred to above.

philosophers.[11] Nietzsche heavily influenced Strauss's critique of historicism and in this regard Strauss refers to *OTA* rather frequently.[12]

But most especially we see the influence of Nietzsche in Strauss's rediscovery of philosophy as a way of life, which Strauss holds was also Nietzsche's deepest concern.[13] Despite certain reservations, Strauss saw Nietzsche as overcoming the cave created by the modern notions of history and progress which renders all philosophical questions superfluous. Nietzsche did this, according to Strauss, because he wanted to face the fundamental problems, like the Greeks, and philosophize once again about the *kosmos* or the real world.[14] In this regard, Strauss also says, "It is certainly not an overstatement to say that one has ever spoken so greatly and so nobly of what a philosopher is as Nietzsche."[15] The young Strauss charmed and dominated by Nietzsche seems to have at one time adopted Nietzsche's notion of the philosopher of the future as a musical Socrates or the overman.

Strauss' Discovery of the Shaky Foundations of the Enlightenment

However, after his thirtieth year Strauss makes an important break with certain exalted aspects of Nietzsche's vision of the philosopher and begins his eventual return to ancient philosophy which Nietzsche did not think was possible.[16] As Zuckert points out, it was not until Strauss's reading of Spinoza' critique of religion that he realized that modern rationalists were

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[11] Lampert, 6.
[12] *LIGP*, 121; For Strauss' references to Nietzsche's *OTA* see also *NRH*, 26; *WIPP*, 54.
[13] *LIGP*, 139.
[14] *LIGP*, 138.
[15] Leo Strauss, "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism," In *The Rebirth of Classical Politcal Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 40. [Hereafter cited as *IHE*].
[16] *SCR*, 31.

not as successful as they thought, or purported to be, in attempting to disprove the existence of the Biblical God, divine miracles or the veracity of Biblical revelation.[17] For, due to his orthodox Jewish upbringing and education, Strauss realized much more clearly that these religious truth claims were never intended to be made on the basis of reason but only on faith and thus remained outside of the competence and scope of science or philosophical rationality.[18]

Furthermore, Enlightenment rationalist philosophers, with their characteristic mockery of religion as old fashioned, knowingly or unknowingly, simply presupposed the impossibility of miracles and thus rejected the Bible as contradictory and religion as absurd.[19] But Strauss concluded that this presupposition would only be justifiable if man obtains a total grasp of the whole and thereby attains true wisdom which, according to Rosen, Strauss believed to be quite impossible.[20] Commenting on this discovery Rosen points out that the young Strauss realized that some of the less reflective modern philosophers were, as Rosen says, "carried away by the charm of scientific and technical competence."[21] While other more sagacious modern philosophers, knowing very well that they could not refute faith, purposely exaggerated the

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[17] Leo Strauss, "Progess or Return?" In *The Rebirth of Classical Politcal Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, 227-270, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 263 [Hereafter cited as *PR*]; Leo Strauss, "Reason and Revelation (1948)." In *Leo Strauss and the Theological-Political Problem*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 150-5. [Hereafter cited as *RR*]. Strauss says, "Philosophy may succeed in proving the impossibility of demonstrating the fact of revelation to unbelievers; … The experiential knowledge of the fact of revelation remains absolutely unshaken." *RR*, 155; Strauss also says: "atheism was no longer proved—it was asserted that God is dead, i.e. that people no longer believe in the Biblical God—which is clearly no proof. For the view that Biblical belief had been refuted by modern science and criticism presupposed belief in science and criticism, a belief utterly shattered in the period in question [After the First World War], *LIGP*, 131.

[18] Zuckert, 105.

[19] Velkley points out that Strauss was a committed Zionist in the twenties but disturbed by attempts to fuse rationalism and orthodoxy. Because of this he became convinced that "the rationalist critique of Biblical orthodoxy, as espoused by its greatest exponent, Spinoza, rested on a merely asserted and unproven superiority of reason to revealed truth." Velkley, 44.

[20] Stanley Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). [Hereafter cited as *HAP*]. As Strauss says: "One would have to know the limits of the power of nature. This would require that we have a complete knowledge of nature, or that natural science is completed. This condition is not fulfilled and cannot be fulfilled." *RR*, 151.

[21] *HAP*, 111.

power of science and belittled religion as well as ancient philosophy as a form of propaganda for their political purposes.[22] This made modern philosophy actually based on an act of the will, or belief, which for Strauss was "fatal to any philosophy."[23] Strauss saw philosophy as based on reason, and not on the will, as in religion. In this way, for Strauss, modern philosophy as 'decisionist' was similar to Christianity and had therefore still not overcome it.

Seeing the presumptuous overstatements of modern philosophy, Strauss concluded that both faith and ancient philosophy were not as dead as modern philosophy portrayed them. Strauss admits later that before he wrote his book on Spinoza he was still operating "on the premise, sanctioned by powerful prejudice, that a return to pre-modern philosophy is impossible."[24] However, after discovering the shaky foundations of the Enlightenment in Spinoza, along with the failed promises of modern science—so memorably illustrated by Henry Adams[25]—Strauss concluded that there were in fact two authentic ways of life: The life of ancient Greek philosophy based on reason; and the life of faith based on the Bible. As Strauss says: "Philosophy and the Bible are the alternatives, or the antagonists in the drama of the human soul. Each of these antagonists claims to know or to hold the truth, the decisive truth, the truth regarding the right way of life."[26] Similarly, in another essay Strauss says:

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[22] *HAP*, 110-111.
[23] *SCR*, 30.
[24] *SCR*, 31.
[25] Strauss recommends his readers to read the *Education of Henry Adams* to see how at one time science promised to the Western world to reveal the true nature of the universe and the true nature of man but suddenly in an about face science gave up on this promise at the end of the nineteenth century (See Chapter III above). According to Strauss, Adams memorably documents how science changed its claim and its character and how this sudden change has had an impact on society ever since and has lead to nihilism. *IHE*, 32. See also *LIGP*, 118; 126.
[26] *PR*, 260.

> According to the Bible, the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord; according to Greek philosophers, the beginning of wisdom is wonder. We are thus compelled from the very beginning to make a choice, to take a stand.[27]

Thus, for Strauss it seems that every Western intellectual who soberly faces the crisis of modernity and desires truth must choose between these two fundamental orientations toward truth to pursue the right way of life. Although he is somewhat coy about not declaring it publicly,[28] Strauss seems to have personally chosen the ancient way of philosophy over against the Orthodox Jewish faith of his upbringing.[29]

So for Strauss, Nietzsche was quite correct to revive the ancient Greek philosophical life as he does in his early works like *BT*, *OTA* and *SAE* but wrong in also thinking later that "God is dead," and that therefore the life of Biblical faith is on its way to utter extinction. Because he believed that the Biblical life of faith was in the throes of death, Nietzsche had a tendency along with Heidegger, according to Strauss, to Christianize the philosophical life by making the philosopher "intrinsically religious."[30] Strauss observes that, in contrast to the ancient philosophers, Nietzsche's "philosopher of the future is an heir to the Bible. He is an heir to that deepening of the soul which has been effected by the Biblical belief in a God that is holy." This preoccupation with the holy made Nietzsche see the philosophers of the future as a new

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[27] Leo Strauss, "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections," in *Fatih and Political Philosophy: The Correspondence Between Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin, 1934-1964*, ed. Peter Emberly, and Barry Cooper (The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 112. [Hereafter cited as *JA*].
[28] *Wonderlust*, 141.
[29] Rosen claims, rather bluntly, that it was quite evident to all of Strauss's "competent students" that Strauss chose Athens over Jerusalem and was not a believer in the traditional sense. However, Rosen also points out that this does not mean that Strauss thought one could simply return to ancient Greek philosophy easily. Rosen interestingly argues that Strauss was in fact more of a "stepson of the Enlightenment" because he defends its earlier conservative dimension as presented by Bacon, Rousseau, and Nietzsche. *HAP*, 112-113. Velkley quotes from Strauss's letters where he insists that he simply cannot believe and that there must be a way of life not based on faith. This way of life is either ancient philosophy or the Enlightenment. Velkley, 47-48.
[30] *IHE*, 40.

aristocracy or nobility that would take on their shoulder's the "infinitely increased responsibility of the planetary age."[31] According to Strauss, Nietzsche's new noble caste of supermen are not believers in the God of the Bible, but are atheists who are awaiting the novel revelation of a new god and thereby will create a new religion for the world through creative myth-making.[32]

Strauss, however, believed it was a mistake for philosophers to take on such a superhuman responsibility for the spiritual health of a world culture.[33] In other words, although showing a deep reverence for Nietzsche's exalted speech regarding the philosopher, Strauss, at the same time, is also saying in his comment above that Nietzsche's notion of the philosopher is actually *too noble* and *too great*.

Strauss' Uncovering of Socratic Philosophy

Strauss's view of the philosophic life, on the other hand, is much more moderate and Socratic than Nietzsche's ambitious vision. Strauss says, "But philosophy in the original meaning of the term is nothing but the knowledge of one's ignorance."[34] Putting a strong emphasis here on the words 'nothing but' Strauss wants to attempt a return to a more quiet philosophical life of intellectual virtue that is mainly contemplative in its orientation, and much less activist or creative as in the case of Nietzsche.

On the other hand, Strauss also explicitly recognizes that he is deeply indebted to Nietzsche for uncovering the original meaning of Socratic philosophy as erotic knowledge of

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[31] *IHE*, 40.
[32] *IHE*, 41.
[33] *IHE*, 41.
[34] *WIPP*, 115.

ignorance.[35] Strauss explicitly credits Nietzsche for being the first modern philosopher to raise the "problem of Socrates" in *BT*.[36] Strauss sees modern philosophy as a project that is based on a criticism of what he calls the "Great Tradition"[37] which consists of a union of ancient philosophy and Biblical faith. This criticism for Strauss begins with Machiavelli and climaxes with Nietzsche who provides the deepest and most comprehensive criticism of the 'Socratic Great Tradition' with his criticism of Socrates and Plato. To provide the deepest criticism of the 'Great Tradition' Nietzsche must first uncover the true nature of ancient philosophy at its origins. Strauss says,

> The return to the origins of the Great Tradition has become necessary because of the radical questioning of that tradition, a questioning that may be said to culminate in Nietzsche's attack on Socrates or on Plato. Nietzsche began this attack in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy*.[38]

In his attack on Socrates, as seen above in Chapter II, Nietzsche shows in *BT* that the philosophical life originally was much less about a final metaphysical doctrine and much more driven by an erotic search for the truth. Nietzsche uncovers the original Socratic sense of philosophy as primarily a life based upon knowledge of ignorance.

Yet, at the same time, Nietzsche still sides with the poets' and Aristophanes' criticism of Socrates' project of ancient rationalism as wrongfully choosing knowledge over instinct which caused great life-deleterious effects especially in the modern world. So, in other words, right at the very moment when he uncovers the true essence of the philosophical life as knowledge of

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[35] Velkley, 66.
[36] *SA*, 6-8.
[37] Lampert, 3.
[38] *SA*, 6. Cf. *LIGP*, 134.

ignorance, Nietzsche also condemns it.[39] As seen above Nietzsche condemns the logical Socrates and would only accept a new "musical Socrates" who legislates and makes myths as the basis for a new philosophical life.

Strauss, on the other hand, wants to seize and press pause, so to speak, on this initial moment of Nietzsche's rediscovery of the original meaning of philosophy in *BT*. Strauss, like Plato, takes up a defense of the ancient Socratic way of life from the criticism of Aristophanes and Nietzsche. First, Strauss admits that Aristophanes and Nietzsche's critique of Socrates indeed applies to the young "pre-Socratic" Socrates who was only concerned with natural philosophy and held no reverence for the political things that upheld human culture. But the critique does not apply to the Socrates of Plato who is primarily concerned with fostering human virtue. Strauss holds that Nietzsche makes the mistake of applying Aristophanes' critique of the young Socrates to the Socrates as portrayed by Plato. Strauss says of Nietzsche:

> He seems to imply that Aristophanes would have attacked the Socrates who defended justice and piety on the same ground on which he attacks the Socrates who assailed justice or piety, or that the Platonic Socrates is as remote from the Marathon fighters as is Aristophanes' Socrates.[40]

One could argue, based on these comments, that in the same way that Plato in his dialogues devoted himself to defending the mature Socrates from the critique of Aristophanes, which had influenced the Athenians who condemned him, so too Strauss defends the ancient philosophical

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[39] Strauss similarly credits Heidegger as well with uncovering Aristotle and Plato. Heidegger following Nietzsche realized that modern philosophy had not properly fulfilled its mission of refuting Aristotle and Plato because it did not properly understand them. Thus, Strauss says: "If Plato and Aristotle are not understood and consequently not refuted, a return to Plato and Aristotle is an open possibility." *LIGP*, 135. This is why Strauss says, "Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle was an achievement with which I cannot compare any other intellectual phenomenon which has emerged in Germany after the war." The war here refers to the First World War which for Europe was more cataclysmic than World War Two. Heidegger and Nietzsche's attempts to fulfill the mission of modern philosophy ends up willy-nilly opening up a return to ancient philosophy which Strauss takes.

[40] *SA*, 8.

life originating in Socrates as truly life-giving from the critique of Nietzsche. Thus, as Velkley points out, modern philosophy's destruction of the tradition ends in the criticism of Nietzsche and Heidegger which opens the way for a "postmodern rebirth of Socratism."[41] Strauss believed Nietzsche was actually closer to the rebirth of Socratism than Heidegger who is more of an atheist-Christian theologian.[42]

Aside from his critique of Socratic logic as life-destroying, Nietzsche's historicism and relativism is also dangerous to the philosophical life because it rules out any absolute truth and so also rules out any real erotic search for it. For Strauss, philosophy is a search for absolute knowledge and truth, a movement out of the cave of opinion to the realm of knowledge. Hence, if this truth or knowledge is deemed impossible from the outset, then so is the philosophical life. Philosophy then must concede all authority to poetry, as in the case of Nietzsche and Heidegger following him.[43]

Strauss' Theory on the Philosophical Life

Strauss's writings tend to be detailed interpretations of works in the history of philosophy but scattered throughout them Strauss also embeds certain short reflections on his own understanding of the philosophical life which are very interesting and important to track. Strauss' position amounts to a defense of the Socratic version of the philosophical life from the criticisms of Nietzsche and Heidegger, despite their introduction of Strauss to true philosophy.

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[41] Velkley, 46.
[42] Velkley, 47.
[43] Thomas L. Pangle, Leo Strauss: *An Introduction to His Thought and Intellectual Legacy*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 200), 25. Velkley shows that Strauss was in a constant conscious dialogue with Heidegger throughout his life. Velkley says that Strauss was, "to the end of his life engaged with Heidegger as the one contemporary thinker with whom his thought was in essential dialogue." Velkley, 2.

One of these important early reflections is found in *WIPP* in a dialogue with Kojève about Xenophon's Socrates. Strauss lays out a kind of middle road of philosophy between dogmatism which sees philosophy as primarily a doctrine and utter skepticism that offers no hope for the truth. Strauss says,

> What Pascal said with anti-philosophical intent about the impotence of both dogmatism and skepticism, is the only possible justification of philosophy which as such is neither dogmatic nor sceptic, and still less "decisionist," but *zetetic* (or sceptic in the original sense of the term).[44]

What Strauss means here is that the philosopher must live a highly ascetic form of life by maintaining a rather difficult tension between contemplating the fundamental problems of human life and grasping their possible solutions. The philosopher indeed investigates the fundamental problems of human life regarding metaphysics, ethics, and politics, but by doing so must, at the same time, resists a certain inclination toward adopting certain solutions to these problems. Adopting one of the several dogmatic solutions kills philosophy in the same say that giving up on the possibility of any solution to the fundamental problems in the fashion of a sceptic also kills philosophy. Strauss says:

> Therefore the philosopher ceases to be a philosopher at the moment at which the "subjective certainty" of a solution becomes stronger than his awareness of the problematic character of that solution. At that moment a sectarian is born.[45]

So a true philosopher, according to Strauss, must avoid two temptations. On the one hand, he must avoid becoming a sectarian who yields to the temptation to have a solution to the fundamental problems. On the other hand, he must avoid becoming a total sceptic who does not

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[44] *WIPP*, 115-6.
[45] *WIPP*, 116.

engage the fundamental problems seriously treating them as mere games because he has given up on a possible solution.

Furthermore, the "decisionist" option that Strauss mentions here seems to refer to Nietzsche who is a sceptic because he denies absolute ahistorical theoretical truth. Moreover, because Nietzsche soberly faces the culture-destroying consequences of this skeptical position, he chooses to do philosophy based on acts of the will that create truths that will generate life-giving culture. In this regard, Strauss says, following Nietzsche's reasoning:

> There is then hope for a future beyond the peak of pre-Socratic culture, for a philosophy of the future that is no longer merely theoretical, but knowingly based on acts of the will or on decisions, and for a new kind of politics that induces as a matter of course "the merciless annihilation of everything degenerating and parasitical."[46]

This decisionist approach according to Strauss can end up in a Nazi-like "praise of resoluteness" and "contempt for reasonableness."[47]

So for Strauss relativism and historicism threaten philosophy because they give up hope in an absolute truth just as much as dogmatism and sectarian ideology also ends the life of philosophy by claiming a comprehension of the truth. The philosophical life is a way of living that flirts with these two dangers of dogmatism and skepticism, or of yielding to solutions and simply playing with the problems.[48] Strauss' approach is not simply skeptical because he holds for the possibility of knowledge and also holds that knowledge of ignorance is not simply ignorance but objective knowledge. In this way, for Strauss knowledge of ignorance is not

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[46] *SA*, 7.There is some debate whether Strauss ultimately is simply a moderate Nietzchean who sees philosophy as simply based on an act of the will and so ends up a decisionist just like Nietzsche. Strauss does not present himself as a decisionist or a Nietzschean publicly and this would be an esoteric reading of Strauss which Rosen holds. *HAP*, 107-123.
[47] *IHE*, 30.
[48] *WIPP*, 116.

simply ignorance. Strauss says, "the subjective certainty that one does not know coincides with the objective truth: of that certainty. But one cannot know that one does not know without knowing what one does not know."[49]

Strauss in another essay expands on the implications or basis of Socratic knowledge of ignorance that characterizes the philosophical life. He says that knowledge of ignorance amounts to "knowledge of the elusive character of the truth, of the whole."[50] This knowledge recognizes that philosophy is an intellectual movement from opinion about the whole to knowledge of the whole. However, the whole fundamentally eludes human beings because they are a part of the whole that, therefore, cannot get a comprehensive perspective on the whole.

So according to Strauss philosophers are limited to partial knowledge of parts because a total knowledge of a part would imply a total knowledge of the whole.[51] This is why Socrates viewed man in light of the mysterious character of the whole.[52] For both Strauss and Socrates of all the parts that can be partially known the best part to know partially then is the human soul. This is because the human soul, as Strauss says, "is the only part of the whole that is open to the whole and therefore more akin to the whole than anything else is."[53] This is why Socrates' turn away from cosmology and the concern with ultimate causes comes with knowledge of ignorance. In his second sailing (*Phaedo* 99D) Socrates decided to turn to the human things and to the study of the human soul rather than natural things because the soul is the best indirect access to the whole.

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[49] *WIPP*, 115.
[50] *WIPP*, 38.
[51] *WIPP*, 39.
[52] *WIPP*, 39.
[53] *WIPP*, 39.

However, even knowing the ends of man and understanding human happiness as the philosophical life still does not give a knowledge of the whole which philosophy seeks. This, for Strauss, would involve putting together knowledge of homogeneity or mathematical knowledge of nature with knowledge of heterogeneity or of the ends of human beings.[54] What Strauss seems to mean here is that the homogenous order understands by reducing several things to one real thing the way the pre-Socratics reduced the world to water, air, or the dual principles of strife and eros. The problem with an overly homogenous approach is that it is too reductive and can not explain the human knower's relationship to nature.

On the other hand, the heterogeneous way of thinking respects the integrity of the appearance of things and refuses to reduce them to one thing. This way of thinking sees things in terms of their ends and in terms of 'kinds'. This respect for appearances and ends is why Plato and Aristotle formulate a more complex manifold causality based on the ideas and substances. The problem with this approach is that it does not reduce the whole to a comprehensive principle which is the demand of the human intellect's need for understanding.

But putting these two forms of knowledge together, which is a necessary condition for knowing the whole, seems to Strauss and Socrates to be impossible.[55] Strauss says,

> It seems that knowledge of the whole would have to combine somehow political knowledge in the highest sense with knowledge of homogeneity. And this combination is not at our disposal. Men are therefore constantly tempted to force the issue by imposing unity on the phenomena, by absolutizing either knowledge of homogeneity or knowledge of ends.[56]

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[54] *WIPP*, 39.
[55] *WIPP*, 40.
[56] *WIPP*, 40.

Turning to a purely mathematical technological approach to knowledge of reality would force unity on phemonema in the direction of homogeneity but would also give up knowledge of the principles of political/ human knowledge. Whereas focusing totally on human ends within the political community would be the path of poetry which forces the issue in the direction of heterogeneity.

Recognizing this impossible combination of the homogenous approach and the heterogeneous approach is what it means to recognize knowledge of ignorance. The refusal to lean one way or the other toward mathematics or poetry is the true middle way of philosophy. Thus according to Strauss' narrative, the authentic philosopher, to maintain his way of life must resist the human temptation to succumb to the "charm of competence" offered by mathematical knowledge or the "charm of humble awe" offered by reflection on the human soul and its experiences like the poetic and political arts.[57] Strauss says: "Philosophy is characterized by the gentle, if firm, refusal to succumb to either charm. It is the highest form of the mating of courage and moderation."[58]

However, this view of philosophy as a life of constant vigilance and resistance to the charms of mathematics, on the one hand, and the charms of poetry, on the other hand, seems to kill philosophy by making it humanly impossible or something quite ugly. For, although philosophy has the high goal of knowledge of the whole, it can never achieve it's own goal. For this reason, philosophy, as Strauss has laid it out, can indeed appear quite "Sisyphean." He says, "In spite of its highness or nobility, it could appear as Sisyphean or ugly, when one contrasts its

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[57] *WIPP*, 40.
[58] *WIPP*, 40.

achievement with its goals."[59] Philosophy here is presented as a heroic and just life of virtue. Yet, as an intellectual discipline philosophy from this perspective still has a rather unfulfilling aspect that, on the concrete human level seems to make it border on the impossible without some outside help.

Strauss recognizes this problem and for him the outside help that makes the philosophical life concretely possible is Platonic eros. That is, the justice of philosophy is made beautiful by eros, which Strauss calls, 'nature's grace.' Strauss says philosophy's struggle is "necessarily accompanied, sustained and elevated by *eros*. It is graced by nature's grace."[60] For Strauss the difficulty and ugliness of the life revolving around the knowledge of ignorance is elevated, redeemed, and driven by the loving search for the truth.

This is why in the modern context where radical historicism and relativism end up renouncing and condemning the idea of eternity, Strauss wants to bring the idea of absolute truth, or even eternal life, back to the memory of the human being.[61] For, the early modern Cartesian and Machiavellian projects of making man the absolute sovereign and master of nature and fortune ends up sacrificing man's deep love for the eternal that gives true life. This modern project which sacrifices eros, according to Strauss, puts man at odds with himself.[62] In this way, by restoring the prospect of truth and reviving the grace of eros in the philosophical life the human being is no longer at odds with his deepest desire for eternity but lives a life in a hopeful search for it. Thus, for Strauss, it isthis hopeful and erotic aspect of philosophy that makes it life-giving for the individual. It is the seeking of truth and the erotic way of life that makes the

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[59] *WIPP*, 40.
[60] *WIPP*, 40.
[61] *WIPP*, 55.
[62] *WIPP*, 55.

person doing it both just and beautiful. For Strauss, as Davis says, the life of philosophy is the "highest possibility for human beings."[63]

Modern philosophy tends to turn its gaze away from the permanent nature of things in order to accomplish its political project of perfecting human nature. However, this sets the human being at odds with himself because it denies his desire for ultimate truth, his eros for eternity. This is why Strauss' view of the philosophical life is based on a deep inner resolution not to shield oneself from the fundamental problems of human life and the question of being itself.

However, humans also tend to forget or conceal the mystery of the questionableness of human life, by seizing on certain symbols and rituals of the cave grounded in divine law and so close off this fundamental question. Velkely points out that, for both Heidegger and Strauss, the philosophical life is the "intransigent facing of the questionableness of Being."[64] This is why few human beings have the fortitude to carry out this life in its ascetic purity. Nietzsche is the prime example in the modern age of a thinker who refused to attach to images in the cave and give up on the questionableness of Being.[65] Philosophical life is still pursued because it promises to move the individual beyond the city to the realm of freedom, beyond the law to the realm of eros, which the poets say is impossible.[66] Against the poets, the philosophers audaciously promise the fulfillment of eros within their own way of life.

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[63] *Wonderlust*, 155.
[64] Velkley, 12.
[65] Velkley, 12.
[66] Velkley, 20.

The Straussian Philosophical Life

Above we have just covered Strauss's theoretical understanding of philosophy as a way of life on the model of Socratic knowledge of ignorance. The question remains how he envisioned this life would actually be lived concretely in the modern age? The answer to this question can be found in his autobiographical comment on Heidegger whom he considered to be a true and living philosopher (Strauss always just considered himself to be only a scholar). Whereas Nietzsche resurfaced the original meaning of ancient philosophy as a way of life for the young Strauss, it was the example of Heidegger as lecturer that eventually showed Strauss that a return to ancient philosophy was an actionable possibility.

In 1922, just as the young Strauss began to be charmed by Nietzsche, in Freiburg he attended some lectures by Heidegger on Aristotle that made a life-changing impression on him the significance of which he says only fully dawned on him later.[67] Strauss says: "I had never seen before such seriousness, profundity, and concentration in the interpretation of philosophical texts."[68] Strauss observes that Heidegger caused a revolution in Germany with his focused interpretation of ancient texts because he showed that the ancient philosophers had not been properly understood and therefore not properly refuted; and this supposed refutation was the very basis of modern philosophy. Strauss says,

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[67] *IHE*, 28.
[68] *IHE*, 28.

> Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle was an achievement with which I cannot compare any other intellectual phenomenon which has emerged in Germany after the war. Heidegger made it clear, not by assertions, but by concrete analyses—the work of an enormous concentration and diligence—that Plato and Aristotle have not been understood by the modern philosophers for they read their own opinions into the works of Plato and Aristotle; they did not read them with the necessary zeal to know what Plato and Aristotle really meant.[69]

Strauss in his two rather uncharacteristic emotional descriptions of this event in his life is relating more than the discovery of a new intellectual argument, but a life-changing encounter with a real living philosopher or great thinker.[70] This encounter is significant in two ways. First, Heidegger, following Nietzsche's example, showed, by a more authentic interpretation of an ancient thinker, in this case Aristotle, that the ancients had not been refuted by the moderns. This liberated Strauss and other members of his generation from the modern cave created by the deeply sanctioned prejudice that modern philosophy and science had refuted the old way of thinking in ancient philosophy. In this way, Strauss was liberated from the cave created by positivism and historicism.

Second, it was also the particular way Heidegger interpreted this ancient text that left a strong impression on the young Strauss. Strauss is overflowing in admiration of Heidegger's deep concentration and careful study of the text as something sacred. Heidegger honors the text and the thinker by trying to understand an author as he understood himself free from modern prejudices which holds the assumption they understand the author's intentions better than the author understands himself.

For Strauss, it seems this profound and diligent engagement with an ancient text modeled a key element in his vision of the philosophical life. This picture of a teacher liberating his

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[69] *LIGP*, 134-135.
[70] *IHE*, 29.

students from the cave by engaging in a serious interpretation of ancient texts is the concrete Straussian model of the philosophical life. From this experience Strauss actually took the door which Heidegger opened to return to ancient Greek philosophical life through the diligent study of texts. In this regard, Strauss says:

> Our most urgent need can then be satisfied only by means of historical studies which would enable us to understand classical philosophy exactly as it understood itself, and not in the way in which it presents itself on the basis of historicism.[71]

So in order to come back into contact with the true nature of ancient philosophy post-moderns must overcome historicism by turning to a more diligent reading of historical texts. Simply by reading ancient philosophers as they understood themselves, and not through the heavily prejudicial lens of seeing them as mere products of their times, the post-modern Straussian philosopher by his example overcomes the modern prejudices of historicism and positivism. This example has the potential of leading students to experience a new freedom of the life of philosophy outside of the modern day cave. The sympathetic interpretation of texts has a liberating effect on the students in the same manner in which Heidegger had a liberating effect on Strauss.

So for Strauss one could not just return by the force of the will to classical philosophy because there must be a dismantling of tradition to get back to experience what the ancients experienced directly. This model of 'getting back' to the experience of truth of the ancients then necessarily involves historical studies.[72]

Possibly more than any other life-philosopher Strauss literally pushes his readers to the reading the texts of great philosophers. For example, Strauss writes somewhat cryptically with

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[71] *NRH*, 33.
[72] Velkley, 3.

numerous footnotes and a web of interesting references to the great philosophical works which forces the reader to examine large sections of these ancient works just to follow Strauss' argument. In this way, Strauss will often say just enough on a specific subject to grip the interest of the reader, but not enough that the reader can fully understand the subject of interest without also turning to the great works that he references. One could say that the multilayered, wonder provoking, rhetoric of Strauss is an invitation to actually live the philosophical life by entering into a living dialogue with the great thinkers. Strauss' own works then are intended to be a kind of spiritual exercise for the life of philosophy. In this way, Strauss's Socratic way of philosophizing primarily by means of a close reading of texts is rather different from Socrates himself who did philosophy primarily by means of conversations with young noble Athenians.[73] This is part of the reason why some call Strauss' approach to the philosophical life, "Talmudic."[74]

Strauss' approach to the philosophical life was a decidedly non-doctrinaire pursuit of the truth through the lens of political life. Nonetheless compared to other models the Straussian

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[73] In his penetrating analysis Velkely points out that this distinctive way of doing philosophy by turning to a close reading of texts reveals an important ambiguity in Strauss. For, on the one hand, Strauss wants to purify modern philosophy from the influence of the sacred texts of revealed religion which he sees as a nonsensical fusion of two heterogeneous realities. This illegitimate fusion has created a second cave beneath the cave and so obscures the natural mode of philosophizing where there is only philosophy and law with no intermingling of religion in philosophy. On the other hand, however, Strauss proposes to overcome the influence of sacred texts by means of turning to historical texts in order to re-establish the original innocence of philosophy and its relationship to law or in other words to get back to more natural situation of the first cave. Velkley says, "Paradoxically, post-modern philosophers must turn to the book—to historical studies—to discredit the authority of books and to uncover the Greek natural way of philosophizing in terms of the political and its law." Velkley, 53-4. Velkely leads us to ask then how Strauss's Talmudic approach to the philosophical life can ever lead back to a kind of original state of nature where philosophy is free from the book? Velkley thinks that Strauss's criticism of Christianity and his deploring its influence on modern philosophy as a nonsensical fusion is therefore "hasty and ill-considered." Velkley, 53. Velkley's personal position on this matter seems to be more positive toward the modern philosophers who are able to legitimately engage in real philosophy in relation to Christianity in a way very similar to Greek philosophers in relationship to myth-based religion. In other words, philosophy can exist within the context of Christianity in the natural state of the first cave.

[74] Velkley, 54.

approach for the most part remains on a purely intellectual level. Strauss' vision of the philosophical life is a decidedly scholarly pursuit focused on entering the grand conversation among the great thinkers through historical studies such that anyone, saint or villain, can enter into it. Furthermore, Strauss' idea of the philosophical life is ascetic only in the sense that it is a discipline of the mind in retaining the purity of philosophical questioning by resisting what he calls the charm of competence, on the one hand, and the charm of humble awe, on the other, both of which hinder a pure lifestyle of intellectual questioning. This neutral state of radical questioning concretely means not latching on to any of the doctrines, rituals, or arts of the cave that come from religion, law, or various conventions and implies a rather rarefied life that very few could sustain without the help of the natural grace of eros.

Strauss and Romanticism

It should be noted here that Strauss does not see Nietzsche as a Romantic but as a critic of the Romantics and does not interpret *BT* or *OTA* in this light as we do in this present thesis in Chapters I and II. Strauss, rather, interprets Nietzsche as engaged in a much deeper dialogue within German philosophy itself that begins with Rousseau who is understood as the founder of German philosophy. Strauss sees German philosophy, in contrast to French and English philosophy, as beginning with a criticism of modern civilization which is increasingly moving away from man's natural condition of the state of nature. So German culture and philosophy, driven by this criticism, tends to constantly be gripped by a longing for the past. So where some more ridiculous people long for a Teutonic tribal past, the Romantics long for the past of the Middle Ages. However, the German philosophers, by contrast, tend to long for ancient Greece

and so are different in respect to their nostalgia from the Romantics. Strauss, following Nietzsche, then interprets German philosophy as the attempt to build a bridge to Greece. A core aspect of the German philosophical criticism of modern civilization is the criticism of science and the assertion of a realm of freedom over against the realm of science. We see this in Rousseau as the state of nature and with Kant as moral freedom and with Hegel, and the German Romantics along with him, as history and culture as the sphere of freedom vis-à-vis nature. According to Strauss' interpretation of German philosophy Nietzsche, and the existentialists who follow him later, tend to see the German cultural struggle as "life" or "existence" verse knowledge and theory.

Strauss says,

> According to Nietzsche, the theoretical analysis of human life that realizes the relativity of all comprehensive views and thus depreciates them would make human life impossible, for it would destroy the protecting atmosphere within which life or culture or action is alone possible. Moreover, since the theoretical analysis has its basis outside of life, it will never be able to understand life. The theoretical analysis of life is noncommittal and fatal to commitment, but life means commitment. To avert the danger to life, Nietzsche could choose one of two ways: he could insist on the strictly esoteric character of the theoretical analysis of life—that is, restore the Platonic notion of the noble delusion—or else he could deny the possibility of theory proper and so conceive of thought as essentially subservient to, or dependent on, life or fate. If not Nietzsche himself at any rate his successors adopted the second alternative.[75]

According to Strauss, Nietzsche then sees a struggle between life or existence and any theoretical enterprise whatsoever; whether the theoretical enterprise be Descartes' natural science, Hegel's science of history, or even the historicism of the Romantics. In this way, according to Strauss' thought, Romantic historicism becomes another theoretical analysis among many which Nietzsche is against because it degenerates life. Romanticism then from Strauss' perspective,

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[75] *NRH*, 26.

and maybe from Nietzsche's perspective as well, can be interpreted as a kind of spur or an offshoot of a larger deeper movement of German philosophy beginning with Rousseau's state of nature theory.[76]

However, Strauss concludes this because he tends to see Romanticism as merely a sentimental German longing for faith and nostalgia for the Middle Ages only, and not a serious philosophical critique of the modern split between thought and life. Also, Strauss tends to see the history of philosophy and German philosophy as a kind of inner dialogue between a select few elite great thinkers like Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche, into which lesser thinkers like the Romantics would have difficulty entering.[77]

Strauss and Gilson

Of all the life-philosophers we cover in this study Strauss and Gilson are the most alike but also at the same time the most unlike. Both Strauss and Gilson approach philosophy as really 'getting back' to the original ancient sources of philosophy through the careful reading of ancient texts. Both Strauss and Gilson, possibly more than any other philosophers in the twentieth century, make a sincere and consistent attempt at trying to understand ancient and medieval philosophers as they understood themselves. This involves a demanding historical approach that attempts to understand the whole cultural context through poetry, history and law of the time.

The thing that markedly separates Gilson and Strauss is the question of the relation of faith and reason. There is much controversy about what exactly Strauss thought on many varied topics due to his elusive mode of esoteric writing, but it is certain he saw the life of philosophy

[76] *LIGP*, 115-117; 137.
[77] *SCR*, 2; 30.

and the life of revelation as incompatible approaches to life. Strauss also saw Christianity as an illegitimate corruption of both the life of faith and the life of reason by an attempt to intermingle the two into one way of life. This leads to the following speculation. If Gilson, more than any other Catholic thinker was effective in reviving the Christian philosophical life based on faith and reason, then Gilson was also the biggest competition for Strauss' attempt to revive the philosophical life based on a separation between faith and reason. In other words, if Strauss' agenda was to revive the philosophical life by contrasting it with a life based on faith in Biblical revelation, then Gilson's revival of the Christian philosophical life based on faith and reason remained an obstacle to Strauss' neo-Averroistic model.[78]

It is clear, however, that Gilson and Strauss were both quite familiar with one another's work from the beginning of Strauss' writing career and that they respected each other. Around 1933 Strauss sent Gilson a copy of his book on Hobbes. Gilson read the book and responded in a letter where he says that he read with pleasure the book that Strauss sent him and "I think that what you say of Hobbes is fundamentally right—-but I must remind you that I have not personally studied the problem."[79] From the content and tone of the letter Strauss seems to have asked Gilson what he thought of the political problems in Hobbes but Gilson was not able to give any insights beyond "general observations" due to his "lack of competence in on this subject." This exchange of the book and letter indicates that Strauss very much respected Gilson's opinion on his work and that both men respected each other as scholars. However, considering his

[78] The 'neo-Averroistic model' here refers to a strict separation between philosophy and theology following after the model of Averroes who presented revelatory religion as meant for the uneducated masses and philosophy as the esoteric teaching meant for intellectuals.
[79] Étienne Gilson to Leo Strauss, 16 May 1933, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.

extensive learning and mastery of English it is rather hard to believe that Gilson lacked competence on Hobbes; this makes one indeed wonder about what Gilson meant by his demurring comment.

CHAPTER V

Philosophy as a Way of Life in the Thought of Pierre Hadot: The Stoic and Epicurean Model

Of all the 20th century thinkers since Nietzsche who have attempted to revive philosophy as a way of life Pierre Hadot (1922-2010) holds a special distinction. Although he may not be as popular as Michel Foucault, or as influential as Leo Strauss, Hadot presents the strongest historical case that philosophy, at its origin in ancient Greece, was primarily a way of life and not the formation of a theoretical system as it is regularly portrayed. The key piece of Hadot's demonstration is showing how the theoretical element of philosophy involving discursive thought, arguments, proofs and writing was only one among many spiritual exercises (like fasting, voluntary poverty, communal living, meditation etc.) which comprised an overall life of philosophical asceticism. The ultimate purpose of the theoretical segment of these exercises, according to Hadot, was not to create a comprehensive philosophical system, that attempts to mirror reality, but to transform the intellectual perception of the person. Furthermore, Hadot's historical argument goes to the heart of the nature of philosophy itself by claiming that not only in its origins in ancient Greece, but also in its very essence philosophy is, and always will be, primarily a way of life.

Hadot redirected his considerable skills as an experienced philologist and historian, developed over twenty years of scholarly work on the Latin Fathers of the Church, to making his case that the ancient philosophical life was a spiritual exercise. Hadot makes a synchronic case in *Philosophy as a Way of Life* which is a compilation of different writings on the idea of philosophy as a way of life ranging historically from Socrates to Foucault. Hadot also makes a diachronic case in *What is Ancient Philosophy?* which is a historical survey of the development

of ancient philosophy. In both of these works Hadot first makes a historical case, and then a theoretical case, that philosophy is primarily a way of life. Hadot's historical case convincingly proves that the reigning modern view of philosophy as theory alone—which tends to present the history of philosophy as a series of systematic doctrinal explanations of the world along with corresponding moral codes—when applied to the ancient Greek philosophers does not fit with the concrete historical reality. It seems that Hadot's case is so strong that any future scholarly account of Plato, Aristotle, or Stoicism can no longer credibly separate their theoretical arguments and doctrines from the way of life these philosophers intended to foster.

Furthermore, based on his historical proof, Hadot also makes a theoretical case that attempts to show that the essence of philosophy itself, from its origins in ancient Greece, is primarily a way of life that indeed involves, but cannot be reduced to, theoretical discourse without damage to its true nature. In other words, Hadot shows how there is a notable loss when philosophy is reduced to its theoretical element alone which presently remains an unconscious reflexive habit of most modern scholars. Hadot's work, at the very least, poses a strong challenge to the way the history of philosophy is presented and potentially could ultimately have a more lasting impact on the history of philosophy than all the other thinkers covered in this dissertation. For, Hadot's work could at very least change the way the history of ancient philosophy is presented but also could change the way philosophy itself is done by redirecting philosophical activity away from the production of a theoretical system of philosophy to the personal transformation of the philosopher himself.

Hadot and Mysticism

Before we look at Hadot's historical case for philosophy as primarily a way of life it is important to touch on certain aspects of Hadot's intellectual biography that he personally presents in a series of long and insightful interviews.[1] Hadot's rediscovery of philosophy as a way of life begins with his long running attempt to articulate a series of mystical experiences he had throughout his adolescence while in *Petit Séminaire* in Reims.[2] In a certain way, this overriding lifelong concern with mysticism sets Hadot apart from all the other thinkers we have considered or will consider in this study. Hadot relates that as a young man while he was walking under a star filled sky he was "filled with an anxiety that was both terrifying and delicious provoked by the sentiment of the presence of the world, or of the Whole and of me in that world."[3] In retrospect, Hadot believes that this experience was an "oceanic feeling" of being immersed in and part of the world or what he calls "the Whole."[4]

Hadot also holds that this experience was the point of departure for his becoming a philosopher for two reasons: First, it lead him to discover that philosophy was fundamentally about the "transformation of one's perception of the world."[5] Second, Hadot also recognized from this time onward that what is most essential for human beings simply cannot be expressed or that the most important things in life are ineffable.[6] In fact, one can track Hadot's intellectual

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[1] Pierre Hadot, *The Present Alone is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson,* trans. Marc Djaballah, and Michael Chase, 2nd ed, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011). [Hereafter cited as *PAH*]. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault,* trans. Michael Chase, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 286-77. [Hereafter cited as *PWL*].
[2] *PAH*, 5-6.
[3] *PAH*, 5.
[4] *PAH*, 6.
[5] *PAH*, 6.
[6] *PAH*, 7.

journey as a life long attempt to properly articulate these mystical experiences of being immersed in the Whole early in his life.[7]

During *Grand Séminaire* in Reims Hadot discovered the works of Pascal on his mystical experience as well as John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila which made him want to actively seek out a Christian mystical experience much like these mystics, but he felt that it did not happen.[8] To his dismay, Hadot's spiritual directors seemed totally uninterested in helping the young seminarian to actually move along the itinerary of purification, illumination, and unity that he found laid out in the writings of John of the Cross.[9] Hadot even switched spiritual directors seeking help in pursuing the classical path to mystical union but they all remained reserved and focused more on duty than on these mystical graces.[10] In his unflagging pursuit of mysticism Hadot even considered joining the Carmelites but again the Carmelite prior also discouraged Hadot from seeking direct union with God without the mediation of Jesus Christ in the manner that Hadot then seemed to be pursuing.[11]

Then Hadot discovered a purely philosophical mysticism in Plotinus in 1945-1946 beginning with Maritain's discussion of different forms of mystical experience in *Distinguer pour unir ou les degrés du savior.*[12] Hadot agreed with Maritain that mystical experience is the peak of human knowledge.[13] Hadot also discovered, at a certain point, that the Christian mystics

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[7] Hadot in many of his works has the practice of capitalizing the Whole, Reason, and Nature and so in discussing his thought it is important to imitate this practice.
[8] *PAH*, 11; 75-6. Interestingly, Hadot despite being a Catholic did not connect his mystical experience of the presence of the Whole either with Christian mysticism or even wonder at the beauty of nature found in Ancient Greek philosophy, but with Roman Stoic mystical experience and Rousseau's reveries. *PAH*, 8-9.
[9] *PAH*, 11; 75.
[10] *PAH*, 11-12.
[11] *PAH*, 76.
[12] *PAH*, 75.
[13] *PAH*, 75.

and theologians that he was studying actually borrowed the threefold way of purification, illumination and unification from Plotinus and neoplatonism.[14] Despite being ordained a Catholic priest in 1944 at the early age of twenty-two, from this point in 1946 until about 1970 Hadot dropped his attempt at Christian mysticism and turned to a personal pursuit of Plotinian mysticism. During this time Hadot remained a priest in the Roman Catholic Church until 1952 and dedicated much of his scholarship to uncovering the neo-platonic influences on the Latin Fathers of the Church under the tutelage of the Jesuit neoplatonic scholar Paul Henry. Although Hadot initially wanted to work on Plotinus, Henry suggested that Hadot work on the neoplatonic influences on Marius Victorinus and create a critical edition, translation and commentary on his theological works.[15]

After this intense philological training, and seventeen year 'sidetrack' into the Latin Fathers of the Church, Hadot finally formally returned to his original interest in mysticism in Plotinus in 1963 in preparation for his book *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*.[16] However, Hadot also discovered the Stoic influences on Plotinus and from around 1970 onward Hadot's interest in Plotinian mysticism drifted more toward a focus on the more practical and less ethereal Stoic and Epicurean views on the philosophical way of life. This shift from neoplatonism to Stoicism and Epicureanism eventually led to his landmark work on spiritual exercises published in 1977: *Exercices spirituels* later revised and published in English translation in *PWL*.

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[14] *PAH*, 11; 75.
[15] *PAH*, 19; Hadot admits that his twenty years of philological and textual work on Marius Victorinus was not his preference or his original idea but that of Paul Henry. However, he did produce a critical edition of Victorinus with Henry and showed that Victorinus was a follower of Porphyry and not of Plotinus as Henry once thought. Hadot admits this was a tangent from his original interest in Plotinian mysticm. *PWL*, 280.
[16] *PWL*, 280.

Hadot admits, in retrospect, that his personal pursuit of Plotinian mysticism was an "illusion."[17] Hadot says:

> The conclusion of my book *Plotinus* already hinted that the idea of the "purely spiritual" is untenable. It is true that there is something ineffable in human existence, but this ineffable is *within* [emphasis original] our very perception of the world, in the mystery of our existence and that of the cosmos. Still it can lead to an experience which could be qualified as mystical.[18]

Hadot finally found in the Stoics both an articulation of his mystical experiences in his youth, but also a more attainable and immanent spiritual way of life much more palatable for men and women of modern times. Hadot holds that both Plotinian and especially Christian mysticism is simply too purely spiritual for modern times. According to Hadot, Christian mysticism in particular can lead to a dangerous supernaturalism which does not respect the need for natural morality and expects personal transformation through grace and prayer alone.[19] Hadot then spent the rest of his scholarly life on developing a Stoic-Epicurean view of philosophy as a way of life for modern people to actually follow.

Hadot's Philosophical Influences

Before moving on to Hadot's philosophical discoveries in *PWL* and *WAP* we should also mention some other major philosophical influences on Hadot.[20] In his interviews Hadot does mention Nietzsche as a major philosophical influence and quotes him throughout his work for

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[17] *PWL*, 281.
[18] *PWL*. 281.
[19] *PAH*, 26.
[20] It should be noted that Hadot is rather lavish in naming his philosophical influences and mentions several other major philosophical influences that helped him rediscover philosophy as a way of life like Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein. See *PAH*, 128-35.

the sake of backing up his view of philosophy as a way of life.[21] Hadot also credits Nietzsche, along with Bergson and existentialism—which for Hadot also includes Gilson and Marcel—for reviving philosophy as a way of life after what Hadot sees as its historical eclipse by theology in the Middle Ages.[22] Hadot says, "Not until Nietzsche, Bergson, and existentialism does philosophy consciously return to being a concrete attitude, a way of life and of seeing the world."[23] However, unlike Strauss and Foucault who were personally inspired to the philosophical life by Nietzsche it seems that Gilson and Bergson were the primary inspirations for the young Hadot regarding a return to the philosophical life.

Before moving on to the seminal influence of Gilson and Bergson, we should note two other points of influence on Hadot. First, Hadot was from a German speaking family originating in Lorraine and from 1944 onward he was heavily influenced by the German Romantics, especially Novalis. Hadot discovered the German Romantics through his reading of Rilke upon whom he originally wanted to write his dissertation.[24] It is important to note this influence because, as I argued above, the modern revival of the philosophical life, at least partially, derives from Romanticism and the Romantic claim that the value of life which is lost with an overemphasis on rationality and theoretical analysis.

Second, just as Montaigne exerted a strong influence on Nietzsche and Foucault, so too his writings on the philosophical life influenced the young Hadot who read him at a young age in *Petit Séminaire* at around age fourteen.[25] Hadot says that Montaigne "enabled me to discover

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[21] *PAH*, 50-51.
[22] *PWL*, 108; cf. WAP, 277. For Hadot on the influence of Christian existentialism see *PWL*, 278; *PAH*, 18; 130.
[23] *PWL*, 108.
[24] *PAH*, 49. Cf. *PAH*, 140-41.
[25] *PAH*, 49.

ancient philosophy."[26] Hadot says, "Perhaps I did not understand it at the time, but it proved to be one of the texts that led me to represent philosophy as something other than a theoretical discourse."[27] The deeper lesson that Hadot learned from Montaigne, which underlies seeing philosophy as a way of life, is that there was, as Hadot says,

> an infinite value of life itself, of existence; this reverses all habitual values, and especially the pervasive idea that what counts above all is to *do* something, whereas for Montaigne what is most important is to *be*.[28]

It is important to mention Montaigne here because he also had an impact on Nietzsche and Gilson in the rediscovery of the philosophical life.

Hadot's first introduction to philosophy was through Thomism in *Petit Séminaire* which he continued to hold a great respect for throughout his life because it already defined its terms and was free of what he calls the "vagueness of the concepts of modern philosophy."[29] Interestingly, Hadot's introduction to Thomism was primarily through the works of Jacques Maritain and Étienne Gilson. It was Gilson's presentation of Thomism in particular as the true existentialism that helped Hadot to gain an existential attitude toward philosophy. As Hadot says, "Besides it was thanks to Thomism, and especially Étienne Gilson, that I discovered very early on the fundamental distinction between essence and existence, which is dear to existentialism."[30] Furthermore, Hadot did his doctoral lecture on Gilson's real distinction.[31] Hadot believes that Gilson's existential Thomism was "strongly tinged" by the effervescent

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[26] *PAH*, 49.
[27] *PAH*, 125.
[28] *PAH*, 125.
[29] *PAH*, 18-19; cf. *PWL*, 275.
[30] *PWL*, 275.
[31] *PAH*, 20.

existentialism of the time.[32] Hadot says that Gilson influenced him because, for Gilson, "philosophy consisted in knowing and not in constructing and producing a system."[33] In his interviews and in his own scholarly works, whenever Hadot mentions Gilson he consistently presents him sympathetically as a philosopher who understood philosophy not as a system but as a way of life.

It seems from Hadot's comments that it was actually Étienne Gilson who first introduced Pierre Hadot, in a formal philosophical way, to philosophy as a way of life. It seems that it was also Gilson's emphasis on the real distinction between essence and existence that gave Hadot an existentialist approach to philosophy that holds the act of existence as the highest principle of being lying beyond formal essence. The outline of Gilson's real distinction seems to have helped Hadot later to formulate an analogous distinction between philosophical discourse and the philosophical life with the theoretical discourse corresponding to essence and the philosophical act or life corresponding to existence. It seems that Gilson's real distinction then underlies Hadot's distinction between philosophy as theory and philosophy as a way of life.

Also, another similar distinction worth mentioning at this point that helped Hadot formulate his distinction between philosophical discourse and life is Newman's distinction between notional and real assent. Hadot says that Newman's distinction "underlies my research on spiritual exercises."[34] Hadot points out that Newman early on taught him that there is a difference between giving assent in a purely abstract way only with the intellect and giving real assent which engages one's entire being. Hadot says one who engages in real assent is

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[32] *PAH*, 18.
[33] *PAH*, 18.
[34] *PWL*, 277.

"realizing—in the English sense of the word—with one's heart and imagination, just what this affirmation means for us."[35] In this regard, Hadot distinguishes between truths that are technical like the sciences that "can easily be communicated by teaching or conversation,"[36] and truths that are existential which are most important for human beings like: "our feeling of existence, our impressions when faced by death, our perception of nature, our sensations, and *a fortiori* the mystical experience is not directly communicable."[37] In other words, these things cannot be encapsulated in an essence and imparted merely by the expression of an idea. This existential truth is glimpsed only through the transformation of the person which is fostered by spiritual exercises.

Aside from Gilson's existential Thomism, the Catholic enthusiasm for Bergson also had a large influence on the young Hadot during his baccalaureate studies in philosophy in the late thirties. Hadot points out that Bergson saw philosophy as focused primarily on the "experience of a bursting forth of existence, of life that we experience in ourselves in willing and in duration."[38] We see here a parallel with Hadot's concern with the experience of life and existence as such, above the mere collection of knowledge.

Hadot is fond of pointing out, moreover, that in 1939 at his final philosophy exam he was asked to write on Bergson's claim that philosophy was not a system but a resolution to transform one's perception of the world.[39] Hadot had to write on the following Bergsonian statement which he quotes differently in two separate places: "Philosophy is not the construction of a system, but

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[35] *PWL*, 277.
[36] *PWL*, 285.
[37] *PWL*, 285. This distinction is very similar to Strauss' distinction between homogenous and heterogeneous truths.
[38] *PAH*, 9-10.
[39] *PAH*, 9-10.

the resolution once taken [that is, taken once and for all], to look naively in oneself and around oneself."[40] Hadot interprets this statement as first eliminating from the outset the attempt at any construction of a system and holds philosophy to be above all "a choice, not a discourse." Second, Hadot interprets the second half of the claim in the following way:

> The word *naively* reminds us that although Bergson defines philosophy as a transformation of perception, he chooses the example of the painter who, in order to look naively—that is to return, I would almost say, to the brute perception of reality—is obliged to carry out a tremendous effort at transforming his way of seeing, at getting rid of the habits we have of seeing things. Thus the phrase "to look naively" means detaching oneself from the artificial, from the habitual, the conventional, and returning basically to what might be called an elementary perception, disengaged from all prejudice.[41]

In this way, Bergson and his philosophy teachers at seminary taught the young Hadot that philosophy was not a system but a personal decision to transform one's perception of the world.

This transformation for Hadot had to take a strict form of asceticism and spiritual exercises. It is this self-transformation for the sake of truth that leads one to conduct a life according to nature. Hadot also points out that the fact that he was given this interesting topic on the non-systematic nature of philosophy in 1939 shows that, at the time, there was already a concern about re-examining the nature of philosophy itself.[42] It is hard to say exactly where this concern came from, but considering the broad exposure to Gilson that the young Hadot was given by his teachers, it may have been the debate over Christian philosophy that was behind this essay topic on the nature of philosophy as a way of life.

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[40] *PAH*, 125. Cf. *PAH*, 10.
[41] *PAH*, 126.
[42] *PAH*, 10.

Hadot's Late Rediscovery of the Philosophical Life

Now let us pass on from the late 1930s from Hadot's early philosophical influences to Hadot's explicit rediscovery of philosophy as a way of life in the 1970s. As seen above, due to the influences of Bergson, Gilson and Newman, and due to his overriding interest in mysticism, Hadot always implicitly approached philosophy as a way of life. However, it was not until late in his career that Hadot started to make an explicit case for it. As mentioned above, after he discovered the Stoic influence on Plotinus, Hadot gradually switched his longtime interest in Plotinus to the Stoics and Epicureans because they were philosophers who were not focused on advancing on the stages leading to transcendent mystical union, but on teaching a person how to live virtuously in this world.

Hadot's Spiritual Exercises

We first see Hadot's intellectual transition to the Stoics in his watershed essay *Spiritual Exercises* published in 1977. This is the most important and influential of all Hadot's philosophical works and essays.[43] Hadot begins this work with speaking about how French sociologist/philosopher Georges Friedmann has concluded, presumably along with Hadot himself, that the demands of the modern-day spiritual poverty can no longer to be properly filled by the Jewish, Christian or Oriental spiritual traditions.[44] In response, Hadot then proposes a revival of the tradition of spiritual exercises of the ancient Greek, Hellenistic and Roman philosophers as a solution to the problem of the modern-day spiritual vacuum—a solution which Friedmann himself has not considered. Interestingly, Hadot believes that this ancient

[43] This essay helped Michel Foucault rediscover the philosophical life in the Stoics in the last years of his life.
[44] *PWL*, 81.

philosophical tradition is still unconsciously within Friedmann, and within the cultural memory of modern western world generally, and just needs to be brought out more explicitly.[45]

For lack of a better word Hadot lands on the term 'spiritual exercises' to more accurately describe ancient philosophy for two main reasons: First, 'spiritual' as opposed to 'phsychic', 'moral' or 'intellectual' is the only modern adjective that encompasses the reality of ancient philosophy which seeks to engage not only the mind but also the imagination and emotions.[46] 'Spiritual exercises' is also a better term than 'ethical exercises' or 'thought exercises' because ancient philosophical exercises are not simply moral or intellectual training but actually transform the practitioner's vision of the world and lead to a "metamorphosis of personality."[47] According to Hadot, this transformation is not simply the result of new ideas but the whole of one's "phsychism."[48]

Second, these spiritual exercises are properly called 'spiritual' because they also raise the philosopher up to what Hadot calls "life of the objective Spirit" and so transcends himself and becomes eternal by gaining the perspective of the "Whole."[49] Also the term 'exercises' corresponds to the ancient Greek term *askesis* which means 'training.' The *askesis* of the pagan philosophers is distinct from, but not unrelated to, Christian asceticism like the spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola.[50] Hadot explicitly claims that his ultimate goal in this essay is to show

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[45] *PWL*, 81.
[46] *PWL*, 82.
[47] *PWL*, 82.
[48] *PWL*, 82.
[49] *PWL*, 82. Cf. *PAH*, 136.
[50] *PWL*, 82.

how this notion of spiritual exercises will help change and correct, not only our view of ancient philosophy, but also our approach to the nature of philosophy itself.[51]

Interestingly, Hadot does not follow the historical order. So instead of beginning with the pre-Socratics, Socrates or even Plato, he first looks at the Hellenistic and Roman philosophical schools. Hadot does this primarily because these later schools view philosophy as a healing of the passions which makes the primacy of spiritual exercises especially visible. The Stoics, like Epictetus, also explicitly avoid the temptation to reduce philosophy simply to abstract theory or a the scholarly exegesis of a text and rather present philosophy as the "art of living."[52] In this regard, Hadot says, for these philosophers, "The philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being."[53] This practice of the art of life changes or converts the person and moves him from a place of darkness to a deeper authenticity.[54]

As mentioned above, the Stoics believed all human evil came from disordered passions and philosophy was primarily a "therapeutic of the passions."[55] The Stoics also devised spiritual exercises like vigilance, meditation, and remembrance of good things but also more intellectual oriented exercises like reading, listening and research.[56] So, for instance, by meditation on the Stoic principle of discernment which distinguishes what depends on humans beings and what does not, the Stoic philosophers experience a personal transformation. Through the deep internal apprehension of this principle, the Stoic practitioners move themselves from seeing all things within a conventional human perspective dominated by passions to seeing all things from the

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[51] *PWL*, 82.
[52] *PWL*, 83.
[53] *PWL*, 83.
[54] *PWL*, 83.
[55] *PWL*, 83.
[56] *PWL*, 83.

free natural perspective of Universal Nature.[57] With this change in perspective the spiritual exercises transform and convert the practitioner of the philosophy into a natural man.

Hadot claims that these spiritual exercises were always part of the oral instruction of the philosophical schools and part of their daily life from the beginning. However, we don't encounter an explicit listing of these practices until Philo of Alexandria who was concerned with a concrete description of the common philosophical practices in the schools. In Philo's two lists which overlap each other we see the following: research (*zetesis*), thorough investigation (*skepsis*), reading (*anagnosis*), listening (*akroasis*), attention (*prosoche*), self-mastery (*enkratia*), indifference to indifferent things also meditations (*meletai*), therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things and accomplishment of duties.[58] Hadot holds that these, and other spiritual exercises like them, were normal practices in all the philosophical schools from the beginning without exception.

Hadot then goes through each of these spiritual exercises one by one. One of the most important exercises is the intellectual exercise of reading or listening to texts by the teachers in the philosophical schools. Hadot points out this would always have been done in a communal context with a philosophical instructor.[59] Hadot argues the purpose of this philosophical reading is to give nourishment to meditation and to justify and foster the rule of life. Hadot says,

> Fortified by this instruction, the disciple would be able to study with precision the entire speculative edifice which sustained and justified the fundamental rule, as well as all the physical and logical research of which this rule was the summary.[60]

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[57] *PWL*, 83.
[58] *PWL*, 84.
[59] *PWL*, 86.
[60] *PWL*, 86.

So, for Hadot, this means that the abstract study of the order of nature is not simply for its own sake. Theory exists to justify the Stoic way of life and help nourish its growth by allowing the practitioner to view the world from the perspective of Universal Reason and not according to his or her own passions. In other words, the theoretical element of philosophy is ordered primarily to a practical transformation of the person and is not simply a comprehensive mirror of reality.

Hadot then moves on to describe the spiritual exercises of the Epicureans for whom philosophy, just like the Stoics, is primarily a therapeutic of the passions. What distinguishes Epicurean philosophy is that it attempts to free a person from false fears, false desires and needless worry in order to come back to the "simple joy of existing."[61] Similar to the Stoics, the theoretical aspect of their way of life, consisting of reading, hearing lectures, and memorizing dogmas of the master, is an intellectual exercise which provides material for meditation which would "impregnate the soul with fundamental intuitions of Epicureans."[62]

For instance, the theoretical study of physics by the Epicureans, for which they are so famous, according to Hadot, is primarily ordered to personal freedom from fear and anxiety and not to the construction of a comprehensive system. For Epicurean physics demonstrates that the pagan gods have no effect on the world and that death is simply a dissolution and so both are not to be rationally feared. This study of physics or the contemplation of nature changes the philosopher's view of the world to help him live better and experience the only real pleasure in life, which for the Epicureans, is the pure pleasure of existence. Since theory can be readily forgotten, the study of physics is deeply inculcated into the philosopher by the memorization of

[61] *PWL*, 87.
[62] *PWL*, 87.

certain dogmas and short sayings of the masters. These sayings are kept "at hand" to fight off any disturbances or passions that might attack the philosopher and rob him or her of the pure pleasure of existence.

For instance, the would-be practitioner memorizes the famous Epicurean saying: "God presents no fears, death no worries. And while good is readily attainable, evil is readily endurable."[63] In this way, the study of physics is not for the sake of a system but to lead to the freedom of the philosopher. Finally, for the Epicureans the most important spiritual exercise was friendship and mutual affection which above all fostered happiness.[64]

As a kind of aside, Hadot makes a very interesting contrast between the Stoic and Epicurean approaches to the philosophical life. As noted above, both are concerned with curing the soul of its false passions. However, the Stoics use meditation and vigilance to prepare the soul for coming calamities. In this way, the Stoics have the soul "stretch itself tight." On the other hand, the Epicureans train the soul to relax and to detach the vision of the mind from painful things by fixing it on pleasurable things. So while the Stoics stay vigilant always prepared for another calamity, the Epicureans choose to be serene by means of a constant gratitude toward Nature and life which always offers joy and pleasure.[65]

Then, Hadot rewinds the historical clock a bit and goes back to the figure of Socrates. However, first he speculates in a brief, but important, note that the origins of spiritual exercises in humanity itself can be found in any culture where there are rules of life and moral

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[63] *PWL*, 87.
[64] *PWL*, 89.
[65] *PWL*, 88.

exhortation.[66] Hadot indicates that if he had to go behind Socrates he would look first to the Pythagoreans. Behind the Pythagoreans spiritual exercises can certainly be found in the religious, magical and shamanistic traditions of humanity as well.[67] Hadot gives three reasons why he does not go back to this prehistory of spiritual exercises and chooses to begin with Socrates:[68] First, because he lacks anthropological training. Second, there is a lack of a clear Pythagorean philosophy because most of it is found in Stoicism and Platonism which reinterpret it. Third, Socrates marks an important turning point in the historical development of spiritual exercises. Socrates focuses primarily on fostering rational control which is quite unlike religious prophetic trances.[69] Hadot holds, therefore, that Socrates is the founder of spiritual exercises for the Western world and the one who is the founder of the "moral consciousness."[70]

Hadot then describes Socrates' technique of conversation and questioning as a spiritual exercise used to lead his interlocutors to knowledge of ignorance and the care of the soul.[71] Socrates never did philosophy simply for theoretical curiosity but always worked primarily for the conversion of the soul. We see this especially with the figure of Alcibiades whom Socrates tries to convert to care of the soul.[72] Hadot argues that the Socratic dialogue, therefore, is a communal spiritual exercise which leads to an "examination of conscience" and attention to the self and to self-knowledge.[73] A conversation with Socrates makes one realize he does not have

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[66] *PWL*, 116 n.16.
[67] *PWL*, 116 n. 79.
[68] In his later work Hadot does do his own pre-history of spiritual exercises in the pre-socratics and then he highlights the differences between Shaministic spiritual exercises and Socratic spiritual exercises. *WAP,* 180-88.
[69] *PWL*, 116 n. 79.
[70] *PWL*, 89.
[71] *PWL*, 89.
[72] *PWL*, 90.
[73] *PWL*, 90.

wisdom but needs to search for wisdom.[74] This is why, for Plato, the written dialogue also follows the Socratic model and is not a theoretical dogmatic expose. The Platonic dialogue rather is a concrete spiritual exercise which practices the reader in the act of philosophizing.[75] For Hadot then the Platonic dialogue is also a spiritual exercise that leads the reader toward conversion in a way very similar to Socrates' mode of questioning.[76]

Hadot also looks at Socrates' and Plato's understanding of philosophy as a training for death as a type of spiritual exercise. Hadot interprets the training for death in the following way: The *Logos* demands universal rationality and this implies a personal faithfulness to a set of immutable norms that stand above the constantly changing order of human conventions and passion. The philosopher makes a decision to subjugate or surrender his or her body and soul to the demands of the *Logos* which entails a personal faithfulness to the *Logos* no matter what the circumstance. This is why, according to Hadot, Socrates "died for his faithfulness to the Logos."[77] In this way, philosophy begins with a total devotion to the *Logos* and is a training to die for it. According to Hadot, training for death is moving from our individual perspective and personal emotions to the universality of rationality. This entails a kind of death to the self and a willingness to die in faithfulness to Reason itself.[78]

Finally, Hadot moves on to Plotinus and the neo-platonic tradition which stays faithful to Plato's spiritual exercise of training for death but explicitly demarcates levels of spiritual

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[74] *PWL*, 90.
[75] *PWL*, 91.
[76] *PWL*, 93.
[77] *PWL*, 93.
[78] *PWL*, 97.

advancement.[79] So, for instance, Porphyry edits Plotinus' *Enneads* in the order of the stages of virtue and spiritual progress.[80] These stages move from detachment from the body, then knowledge of the physical world and then passing beyond the sensible world to a conversion to the Intellect and the One.[81] Hadot holds that the goal of Plotinus' spiritual exercises is not just to know the Good but to become identical with it in a total "annihilation of individuality."[82] Furthermore, Porphyry boils down the spiritual exercises to a twofold process. First, the philosopher turns away from all attachments to the material and mortal world through a regimen of spiritual and physical ascetic practices like vegetarianism, etc. Second, the philosopher then turns to the contemplation of the Intellect.[83] Hadot sees this as an accurate summary of the whole of the Platonic tradition of spiritual exercises.[84]

After touching on the Stoics, Epicureans, Socrates, Plato and Porphyry respectively, Hadot then recapitulates his findings and states his final conclusion. Despite the major differences in their metaphysical doctrines, and the disparity in their spiritual exercises, Hadot argues that there is still a deeper unity of perspective regarding the nature of philosophy itself which all the different schools held in common. Hadot claims from his investigation that all the ancient Greek philosophers, despite their doctrinal differences, held a common view of both the means and ends of philosophy itself. The means are the "rhetorical and dialectical techniques of persuasion, the attempts at mastering one's inner dialogue, and mental concentration."[85] The

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[79] *PWL*, 99.
[80] *PWL*, 99.
[81] *PWL*, 99-100.
[82] *PWL*, 101.
[83] *PWL*, 100.
[84] *PWL*, 100.
[85] *PWL*, 102.

common overall goal of the philosophical life, is a "self-realization and improvement."[86] Put more simply, each of these philosophers understands that prior to his conversion to philosophy a man is weighed down or sick due to his slavery to the passions and social conventions which are the cultural consolidation of these passions.[87] The ancient philosophers believed that by means of spiritual exercises a philosopher could train himself to be free from the passions and societal conventions and live according to nature in accord with rationality.

Hadot then uses two insightful analogies to demonstrate his thesis that ancient philosophy is a spiritual exercise. First, just as athletes train their bodies to be strong so too philosophers through spiritual exercises can strengthen their soul and transform their vision and their entire personality.[88] In this way, philosophy is like spiritual gymnastics and this is also the reason why philosophy was first conducted often in the gymnasium.

Hadot also points out that the nature of ancient philosophy is like sculpting one's own statue. Using this analogy of the sculptor, some like Foucault or Nietzsche take philosophy to be a kind of moral aesthetics of self-creation. Yet, this is a historical misunderstanding of this Platonic image of sculpting the self. For the ancients, the artistic painting was the artistic medium seen as an 'adding on.' Whereas, the sculptor is the one who 'takes away' and 'liberates' the statue already existing inside the rock. If the ancients were advocating an aesthetic form of self-creation then they would have used the analogy of painting not sculpting.

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[86] *PWL*, 102.
[87] *PWL*, 102.
[88] *PWL*, 102.

In this way, the sculpture analogy ties philosophy to the pursuit of an inner personal nature that abides by objective rational norms.[89]

Based on this historical analysis which finds common means and ends of ancient philosophy Hadot then comes to his final conclusion. He holds that all of ancient philosophy was a spiritual exercise and that philosophical theories are abstract dogmatic content which does one of two things: Either theory explicitly serves the concrete philosophical practices as with the Stoics and Epicureans; or theory is an intellectual exercise that serves a life of contemplation, as with Plato and Aristotle, and is itself nothing other than a spiritual exercise.[90] Finally, Hadot claims that it is impossible to properly understand ancient philosophy without approaching it from the concrete perspective of a spiritual exercise and that ancient philosophy cannot be understood without approaching it with this existential attitude.

Hadot's vantage point of spiritual exercises fundamentally changes how we should properly read the ancient philosophers. By examining the writings and dogmatic theories within this existential perspective we can see that they are all literally products of a teacher within a philosophical school used to teach their students. The theoretical writings are not then primarily meant to be consistent abstract systems and this would also include the works Aristotle.[91] These ancient works are always, at least implicitly, a dialogue intended to lead the soul of the hearer to a deeper spiritual realization. All the theoretical works of philosophy, therefore, cannot be strictly systematic and abstract but always contain the consideration of its interlocutors.[92] This is why so many modern students of philosophy remain perplexed by contradictions and

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[89] *PWL*, 102.
[90] *PWL*, 104.
[91] *PWL*, 104.
[92] *PWL*, 105.

incoherencies found in the ancient philosophers whose purpose was always primarily *psychagogy* and almost never systematic seamlessness in the modern sense.

Thus this pedagogical/spiritual purpose of the dialogue or treatise of Aristotle is not the exposition of a systematic doctrine but lecture notes for teaching on different subjects.[93] Many modern interpreters ignore the pedagogical purpose of the writings and see the internal contradictions and inconsistencies in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and even Augustine and believe that these ancient philosophers are in error, or unknowingly contradict themselves. However, as with Aristotle, Hadot argues that, because he is answering questions on different topics posed by different students the notional content from lesson to lesson does not "necessarily overlap precisely with that of any other lesson."[94] Also Hadot argues that Aristotle never intended to present a systematic theory of the whole of reality in the first place as many often assume.[95]

In this way, the ancients' philosophical works are fundamentally dialectical in nature and primarily a non-systematic intellectual exercise to which the readers are invited to participate.[96] According to Hadot, the reason why systematic coherence was not the main concern of the ancient philosophers is because the "evidential force" of a demonstration was not in "abstract reasoning," but in the existential experience of the person engaged in the spiritual exercises.[97] Thus, as Hadot points out, for Plotinus, one just had to practice virtue to see the truth that the soul was immortal. Also the rhetorical purpose of Augustine's *De Trinitate,* according to Hadot,

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[93] *PWL*, 105.
[94] *PWL*, 105.
[95] *PWL*, 105.
[96] *PWL*, 106.
[97] *PWL*, 107. In other words the ancient philosophers were more concerned with real assent than notional assent.

is not to create a coherent system on the Trinity but more precisely to lead the reader to a concrete experience of their own soul as the image of the Trinity in its own memory, knowledge, and love.[98] From this concrete perspective, Hadot argues that philosophy finally appears in its original aspect "not as a theoretical construct, but as a method for training people to live and to look at the world in a new way."[99]

Yet, very few modern scholars pay attention to the spiritual aspect of concrete philosophy and choose to focus, rather, on its theoretical content alone. But, one may still ask how is this approach is justifiable if philosophy is essentially a way of life?[100] Hadot, indeed, gives a succinct genealogical account of how philosophy got reduced to its theoretical content alone. Hadot primarily lays blame for what he calls the "threoreticizing"[101] of philosophy on what he sees as the absorption of philosophy by Christianity. At first, Christianity in the Patristic period presented itself as a philosophy as we see in the philosophical schools of Justin, Clement of Alexandria and Origen of Alexandria. This was partially because they assimilated the spiritual exercises of the pagan philosophers into the context of Biblical revelation.[102] From Hadot's perspective this was not really a problem because philosophy in this early Christian context was still intent on being primarily a way of life even when informed by Biblical revelation.[103] Also, the other pagan philosophical schools of the Stoics and Neo-platonists continued to flourish at the time which kept the integrity of the philosophical life.

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[98] *PWL*, 107.
[99] *PWL*, 107.
[100] Hadot give and answer to this question in *PWL* but also later in *WAP* he gives a more extensive and modified answer to this question.
[101] *WAP*, 280; 263; 271. This is a term Hadot borrows from Foucault.
[102] *PWL*, 107.
[103] *PWL*, 107.

However, in the medieval period, for various historical reasons, the Schoolmen made a strong distinction between philosophy and theology with theology taking the throne as the supreme science, and thereby reducing philosophy to the handmaid of theology.[104] The integral whole of philosophy, according to Hadot, was therefore, in a certain manner, chopped in half, so to speak, with its spiritual exercises being absorbed by Christian ethics and mysticism and its conceptual content being used only in the service of theology and not for supporting a philosophical way of life. This resulted, willy-nilly, in making philosophy purely theoretical in both aim and content.[105]

Thus, according to Hadot, this is why when Descartes and other early modern philosophers attempted to recover the autonomy of philosophy from theology they did not recover philosophy it in its holistic integrity as primarily a spiritual exercise.[106] Rather, Descartes and modern philosophers unwittingly inherited the medieval notion of philosophy as purely theoretical and from then on it moved more and more toward deeper systemization especially with Suarez, according to Hadot.[107] However, according to Hadot, only with Nietzsche, Bergson and existentialism does philosophy as a way of life finally re-emerge and Hadot sees his personal work is part of this modern or post-modern revival.[108] Nonetheless, the majority of contemporary historians and philosophers, for the most part, remain tied to this one-sided purely conceptual view of philosophy.[109]

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[104] *PWL*, 107.
[105] *PWL*, 107.
[106] *PWL*, 108.
[107] *PWL*, 108. Hadot later in *WAP* revises this thesis and holds that Descartes and others like Kant understood philosophy as a way of life.
[108] *PWL*, 108.
[109] *PWL*, 108.

Philosophy by Nature is a Way of Life

With the unique perspective afforded by the concept of spiritual exercises, Hadot makes a very convincing case, as seen above, that philosophy at its origins in ancient Greece was primarily a way of life ordered to the transformation of the philosopher and not the creation a theoretical system. Hadot's case in his essay *Spiritual Exercises* is almost entirely historical and focused mainly on ancient philosophy. In this early essay in *PWL*, Hadot implies that there is a more theoretical argument about the nature of philosophy as a way of life. So in his later monograph, *What is Ancient Philosophy*, Hadot not only continues to expand and deepen his historical analysis of ancient philosophy as a way of life, but also presents a more explicit case that philosophy by its nature is a way of life.

Hadot makes this more theoretical case in *WAP* four overlapping ways: First, he expands his analysis of ancient philosophy believing that the nature of a thing is found at its origins. Echoing Aristotle, Hadot says, "If one wishes to understand things, one must watch them develop and must catch them at the moment of their birth."[110] In *WAP* Hadot is looking at the origin and development of philosophy to show that its nature is to be, above all, a way of life.

Second, Hadot expands his analysis of the development of philosophy by widening his scope and applying the concept of spiritual exercises also to modern philosophers like Descartes, Kant and Wittgenstein.[111] Contrary to his original claims at the end of *Spiritual Exercises*, Hadot argues in *WAP* that the modern philosophers also saw philosophy primarily as a way of life despite their strong theoreticizing tendencies.[112] In this regard, Hadot interestingly makes a

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[110] *WAP*, 2.
[111] *WAP*, 277.
[112] *WAP*, 264-270.

definite and interesting shift from his earlier position in *Spiritual Exercises* by arguing in *WAP* that most of the great historical figures in philosophy, including the moderns, approached philosophy as primarily a way of life.[113] Hadot argues in *WAP* that it was not so much the modern philosophers who are at fault for the theoreticizing of philosophy, but rather the lower level modern scholars and university professors, including Hegel, who tend to turn the history of philosophy into a series of theoretical systems and present it as such to their students.[114] In other words, for Hadot, it is primarily in the teaching of philosophy by professors of philosophy that its original existential attitude as a way of life is lost.

Third, Hadot also expands on his argument that it was not Descartes, as Foucault claims, whose ideas historically lead to this theoreticizing of philosophy among university professors, but rather the medieval Schoolmen. Hadot argues that the scholastics reduced philosophy to theory alone by forcing its conceptual content into playing the role of handmaid of theology and then doling out its spiritual exercises to the monastic life.

Fourth, Hadot also makes the case that philosophy by its very nature is primarily a way of life by focusing on his important distinction between philosophy as a way of life and philosophical discourse that is implied in his notion of philosophy as a spiritual exercise. Hadot's thesis in *Spiritual Exercises* is based on the concept of spiritual exercises. However,

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[113] As seen above in *PWL* Hadot seems to think philosophy as a way of life simply halts in the Middle Ages, and that it cannot really be found in Descartes who despite his attempt at breaking from its tradition is profoundly influenced by medieval philosophy as Gilson's scholarship has shown. Hadot thinks the philosophical life is only revived again with Nietzsche, Bergson and existentialism. By contrast, in *WAP* Hadot departs from his earlier position and attempts to draw a continuous line of philosophers who follow the ancient tradition of philosophy as primarily a way of life that begins with Socrates and runs straight through Descartes and Kant to Nietzsche and the existentialists *WAP*, 253-70. Here Hadot admits that he had a shift in his position due to the influence of the work of Juliusz Domański and he sees the rediscovery of philosophy as a way of life happening even in the medieval universities, first in the Faculty of the Arts at the University of Paris, then in Dante, Meister Eckhart, Petrarch, Erasmus and eventually Montaigne and Descartes. *WAP*, 261-263.

[114] *WAP*, 259-61; 2-3.

Hadot's idea of spiritual exercises is grounded in a more basic distinction between philosophy as a theoretical discourse and philosophy as a way of life which only lurks in the background in *Spiritual Exercises*.

Moreover, later in *WAP,* Hadot delves into this background distinction. Hadot defines his terms more clearly and elaborates on his important distinction in a way that helps him use this distinction to effectively analyze the whole history of philosophy. His analysis with this distinction helps him make a theoretical case that philosophy, not just at its origins, but throughout its history and in its very essence always was, is and always will be primarily a way of life. Although these four pieces of Hadot's argument overlap, we will leave the first two pieces of Hadot's argument to the side for future study and look more intently at his explication of this distinction in *WAP*.

Hadot's Distinction

Hadot explicitly elaborates on his distinction in three different places in *WAP*.[115] He begins *WAP* by pointing out that most undergraduate professors present philosophy as an intellectual discourse alone and treat the history of philosophy as a series of systematic theories created by philosophers to mirror the universe and human life.[116] However, commonplace this approach may be, Hadot argues that it is very misleading because it leaves out the existential attitude of philosophical schools underlying the theoretical discourse. Hadot claims that a history of philosophical theories cannot be separated from a history of modes of life without resulting in a total distortion of the truth.

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[115] *WAP*, 1-6; 172-180; 271-281.
[116] *WAP,* 2.

One of these major distortions is the impression that students receive that each philosopher in turn recreates an original new construction of an abstract theoretical system that explains the order of the universe. This general philosophical system then gives rise to general moral principles that can be applied to people and society which call people to carry out a special form of life the fruitfulness of which is only a secondary consideration.

Hadot, however, argues that the consideration of the efficaciousness of the practical way of living does not come at the end of the theoretical search for truth. Rather, quite the opposite, the philosophical way of life is first an existential choice to live a mode of life that stands at the beginning of philosophy prior to any theoretical considerations. Moreover, this decision, to a large degree, actually determines the specific doctrinal content of the philosophy. Thus, philosophy, and its philosophical discourse itself originates in, as Hadot says "a choice of life and an existential option—not vice versa."[117]

One of the reasons for this is that the choice to live philosophy is never done in solitude but is always connected to a community or a philosophical school which calls for a total conversion of the person to live in a certain way. The way of life lived by the school is based on a theoretical vision of the structure of the world. Thus the role of philosophical discourse is to "rationally justify this existential option."[118] For, Hadot philosophical discourse is a means and explanation of a certain way of living and therefore cannot be separated or properly understood outside of the context of the mode of life it serves to foster.

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[117] *WAP*, 3.
[118] *WAP*, 3.

Hadot clarifies two important points. First, philosophy as life and philosophy as discourse do not correspond to theory and practice.[119] Philosophical discourse understood by Hadot as "'discursive thought' expressed in written or oral language,"[120] is quite practical because it changes or works on the listener or reader. Also, philosophy as a way of life is not "theoretic" but can be quite theoretical in that contemplation is a theoretical activity.[121] Thus one of the implications of Hadot's working distinction is that philosophical discourse is so essential to the modes of philosophical life—and the way of life so determines the theoretical discourse of a philosophical school—that philosophical discourse and philosophical modes of life cannot be considered as realities that exist in, of, and for themselves. Consequently, one cannot accurately do a history of the philosophical modes of life separate from their theories. Nor can one do a history of philosophical systems separate from their respective modes of life. Furthermore, any philosophical discourse cannot be properly understood separate from the mode of life intended by the philosopher who developed them.[122]

After these introductory remarks Hadot again makes a more comprehensive elaboration on his distinction in chapter nine entitled "Philosophy and Philosophical Discourse." He roots his distinction in a Stoic distinction found in Cicero and Diogenes Laertius between philosophy understood as living virtue and philosophical discourse understood as theory—which itself was in turn divided by the Stoics into logic, physics and ethics.[123] Hadot uses this Stoic distinction to describe ancient philosophy and to discern the nature of philosophy itself. In all of ancient

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[119] *WAP*, 4.
[120] *WAP*, 4.
[121] *WAP*, 4.
[122] *WAP*, 6.
[123] *WAP*, 172

philosophy there is, on the one hand, a philosophical life that is "radically opposed"[124] to the conventional way of living. Also, there is clearly philosophical discourse in all of ancient philosophy that "justifies, motivates and influences their choice of life."[125] Hadot concludes from these two discernible realities that philosophy and philosophical discourse are both "incommensurable and inseparable."[126]

Philosophy and its discourse, according to Hadot, cannot be conflated for two reasons: one historical and one theoretical. First, on the level of history, philosophical discourse no matter how abundant, original, or sophisticated was never considered a sufficient condition to be considered a philosopher as we see with the Sophists for example.[127] Hadot interestingly points out that, in fact, it was actually quite the opposite, for the wandering Cynics who limited philosophical discourse to the bare minimum—even sometimes to the point of mere gestures—were always honored among the ancient as the true and purest philosophers.[128] The wandering Cynics were even considered at times the true or model philosophers looked up to by the more scholastic type philosophers. Also, the only discourse that was considered truly philosophical had to lead directly to a fruitful philosophical life that transformed the practitioner and his friends.[129]

Second, on the more theoretical level, philosophical life and discourse are incommensurable because they have, according to Hadot, "heterogeneous natures."[130] For the lived existential experience of the philosophical life is inexpressible in in terms of philosophical

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[124] *WAP*, 172.
[125] *WAP*, 172.
[126] *WAP*, 172.
[127] *WAP*, 174.
[128] *WAP*, 173.
[129] *WAP*, 173.
[130] *WAP*, 173.

discourse. For example, Platonic eros, Aristotelean knowledge of separate substances, and Plotinian union are all beyond words and propositions.[131] Also the less mystical Stoic passionless perspective of *Logos,* the Epicurean joy of existence, and the Cynic's natural wandering existence, is of a totally "different order from the discourse which prescribes or describes it from the outside. Such experiences are not of the order of discourse and propositions."[132]

In this section, Hadot goes on to argue that philosophy and discourse are also inseparable. For just as discourse cannot be described as philosophical unless it effectively leads to personal transformations, that comprise the philosophical life; so also a way of life cannot be considered philosophical without theoretical discourse which is an integral part of the philosophical life. Hadot gives three reasons that can be easily conflated into two reasons.

First, philosophical discourse justifies theoretically the existential choice of life at the origin of the philosophical life. Hadot argues for the operation of a "reciprocal causality" where both determine one another and cannot be separated.[133] In other words, what Hadot seems to be describing here is an interesting symbiotic relationship between the philosophical life and its discourse where both are a necessary condition for the other, but neither on its own is a sufficient condition for the other. Even the Cynics, who would seem to be the possible exception to this rule because they have almost no discourse, demonstrate by their radical life an implicit reflection, or inner discourse, on the fundamental distinction between convention and nature.[134]

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[131] *WAP*, 174.
[132] *WAP*, 174.
[133] *WAP*, 175.
[134] *WAP*, 176.

Second, Hadot argues that philosophical discourse is a "privileged means" by which the philosopher can act upon himself and others and transform himself in a philosophical way.[135] Philosophical discourse, "is always intended to produce an effect, to create a *habitus* within the soul, or to produce a transformation of the self."[136] In other words, (this is Hadot's third reason) philosophical discourses are spiritual exercises that change personal being and they are therefore a necessary condition for the philosophical life focused on this change.[137] So, for instance, philosophical discourse can change personal being in the following ways. There is the sheer evidential force of a physical or logical proof; or the distinct beauty of a sketch of a sage's life; or the power of a memorized maxim to direct a person's actions in the midst of a flood of passion.[138]

Now, Hadot's approach seems to display some Kantian overtones in presenting the theoretical activity of reason as primarily ordered to its practical interests, and whether philosophy actually begins in an existential choice remains to be seen. But what we can take from Hadot's distinction is that one cannot separate theoretical discourse from the existential mode of life that it is intentionally trying to express and foster. Furthermore, what is implied in Hadot's distinction is that for thought to be truly philosophical it must be ordered to a life-giving end. In this way, willy-nilly, Hadot is following Nietzsche's Goethean principle that thought and life cannot be separated, as covered above in chapter two. For, Hadot's distinction implies that philosophy is not a doctrine, but primarily an act that is ordered to a life-giving way of life which is lived according to nature, reason or truth. Sometimes the philosophical act involves

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[135] *WAP*, 176.
[136] *WAP*, 176.
[137] *WAP*, 176.
[138] *WAP*, 177.

theoretical discourse, yet the philosophical act does not always involve theoretical discourse, like, for instance, the Epicurean experience of the joy of existence.

The philosophical choice for Hadot is not the blind following of an arbitrary way of life. Rather, in a Kantian way, the interests of reason are ultimately practical and the practical takes a primacy over the theoretical.[139] Hadot says,

> Nevertheless there is a kind of reciprocal interaction or causality between what the philosopher profoundly wants, what interests him in the strongest sense of the term—that is, the answer to the question "How should I live?"—and what he tries to elucidate and illuminate by means of reflection. Reflection is inseparable from the will.[140]

One of the important premises here behind Hadot's distinction and vision of the philosophical life, also shared by Nietzsche, Adams, Strauss and Gilson, is that philosophy is not wisdom simply but the pursuit of wisdom or a preparation exercise for the reception of wisdom.[141] If philosophy were simply wisdom, then one could consider separating the true systematic theory of the universe and the practical life that would follow from it. As Hadot says,

> We will not be concerned with opposing, on the one hand, philosophy as a theoretical philosophical discourse, and, on the other, wisdom as the silent way of life which is practiced from the moment in which discourse achieves its completion and perfection.[142]

Yet, if philosophy is always somewhere between sage and non-sage, that is, between total ignorance and full wisdom, then philosophy is always acting in pursuit of wisdom and personal transformation in preparation for wisdom.[143]

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[139] *WAP*, 273.
[140] *WAP*, 273.
[141] *WAP*, 4.
[142] *WAP*, 4.
[143] *PWL*, 4.

Hadot's Influence on Michel Foucault

One question that may arise, at any point in this dissertation, is why we did not devote a chapter to the thought of Michel Foucault? For, Foucault is probably the most popular and influential figure in later half of the twentieth who advocated a return to philosophy as a way of life, or what he often calls the "care of the self."[144] Foucault, like many of the other figures in this movement of life-philosophers, is also deeply inspired by the early Nietzsche especially his work on the philosophical life in *Untimely Meditations*.[145]

While Foucault indeed lived a Nietzsche-inspired philosophical life privately from this point on, it was not until 1980, while reading John Cassian, under the direct influence of Pierre Hadot that Foucault explicitly rediscovered philosophy as a way of life.[146] Due to Hadot's work, Foucault made a very interesting turn away from his genealogist philosophy focused on the techniques of power to a close reading of ancient philosophy in terms of Hadot's spiritual exercises.[147] In other words, Foucault changed or evolved from a genealogical phase in his

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[144] Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: Volume Three of the History of Sexuality*, trans. by Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 39-68. [Hereafter cited as *CS*].

[145] In the summer of 1953 Foucault went on holiday and on the beaches of Italy became totally engrossed in Nietzsche's *Untimely Mediations*. In an interview given almost 30 years later, Foucault relates that, at that time on holiday, Nietzsche was for him "a revelation" that gave him a "philosophical shock" which set him free from his former way of life. From this point on Foucault seems to have privately aspired to live a Nietzschean philosophical ethos of self-creation. James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault,* (Cambridge: First Harvard University Press, 1993), 66-7. [Hereafter cited as *PMF*]. Foucault himself says he is closer to Nietzsche than Sartre in his project of personal self-creation. Hubert L. Dreyfus, and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 237. [Hereafter cited as *MFB*].

[146] Foucault was able to make this discovery due to help of Hadot's similar discovery of spiritual exercises in ancient philosophy four years earlier in 1976. *HS*, xxix n. 21. Hadot says that Pasquale Pasquino a student of both Hadot and Foucault told Foucault about Hadot's first article on spiritual exercises. *PAH*, 41.

[147] Foucault and Hadot mutually influenced one another and seem to have carried on a tacit dialogue within their works in the later part of their careers when they they both became primarily focused on revising the whole history of philosophy in terms of spiritual exercises. Foucault initiated the election of Hadot to the *Collège de France. PAH*, 41. Foucault also explicitly gives Hadot credit for his reading of ancient philosophy in terms of the care of the self. See Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: Volume Two of the History of Sexuality,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990)., 8 [Henceforth cited as *UP*]. Foucault also mentions Hadot here: *HS*, 417-18; *HS*, 387; *UP*, 8. For more on the influence of Hadot and Foucault on one another see: Cory Wimberly, "The Joy of

thought where he despaired of human freedom under the weight of the technologies of domination to an ethical-aesthetic phase where he rediscovered freedom in the spiritual exercises of the ancient philosophical life.[148] Foucault made the return to the ancient philosophical life, especially in the Stoics and Epicureans, the primary theme of his philosophy for the remaining four years of his life.

However interesting and promising Foucault's conversion to ancient philosophy maybe, and however popular and influential his work may continue to be, Foucault still seems to remain heavily dependent on Hadot's discovery of the spiritual exercises; so much so that he seems to remain a derivative or secondary figure in this movement. Another important reason why we can forego a focus on Foucault in this dissertation is because his ideal of the philosophical life is basically a re-iteration of Nietzsche's notion of self-creation and so is again another derivative notion. This is also why Hadot criticized Foucault for illegitimately reading a Nietzchean project of self-invention, instead of self-discovery in light of the Logos or Universal Nature, into the ancient Stoics.[149] In other words, Foucault does not make any truly original contribution to the

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Difference: Foucault and Hadot on the Aesthetic and the Universal in Philosophy," *Philosophy Today* 53, no. 2 (2009), 191; Arnold I. Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)., 122. Hadot also dedicates a whole chapter to Foucault's notion of the spiritual exercises in *PWL*, 206-13.

[148] It is a controverted issue in the scholarly literature whether this is a continuity or discontinuity between the genealogical and ethical-aesthetic phases in Foucault's intellectual development. Paras argues that in the genealogical period Foucault saw the disappearance of the individual but in the techniques of the self found a place for individual freedom. Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge*, (New York: Other Press, 2006), 1-15. Nealon, on the other hand, argues that Foucault's turn to ethics and subjectivity at the end of his life is not a break from his mid-career work on power but an "intensification" of it. Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault: Power and Its Intensification Since 1984*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 5. McGushin also comes down on the side of seeing continuity between the late phase of Foucault's work and his two early phases. Edward McGushin, *Foucault's Askesis: An Introduction to the Philosophical Life*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

[149] Hadot calls Foucault's understanding of the philosophical life a "new form of Dandyism" which is in fact too aesthetic and too self-creative for ancient Stoicism. Hadot says of Foucault, "His description of the practice of the self—like, moreover, my description of spiritual exercises—is not merely an historical study, but rather a tacit

notion of the philosophical life other than creatively combining the work of Nietzsche with that of Hadot. A third reason not to cover Foucault in this dissertation would also be that his thought is not in direct dialogue with Gilson except indirectly through Hadot.

Hadot's Theoretical Reason for the Theoreticizing of Philosophy

Interestingly, Hadot also admits that the cause of the loss of philosophy as a way of life is not simply an accidental event of history but an inherent tendency in the act of theorizing itself. Hadot argues that there is a temptation, innate in philosophy itself, for all philosophers to be "satisfied with philosophical discourse."[150] According to Hadot, it is one thing, on the one hand, to enjoy "fine phrases" but another thing, on the other hand, to become "generally aware of oneself" and be transformed.[151] This personal self-transformation comes with much harder work and much more pain than theorizing about it. Thus, according to Hadot, the deepest reason for all the theoreticizing of philosophy is this inward temptation to be satisfied with "conceptual architecture which he builds, rebuilds and admires."[152] Philosophy then becomes more about constructing than truly seeing to put it in Gilsonian terms. This leads to the idea that philosophical theory can be cut off from the philosophical life and from producing a life-giving

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attempt to offer contemporary mankind a model of life, which Foucault calls 'an aesthetics of existence.' Now, according to a more or less universal tendency of modern thought, which is perhaps more instinctive than reflective, the ideas of "universal reason" and "universal nature" do not have much meaning any more. It was therefore convenient to "bracket" them." *PWL*, 208. Hadot sees Foucault's attempt to bracket the more objective or absolute aspects of Stoicism like Universal Nature or Reason as unfaithful to the true value of Stoic thought. For Foucault the philosophical life was not about the discovery of a true self hidden under the weight of passion and convention but the creation of a new self and the attempt to make oneself and joy in the self one's own end. See *HS*, 332; Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," in *Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), [Henceforth cited as *WE*], 41-2.

[150] *WAP*, 279.

[151] *WAP*, 279.

[152] *WAP*, 280.

way of seeing and living. The conceptual structure gets inflated and the way of life—the question of how one ought to live that started the philosophical pursuit— is then forgotten or left behind.

In other words, as Michael Davis points out, our initial introduction to philosophy today tends to present philosophy as a body of writings, that is, as a noun. But philosophy from the very beginning was always understood as "the highest human possibility" and more of an activity, that is, a verb.[153] For philosophy begins with the question of human nature (true) and the best way to live (good) and philosophy is primarily an action of searching for and living the answers to these questions.[154] Yet, this act of philosophical questioning involves discursive thought which has a tendency toward systematic theory which can also tend to eclipse the original intention of the philosophical act due to its inherent visibility. Davis makes the analogy that just as the body is more visible than the soul, so too a philosophical system is more visible than the philosophical act, or life.[155] This theoretical inflation causes philosophy to appear more as a noun, or a system, and therefore depart from its original verbal nature as an act.[156] The act of philosophy, then, gets completely eclipsed by a theory of the university professor and a love of philosophical scholarship. Davis observes that professional philosophy takes over and "to philosophize" then means simply to do what a professor of philosophy does during his working hours.[157] According to Davis, the noun originally derived from the verb is then in turn "re-

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[153] *The Autobiography*, 1.
[154] *The Autobiography,* 1.
[155] *The Autobiography,* 1.
[156] *The Autobiography,* 1.
[157] *The Autobiography,* 1.

verbalized."[158] To be a philosopher becomes merely accidental to the person like any other profession and is no longer about the meaning of life or attaining the highest human possibility. Philosophy's tendency to move from an activity to a system, or from a verb to a noun, is another way to articulate what both Foucault and Hadot call the theoreticizing of philosophy.

Hadot and Gilson

Hadot references Gilson several times in *WAP*, three times in his endnotes and two times in the body of the text.[159] Hadot presents an interesting reflection on Gilson's thought in the context of chapter eleven entitled: "Eclipses and Recurrences of the Ancient Concept of Philosophy." In this chapter, Hadot is attempting to answer the greatest challenge to his thesis in *WAP* which is the following: If ancient philosophy established such an unbreakable bond between the philosophic life and philosophical discourse then why is philosophy usually taught in the university as a series of systematic theoretical discourses that lack an integral connection with the philosophical way of life?[160]

As is his wont, Hadot first gives a historical genealogical answer and then a theoretical answer both of which we will look at here.[161] In his genealogical answer Hadot blames Christianity for the split between the philosophical life and philosophical discourse.[162] At first, according to Hadot, the early Christians intentionally presented Christianity not as another pagan religion but as a philosophy in the ancient sense, which meant a way of life in accord with the

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[158] *The Autobiography,* 1.
[159] *WAP*, 259; 272; 317 n.5; 319 n.18; 321 n.1.
[160] *WAP*, 253.
[161] Hadot saves his theoretical answer till his final chapter. *WAP*, 279.
[162] *WAP*, 253.

truth or reason. For the Christian schools of philosophy the Truth or Logos was the person of Jesus Christ. Whether or not this presentation was legitimate from the point of view of early Jewish Christianity, or even legitimate from the perspective of natural philosophy, the Christian philosophical life and its discourse remained integrated with one another. However, in the Middle Ages, for various reasons, according to Hadot, a split occurred between these two inseparable components of philosophy. The philosophical way of life got confined to the monasteries without any adjoining philosophical discourse.

Rather, the philosophical discourses of Platonism and Aristotelianism were separated from their original ways of life, reduced to the status of handmaids of theology. This reduced philosophy to nothing more than a theoretical discourse.[163] With the dual historical events of the rise of the university and the rediscovery of the works of Aristotle, philosophy became reduced to commenting on the works of Aristotle as a professor in a university with no connection to a specifically philosophical mode of life.[164] According to Hadot, when the early modern philosophers took back the autonomy of philosophy from theology they willy-nilly retained this tendency towards theoreticizing philosophy.[165]

Hadot claims that for these historical reasons we have inherited the scholastic tradition of philosophy which is a scholastic or university concept of philosophy reduced to its conceptual content alone. As evidence that this scholastic view of philosophy still abides today, Hadot interestingly takes some time to comment on the debate over Christian philosophy in the 1930s. Hadot claims that the Catholic inheritors of the scholastic tradition continue to see philosophy as

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[163] *WAP*, 254.
[164] *WAP*, 258.
[165] *WAP*, 254.

a "purely theoretical activity."[166] Direct evidence for this is the contours of the debate over Christian philosophy sparked by the work of Gilson. Hadot says:

> The partisans of Neoscholastic or Thomist philosophy have continued, as in the Middle Ages, to view philosophy as a purely theoretical activity. This is why, for example, in the debate concerning the possibility and the significance of a Christian philosophy, a debate that arose around 1930, the problem of philosophy as a way of life was never brought up, so far as I know. The Neoscholastic philosopher Étienne Gilson formulated it in purely theoretical terms: Did Christianity introduce new concepts and problematic into the philosophical tradition? With his characteristic clarity of mind, he saw the essence of the problem: 'The most favorable philosophical position is not that of the philosopher, but that of the Christian.' Christianity's great superiority consisted in the fact that it was not 'the simple abstract knowledge of the truth, but an efficacious method of salvation.' To be sure, Gilson admitted, philosophy in antiquity was both a science and a life; but in the eyes of Christianity, ancient philosophy represented nothing but pure speculation, whereas Christianity itself is 'a doctrine which brings with it, at the same time, all the means for putting itself into practice.' There could be no clearer affirmation that modern philosophy has come to consider itself a theoretical science because the existential dimension of philosophy no longer had any meaning from the perspective of Christianity, which was simultaneously both doctrine and life.[167]

Hadot quite correctly claims that the debate over Christian philosophy demonstrates quite clearly that most Catholic philosophers, and for that matter the secular philosophers, like Émile Bréhier, continue to see philosophy as a purely theoretical activity. Hadot is also right in pointing out that the problem of philosophy as a way of life was never brought up explicitly in the debate over Christian philosophy.

It is somewhat difficult to interpret how exactly Hadot understands Gilson's position in the debate here. For, on the one hand, he compliments Gilson's clarity of mind and credits Gilson with admitting that ancient philosophy was originally a way of life, or, as Hadot says,

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[166] *WAP*, 259.
[167] *WAP*, 259.

"both a science and a life."[168] That is, Hadot admits here that Gilson understood the existential dimension of philosophy and did not reduce it to theoretical discourse alone.

On the other hand, he does seem to explicitly attribute to Gilson a purely theoretical neo-scholastic view of philosophy; first because Hadot claims that neither Gilson nor anyone else brought up the problem of philosophy as a way of life; second because Gilson formulated the problem in purely theoretical terms by arguing that Christian revelation introduced new conceptual content into the philosophical tradition.

Since he credits Gilson both here, and elsewhere,[169] with seeing philosophy as a way of life, Hadot may mean here that Gilson merely *formulated* the problem in a purely conceptual way due to the limitations resulting from the largely immovable assumptions of his secular and neo-scholastic audiences instead of opting to bring up the the bigger issue of the problem of philosophy as a way of life or its equivalent. On the other hand, Hadot could also be saying here that Gilson understood ancient philosophy as a way of life but now sees modern day philosophy as a purely theoretical engagement due to the ascendancy of Christianity as the true way of life and salvation that replaces the ancient philosophical way of life.

Either way, Hadot seems rather ambiguous about Gilson and it is rather hard to discern exactly how he interprets him in this passage. Admittedly, Hadot's intentions in this context are not primarily concerned with an accurate historical portrayal of Gilson's role in the 1930s debate, but rather to making a broader, and quite accurate, point that the contours of the debate over Christian philosophy underscore the predominance of a purely scholastic view of philosophy as purely theoretical. In addition to this, Hadot is also implicitly recommending that

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[168] *WAP*, 259.
[169] *PWL*, 277; 279; *PAH*, 18.

the problem of philosophy as a way of life in fact be applied to the debate over Christian philosophy in the future in order to resolve it.

What Hadot possibly misses here is a real opportunity to further his case for philosophy as a way of life by mentioning that it was in fact Gilson's implicit introduction of the idea of philosophy as a way of life that actually drove the debate over Christian philosophy. For, Gilson's existential approach to philosophy undercut the assumptions of the secular philosophers and neo-scholastics that philosophy was only a closed theoretical system accepting no considerations from the existential order regarding ways of life, faith, grace, revelation, or history.

Gilson, admittedly, does not often use Hadot's exact phrase 'philosophy as a way of life' as an explicit theme in his work, but he does bring into consideration the same reality Hadot's phrase is intended to describe. Gilson pushes the existential dimension of philosophy by showing how the Christian way of life, based on revelation and faith, can have an intrinsic influence on the generation of a philosophy and bring with it legitimate philosophical insight. These theoretical philosophical insights are the direct result and fruits of the Christian philosophical way of life informed by revelation and faith. In a certain way, Gilson showed, then, how all the dimensions of the philosophical life whether it be Greek, Roman, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu or Christian have an intrinsic influence on the theoretical content of philosophy. Gilson, in a different context, is actually making the very same historical point as Hadot that a philosophy cannot be properly understood without an equal consideration of its philosophical mode of life. Precisely, by calling a philosophy 'Christian,' Gilson is bringing in the existential life element that is championed by Hadot.

Second, Gilson does not see ancient philosophy as pure speculation in the sense that the only thing worthy to take from it is its conceptual content. Gilson is quite aware of the influence of the philosophical spiritual exercises on early Christianity. Gilson here in the remark referred to by Hadot is expressing a fulfillment interpretation of ancient philosophy expressed in the early Christian view of ancient philosophers as seeking goals and knowledge that were simply beyond their ken. Knowledge of the *Logos*, or union with the One, or the divine intellect, or even the healing of the passions, according to the early Christian philosophers cannot be accomplished within the power of the natural realm but only by the infusion of grace. Gilson, along with Justin Martyr and the early Fathers of the Church, sees the ancient philosophers as longing for the grace of Christ the truths of revelation. Christianity, according to Gilson, is the true philosophy because it fulfills the empty longings and answers the unanswerable questions of philosophy. So ancient philosophy is not pure speculation for Gilson in the abstract sense of merely theoretical but in the existential sense of philosophy seeking something it cannot provide itself. Therefore, without the divine help philosophy remains "pure speculation." In other words, ancient philosophy is not 'pure speculation' in the sense of merely being a doctrine and not a way of life, but is 'pure speculation' in the sense of an incomplete knowledge that does not contain the necessary power of grace to accomplish the salvation for which is strives. For Strauss it is Eros as nature's grace that plays this role, but, for Gilson, it is only the grace of Christ that can move philosophy from pure speculation to a fulfilled way of life.

Also, Hadot's deeper disagreement with Gilson on this point is his seeing a complete incompatibility between Christian revelation and Greek philosophy and the philosophical life. However, in another piece in honor of Gilson, Hadot interestingly shows a deep agreement with

Gilson's philosophy on two important points. Hadot says that Gilson was his "own master" not only in the history of philosophy but also in philosophy itself and especially in his philosophical work L*'être et l'essence*.[170] Hadot says that two themes from Gilson influenced his own thought definitively: He says,

> This was first of all that the idea that philosophy cannot be a system without setting aside the essence of knowledge itself which is to "see" and not to "build. " This was next, and especially, the idea that the act of being transcends being and essence.[171]

The first Gilsonian idea to which Hadot is here referring is that philosophical knowledge, much like aesthetic experience, often ascends to the level of a trans-conceptual intuition or vision of the real. This first idea is also based on Gilson's notion that philosophy, unlike art, does not construct or create knowledge but must submit to the real and be primarily focused on real things. Both of these Gilsonian ideas—the nature of knowledge as seeing the real and not constructing it and that the act of existence transcends essence—seemed to have fundamentally influenced Hadot's rediscovery of the philosophy as a way of life. First, Gilson approached philosophy from the perspective that philosophy is primarily found in a personal act which perceives the truth of the real beyond conceptual knowledge. Second, Gilson held that this philosophical act, like the act of being, transcends the formal doctrinal phase of philosophy itself. Hadot, likewise, sees this philosophical act of discovery of the truth as transcending the formal phase of philosophical doctrine.

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[170] Pierre Hadot, "Dieu comme acte d'être: à propos des theories d'Étienne Gilson sur la «metáphysique de l'exode»," In *Etienne Gilson Et Nous: La Philosophie Et Son Histoire*, 117-121, (Paris: Vrin, 1980), 117. [Hereafter cited as *Dieu*].

[171] "Ce fut tout d'abord l'idée que la philosophie ne peut être un système sans renoncer à l'essence même de la connaissance qui est de «voir» et non de «construire». Ce fut ensuite et surtout l'idée que acte d'être transcende l'étant et l'essence." Hadot, *Dieu*, 117.

We can safely conclude from this comment by Hadot, and his other various comments on Gilson, that although he disagreed with Gilson's view that Christian revelation helped philosophy, Gilson was still one of the primary philosophical influences that helped Hadot rediscover philosophy as a way of life. Hadot's unique contribution to the history of philosophy is indeed his rediscovery of the notion of spiritual exercises as the key to properly understanding ancient philosophy, and his distinction between philosophic discourse and philosophy as a way of life as the key to properly understanding the nature of philosophy itself. Although these are Hadot's personal discoveries, it seems that the two principles above that Gilson taught him about the nature of knowledge as 'seeing' and the nature of being as act transcending essence were necessary for this discovery. Despite Hadot's historical disagreements with Gilson regarding Christian revelation and his personal originality as a scholar, this would make Gilson possibly the most important philosophical influence on Hadot with respect to his rediscovery of philosophy as a way of life.

PART III: THE CATHOLIC RECOVERY OF PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE IN THE THOUGHT OF ÉTIENNE GILSON

Introduction to Part III

After rooting the modern return to the ancient notion of philosophy as a way of life in Romanticism's critique of modernity and especially in the thought of Nietzsche in part one, and after looking at the three different modern paradigmatic models of the philosophical life—the medieval, the Socratic and the Stoic/Epicurean—in the thought of Adams, Strauss and Hadot in part two, we now turn to the thought of Étienne Gilson who, while following the Medieval model of faith and reason like Adams, provides a more orthodox Catholic approach and response to the modern movement promoting a return to philosophy as a way of life.

In part three we take Hadot's distinction between philosophy as a way of life and philosophy as a theoretical discourse and apply it to the thought and life of Gilson. We do this in order to show that Gilson approaches philosophy more as a way of life than as a systematic doctrine and this aspect of his thought is one of the major things that sets him apart from many of his Catholic and non-Catholic contemporaries. We also hope to show that philosophy as a way of life is indeed the 'spirit of Gilsonism' because this notion best unifies not only the inner thrust of Gilson's body of thought, but also his life's mission that was most clearly expressed in a special way in his founding of PIMS. For PIMS in a way was Gilson's own personal school of philosophy much like the Academy was for Plato or the Lyceum was for Aristotle.

We show that Hadot's notion of philosophy as way of life is the spirit of Gilsonism by showing that Gilson saw philosophy as a way of life throughout all the major phases of his intellectual career and that it remained a major driving theme in his thought, albeit an implicit theme. That philosophy as a way of life is a major theme in Gilson's thought is confirmed most

especially in his vision and foundation of PIMS as his personal dream and possibly the most important personal accomplishment in his intellectual career. For he saw PIMS as a place that would preserve and pass on the Catholic intellectual tradition approached as a way of life on the medieval model of the vital union of faith and reason.

In part three we focus most of our energies on the first phrase of Gilson's career between 1904 when he first encountered Bergson and 1929 when Gilson founded PIMS. We focus on the first phase of Gilson's intellectual life for several reasons. First, because looking at Gilson's thought in its early seed form in his early works before he gets involved in controversies like the debate over Christian philosophy, or following the theological order in St. Thomas, best shows his desire to revive the Catholic philosophical life. Second, Gilson's early thought shows that he was a philosopher from the beginning of his career and was not a historian who later turned to philosophy. Third, by focusing on the early phase of Gilson's thought we show his underlying vision of PIMS as a school of philosophy that would pass on medieval culture in the midst of a declining Western culture. We also show how PIMS may have been the most important personal accomplishment of his philosophical career.

In the final chapter of part three we show how Gilson continued to approach philosophy as a way of life after his founding of PIMS and sometimes more explicitly in this later phase. This shows how Gilson indeed approached philosophy as a way of life from his first encounter with Bergson in 1904 to his last lectures at PIMS in 1972. This leads to the conclusion that Gilson approached philosophy more as a way of life than as a systematic doctrine and that he saw his passing on this sapiential approach to Catholic truth as his life's mission. Thus philosophy as a way of life is indeed the spirit of Gilsonism.

CHAPTER VI

Gilson's Philosophical Genre and Early Intellectual Influences

Introduction

Chapter six consists of two distinct sections. The first section serves as an extended introduction to the Gilson's concrete approach to philosophy and to reality itself. It shows how this inductive approach sets him apart from many other Catholic neo-scholastic philosophers and sets him in a certain genre of French life-philosophers. Section two covers the early intellectual influences on Gilson from childhood, youth and then at the Sorbonne with a special focus on his encounter with Lévy-Bruhl and Bergson and how his encounter with these figures influenced his approach to philosophy as a way of life.

Section One: Gilson's Existential Approach to Reality and Philosophical Genre

Étienne Gilson (1884-1978) was a Catholic philosopher and medievalist with a special focus on the revival of Christian metaphysics. At first glance, Gilson seems to be just one of several major Catholic scholars involved in the neo-scholastic and neo-thomist revivals in the twentieth century which was greatly energized by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical on Christian philosophy, *Aeterni Patris.* In this regard, Gilson looks very similar to Désiré Cardinal Mercier, Pierre Mandonnet, M.D. Roland-Gosselin, Maurice De Wulf, Léon Noël, Fernand Van Steenberghen and Jacques Maritain among the other Catholic philosophers of his time.

Indeed, with his ground breaking works on a wide range of the major Christian philosophers, such as Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, Duns Scotus, as well as works on medieval saints, mystics, and poets like St. Francis, St. Bernard, and Dante, Gilson was

almost certainly the single most influential figure in the revival of medieval intellectual history in the 20th century.[1] Furthermore, what especially distinguished Gilson's contribution to this movement is that, unlike most other medieval scholars of this time who tended to specialize in the work of one thinker, Gilson uncannily produced magisterial works on almost every major medieval thinker.[2]

Paradoxically, however, Gilson never at any point considered himself a neo-scholastic,[3] nor a part of the neo-scholastic or neo-thomist revivals and as a professor of the Sorbonne and Harvard during the 1920s he was often considered an outsider in many Catholic philosophical circles.[4] Gilson also quite often found himself in intellectual conflicts with the major members of the neo-scholastic movement, despite having solid friendships with many of them, including Mandonnet, De Wulf, Van Steenberghen and Maritain. For various reasons, Gilson and Maritain presented a united front and rarely ever disagreed with one another publicly. However, they had

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[1] Gerald A. McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), 34-5. McCool counts Gilson as one of the four most influential figures in the development of Thomism along with Maréchal, Rousselot, and Maritain.

[2] For a comprehensive compilation of Gilson's works see: Margaret McGrath, *Étienne Gilson a Bibliography / Une Bibliographie* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982).

[3] In the early stage of his career from 1913-1929 Gilson did all of his medieval scholarship in the purely secular environments of the Sorbonne and Harvard and his many writings and lectures were almost all directed toward purely secular audiences. Gilson at this time before founding PIMS and the Christian Philosophy debate in the early 1930s published very little in any of the Catholic journals and did not give any lectures or classes in any Catholic institutions like Louvain or the Catholic Institute. See *EG*, 116; 10; 203; 216. Gilson went to a secular *Lyceé* and was not exposed to neo-scholasticism in his *Petit-séminaire* that was more humanist in its approach. In his autobiography Gilson says that it would have been a "genuine catastrophe" for him personally if he were exposed to the neo-scholastic manuals. Étienne Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology,* trans. Cécile Gilson (New York: Random House, 1962), 46. [Hereafter cited as *PT*].

[4] *EG*, 216; 328; 113-16. Gilson was not close with any of the four centers of the revival of neo-thomism and neo-scholastism in the 1920s: The Institut Catholique located in Paris, The Institut Supérieur in Louvain, The Angelicum and Gregorianum in Rome and The Domincan Saulchoir located first in Belgium and then in France after 1939. On an individual level the young Gilson was close with Sertillanges and Rousselot at the Institute Catholique and Chenu and Théry at the Saulchoir.

many scholarly conflicts in several areas including history, philosophy and art including their approach to philosophy itself.[5]

Gilson's first disagreement with the neo-scholastics took place in the 1920s with his use of the theological order in explicating the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and his insistence on calling Bonaventure and Augustine real philosophers despite their explicit and vital dependence on faith in their thought.[6] Next, in the early 1930s Gilson clashed with the neo-scholastics, as well his rationalist colleagues at the Sorbonne, over his notion of 'Christian philosophy' as revelation-engendered philosophical thought. Then, in the later half of the 1930s, Gilson again clashed with the neo-scholastics over the issue of critical realism accusing them, despite their good intentions, of having idealist tendencies by making epistemology a necessary prelude to metaphysics even when presenting Thomas Aquinas' philosophy. Finally, especially toward the later half of his long intellectual career, Gilson also insisted, to the great consternation of the neo-scholastics, that philosophy and especially metaphysics is best done in the context of theology in the light of faith and that any Catholic who wants to be a good philosopher must first and above all be a theologian just like Thomas Aquinas.[7]

Now these interesting arguments between Gilson and the neo-scholastics over different scholarly issues for the most part never devolved into in-house Catholic bickering, so to speak; the neo-scholastics highly respected Gilson's unmatched breadth of humanist scholarship, his masterful ability to write in a popular and appealing way, and his groundbreaking help in

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[5] One interesting early exception to this is Gilson's criticism of Maritain's heavy handed method of reducing philosophers to abstract theses. Gilson says that this method makes it so Thomas, Bonaventure and Descartes would not even recognize this reduction as their own philosophy and that his method is not to reduce a man to his ideas but to attempt to understand the ideas by the man. Frédéric Lefèvre, "Étienne Gilson." In *Une heure avec*, 63-79, (Paris: Gallimard, 1925), 71-2. [Hereafter cited as *UHA*].
[6] *PT*, 91-5.
[7] *EG*, 298-301.

reviving interest in medieval thought. Gilson, furthermore, was also an extremely affable[8] and cultured gentleman who respected and befriended many of the scholars he disagreed with especially De Wulf, Van Steenberghen[9] and Maritain. Thus, this is one indication that Gilson's arguments with his neo-scholastic interlocutors were rooted in legitimate philosophical disagreements and not internal rivalry.

Gilson's Inductive Approach vs. the Neo-Scholastic Deductive Approach

These manifold disagreements remain philosophically interesting today in their own right but especially because they can be traced back to a more radical disagreement about the nature of philosophy itself and the proper relation of the philosopher to the real. For the neo-scholastics tended to see philosophy as simply an abstract and unchanging system of rational discourses beginning and ending in ideas, whereas Gilson viewed philosophical discourse as an on-going historical conversation in search of the knowledge of existential reality within the larger context of the philosophical way of life. In other words, the neo-scholastics saw philosophy as a closed abstract system of concepts whereas Gilson saw philosophy as a way of life beginning and ending in existential reality. These two different approaches to philosophy and reality were the often unspoken, and at times, unconscious, root of their various philosophical disagreements.

One could couch this disagreement as based on the fundamental choice of a deductive or an inductive approach to reality, philosophy and history. For instance, most all the neo-

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[8] De Lubac said "his heart remained generous and as big as all outdoors." Henri De Lubac, *Letters of Ètienne Gilson to Henri De Lubac*, trans. Mary Emily Hamilton, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 12. [Hereafter cited as *LEGH*].

[9] For more on Van Steenberghen's interesting friendship with Gilson see Henri De Lubac, *Lettres de M. Étienne Gilson adressées au P. Henri De Lubac et commentées par celui-ci*, (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 1986), 186-7. [Hereafter cited as *Lettres*].

scholastics, tended to use a deductive method in their approach to the figures in history of philosophy. They would begin with a predetermined scientific idea of the nature of philosophy as a purely rational discourse or system of abstract ideas and apply it to various Christian thinkers.[10] Talking about the neo-scholastic deductive approach Gilson says,

> The consequence is in fact necessary, if one starts with a certain conception of philosophy as a separate essence and then one searches for what place such a philosophy finds in the doctrine of St. Augustine. In effect, there is no place for such a conception of philosophy.[11]

This deductive approach then often lead some of them, like Mandonnet and Van Steenberghen, to rule out Bonaventure and Augustine as genuine philosophers because they conducted their philosophy under the light of faith and revelation. These neo-scholastics then interpreted Thomas as making historical progress by making a practical separation between the sciences of philosophy and theology in a manner very similar to that found in Descartes. In addition to this, many of the neo-scholastics also tended to see philosophical discourse as a stable conceptual system just as unchanging as the eternal truth it conveys. This made them see only one true Catholic philosophy, such as, that of Aristotle as interpreted by Thomas. In addition to this deductive approach, the neo-Thomists also had a much more confident attitude than Gilson displayed in the philosopher's ability to conceptualize and define all of created existence with philosophical ideas.

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[10] Cf. *PT*, 92. We are primarily using the English version of this work because Gilson worked on it with his daughter and made so many changes that it amounts to a rewrite.

[11] "La conséquence est en effet nécessaire, si l'on part d'une certaine conception de la philosophie comme essence séparée et que l'on cherche ensuite quelle place une telle philosophie trouverait dans la doctrine de saint Augustin. Elle n'en trouverait en effet aucune." Étienne Gilson, *Introduction a L'Étude De Saint Augustin,* 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1943), 318. [Hereafter cited as *ISA*].

Gilson, on the other hand, guided by the strict historical methods he was taught by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl at the Sorbonne, applied a more inductive method to history.[12] Gilson consciously attempted to approach history without any tight *a priori* scientific definitions of philosophy or theology that would pre-determine the conclusions about which thinkers could be counted as a true philosophers and which could not be counted true philosophers. With his doctoral work on the influence of scholastic theology on Descartes, Gilson knew first hand that many medieval thinkers made great contributions to the history of philosophy. Yet, a strict *a priori* rationalist definition of philosophy would exclude great thinkers like Augustine and Bonaventure from being considered philosophers, and thereby exclude them from the history of philosophy simply because they lived their philosophical life from the perspective of faith. Such a violent distortion to the actual history of thought was simply unacceptable to Gilson because of his sense of the importance of an accurate depiction of the history of philosophy.

For example, Gilson observed that this deductive approach is the biggest source of error in approaching history: "We represent to ourselves history through some *a priori* ideas, which we then invoke to justify these same ideas."[13] Furthermore, Gilson's historical approach of seeking what a philosopher really thought, and not reducing him to his ideas alone, made him see philosophy as the search for wisdom within an on-going historical dialogue among philosophers, and less as a series of irreconcilable abstract theses.[14]

Guided by the metaphysical methods of Bergson, Gilson also employed an inductive approach to philosophy where he saw philosophy as always beginning and ending in actually

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[12] *PT*, 96.
[13] "*Nous nous représentons l'histoire à travers certaines idées a priori, et nous l'invoquons ensuite pour justifier ces mêmes idées." UHA*, 72. [Italics in original].
[14] *UHA*, 72.

existing things. This existential approach made Gilson always begin with being, or the real, and not with thought. As Gilson says,

> But Thomism is not a system, if by that we mean a comprehensive explanation of the world, that we could deduce or construct, in an idealistic manner, arising from principles posed *a priori*.[15]

This is because, for Gilson, the concept of being is not univocal and cannot be conceptually defined in such a way that is valid for all substances. Therefore, the different ways of being must first be examined inductively and philosophy built up from there. Whereas, on the other hand, beginning with thought in the deductive mode ensures the certainty of a closed comprehensible system of concepts; it does not, however, also ensure a real connection of our thought with being itself.

The Mystery of Creation in Gilson's Thought

This inductive approach to being ensured for Gilson that philosophy would always be an on-going search for wisdom due to the inherent resistance of the real to full conceptual comprehension. For Gilson saw existence as reflecting the incomprehensible mystery of its Creator. As Gilson says,

> Creation is a mystery. That God freely created finite being, which cannot exist without him but without which he himself can subsist, as moreover he has decided to do in the same way indeed for eternity prior to creation, this is for us the first of the mysteries and the seed of all others. Nature is not grace, but the gift of

[15] "Mais le thomisme n'est pas un système, si l'on entend par là une explication globale du monde, que l'on déduirait, ou construirait, à la manière idéaliste, à partir de principes posés *a priori*." Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme: Introduction à la Philosophie de Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 6th ed. (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1965), 438. [Hereafter *Le Thomisme* 6th ed.].

> existence which God gave is a mystery whose opacity reason immediately perceives.[16]

Gilson's creationism made him resist the idea of a final and closed philosophical system of definitions and concepts that could comprehend it. Thus, for Gilson, it is ultimately due to the mystery of existence that philosophy is by its nature an on-going dialogue. Therefore, grounded in this primordial mystery of the gift of existence, philosophy manifests itself as an on-going dialogue within history.

Furthermore, Gilson also saw philosophy as ending in existence or an intuition of the real. For the early Gilson, still under the heavy influence of Bergson, philosophy did not culminate in a conceptual system of logical ideas that may, or may not, reflect reality, but rather in an inexpressible non-conceptual intuition of reality or a fragment of reality. For Gilson, philosophy's goals were not to capture existence in words and concepts in a scientific analytical manner, but to use words and concepts to conduct the philosopher himself to a place where he experiences reality in a metaphysical intuition, or an experience of the goodness, truth and beauty of existence. In this way, the early Gilson saw philosophy, in term of its goals, as much closer to art's aesthetic intuition of beauty through a work of art than to science's conceptual grasp of things for the purposes of control and practical action.[17]

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[16] "La création est un mystère. Que Dieu ait librement créé de l'être fini, qui ne peut être sans lui mais sans lequel il peut lui-même subsister, comme d'ailleurs il a fait pendant l'éternité précréatrice, c'est pour nous le premier des mystères et la semence de tous les autres. La nature n'est pas grâce, mais le don gratuit que Dieu lui fit de l'existence est un mystère dont la raison perçoit immédiatement l'opacitè." *Lettres*, 147.

[17] By the time Gilson becomes a Thomist, and discovers the Thomistic metaphysics of *esse,* Gilson adjusts his Bergsonian position on philosophy and sees philosophy culminating more in the articulation of conceptual essences in terms of their non-conceptual *esse*. See *Le Thomisme* 6th ed., 437-59. We still see the trans-conceptual element remain in his later position but he drops his earlier perhaps more mystical approach in terms of metaphysical intuition and replaces it with *esse*. It is hard to pinpoint when exactly Gilson became a committed Thomist. It is clear he is not a Thomist in 1925 because when asked weather he preferred St. Thomas or St. Bonaventure he replies "Mes préférences, non pas secrètes mais avouées, ne vont ni à l'un ni à l'autre exclusivement, mais à la pensée chrétienne dont ils sont l'un et l'autre de très prodons représentants." *UHA*, 70. However, it is clear that Gilson is

Thus Gilson's combined historical and existential approaches lead him to see philosophy, not only as a search for wisdom, but also as an on-going dialectical conversation among great thinkers beginning in ancient Greece and continuing through imperial Rome and medieval England and France into modern philosophy. According to Gilson, this conversation is part of the essence of philosophy itself which will never end due to the pure mysterious depths of existence. In this way, Gilson also viewed philosophical discourse not as the totality of philosophy but as serving the larger goal of a certain way of life.

Gilson as a Life-Philosopher

In these several ways, Gilson was set apart from many of the other Catholic thinkers of his time because of his historical/existential approach to philosophy as a way of life. In this respect, Gilson was much more like Nietzsche, Henry Adams, Strauss, and Hadot than his own Catholic neo-scholastic colleagues. For Gilson, like all of the life-philosophers covered above, had a historical way of doing philosophy, a dialectical view of philosophy as an on-going conversation regarding the mystery of existence, and a view of philosophy as transforming the philosopher himself in the context of an intellectual, practical, and spiritual way of life.

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indeed a committed Thomist by the early 1940s when he edits his major works in Paris during World War Two and discovers Thomistic *esse*. It is hard to pinpoint Gilson's turn to Thomas: if one was forced to pinpoint the moment then it would be the William James Lectures at Harvard in 1936 where he couches the history of philosophy, in a dromedarian fashion, as culminating in Thomas Aquinas and then degenerating into skepticism. Étienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999). In this regard, Noone points out that Gilson was similar to De Wulf in marking Thomas Aquinas as the peak of medieval philosophy yet unlike De Wulf who saw a common metaphysical patrimony. As Noone says, "Thomism, à la Gilson, was rather a quantum leap in the understanding of what is first in the nature of reality, namely being. Thomas's notion of *ens* as *habens esse* was the greatest philosophical achievement of the Middle Ages." However, Gilson did not claim in the manner of De Wulf, and others, that the metaphysics of Augustine, Bonaventure and even Scotus were "a decline so much as an alternative." Timothy Noone, "Medieval Scholarship and Philosophy in the Last One Hundred Years," In *One Hundred Years of Philosophy*, ed. Brian J. Shanley, 111-32, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 120.

However, what sets Gilson apart from these other life-philosophers is that he more than any other thinker—including Nietzsche, Strauss and Hadot—put this concept of philosophy as an existential way of life into action with the founding of the Institute of Mediaeval Studies at the University of Toronto in 1929 [IMS].[18] IMS for Gilson was more than merely another step in an illustrious career; it was the fulfillment of a long held personal dream to found a kind of school of philosophy in the ancient sense, one that trained researchers in such a way that would revive medieval wisdom and culture. Gilson devoted himself to PIMS as his most important philosophical work by teaching there almost every year, with the exception of the hiatus of the Second World War, for over forty years. Gilson, then, presents philosophy as a way of life not only in thought but also in deed with PIMS. More specifically he presents this philosophical life as ordered to building a life-giving civilization on the medieval model driven by a synthesis of faith and reason.

Several Difficulties in Approaching Gilson as a Life-Philosopher

There are several difficulties with speaking of Étienne Gilson as approaching philosophy as a way of life which will be helpful to enumerate for purposes of introduction.

Gilson's definition of philosophy

First, Gilson shows a consistent preoccupation with the question of the nature of philosophy throughout his long sixty-six year scholarly career between 1909-1972. Indeed,

[18] The Institute of Mediaeval Studies was granted a pontifical charter in 1939 and renamed The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. We will refer to Gilson's institute in Toronto as either IMS or PIMS depending on the year to which our discussion refers.

Gilson provides at least one comment, but usually much more than that, which pertains to the purpose and nature of philosophy in the vast majority of each one of his numerous scholarly writings. Furthermore, Gilson also takes many different angles on the nature of philosophy usually based on the many different audiences and controversies he is dealing with at the time. In these many comments, Gilson does not explicitly say that he views philosophy as a way of life, and, with some important exceptions,[19] rarely uses this terminology that has admittedly been made more popular recently by Strauss, Hadot and Foucault and their followers who want to use this idea as a way to return to the ancient Greek ideal of philosophy.

However, when Gilson does speak of philosophy itself, in a manner very similar to Strauss, he tends to define it etymologically not as wisdom itself, but as the love of wisdom in the sense of an on-going pursuit or search for wisdom.[20] Gilson often does this because he holds that knowing existence, the real, or being as being is a primary concern of philosophy and, like its Creator, existence is fundamentally mysterious and therefore can never be exhausted by conceptual thought.

This basic Gilsonian premise of creationism mentioned above has several implications for Gilson's philosophy: First, philosophy will be a perpetual search and there will never be one final philosophy that can claim final wisdom. For Gilson, there are enduring metaphysical principles but no final system of conceptual knowledge that ends the perpetual search and vital

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[19] Étienne Gilson, "Le rôle de la philosophie dans l'histoire de la civilisation," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 34, (1927): 176; [Henceforth cited as *Le rôle*]; Étienne Gilson, "The Education of a Philosopher," In *Three Quests in Philosophy*, ed. Armand Maurer, 2-24, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2008),15. [Hereafter cited as *EP*].

[20] See Étienne Gilson, "What is Christian Philosophy?," in *A Gilson Reader,* ed. Anton C. Pegis, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957)., 177. [Hereafter cited as *WCP*].

life of philosophy.[21] Second, there can be several philosophies that are different yet complementary to one another like Augustine, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas; although not all philosophies for Gilson are compatible. Third, philosophy is an on-going search for wisdom in the context of a perpetual dialogue or conversation among great thinkers that began in ancient Greece that one must enter into in order to best do philosophy.[22] This makes the history of philosophy a fundamental component to philosophy itself in a way that the history of physics is not a fundamental component to physics. For Gilson philosophy is a way of life that reincarnates itself throughout history in living philosophers themselves.[23]

Furthermore, Gilson often uses the word 'philosophy' in a very wide sense so as to include not only the doctrinal phase of philosophy but also to include the genesis of a philosophy and the life and context of the philosopher that plays a role in its construction. For Gilson, the genetic phase of philosophy is intrinsic to philosophy and just as much a part of philosophy as the doctrinal phase. Thus Gilson, much like Hadot, takes into consideration the historical context and the factors like faith, revelation, and way of life which helped the philosopher search and gain insight into truth and considers them intrinsic parts of philosophy. Gilson also speaks of philosophy as a kind of 'vocation' that leads to a special way of life and plays a role in producing culture and civilization through submission to the truth.[24] Thus the idea of philosophy as a way of life seems to be the best notion that describes Gilson's view of philosophy because it unifies these several aspects in his distinctive approach to philosophy. For the sake of clarity we then define this notion of *philosophy as a way of life* in the following way: an art of human

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[21] *EP*, 15.
[22] *EP*, 11-17.
[23] *EP*, 12.
[24] *EP*, 4.

existence, inspired by Greek thinkers, especially Socrates, focused on engaging in an on-going search for the principles of wisdom that involves the conversion of both the intellectual and practical faculties of the philosopher in order to transform his perception of the world for the sake of personal fulfillment in knowing the truth.

Also, it should be noted that just because Gilson himself does not explicitly use this term as a theme does not mean it cannot be fruitfully applied to his body of work for the sake of illumination. In fact, the opposite is true, for if Gilson did use the term frequently then the present thesis would be simply an exercise in stating the obvious and contain very little significance or valuable insight. On the contrary, the thesis that Gilson sees philosophy as a way of life is a meaningful one precisely because he did not often explicitly say it and because this idea brings a helpful unity to his many different statements on philosophy. To put it in a Gilsonian way, the idea of philosophy as a way of life gives "concrete meaning" to his philosophy and encapsulates the 'spirit' of Gilson's philosophical approach.[25]

The spirit of Gilson

Furthermore, pulling the idea of philosophy as a way of life out of Gilson's work and life's work brings out an unspoken original intuition contained in Gilson's thought. In this way, we are applying to Gilson his own historical method that he himself applies to thinkers. Gilson, following his beloved teacher Bergson, always looks beyond the words and construction of a thinker's philosophical system and focuses on the unspoken original intuition of the philosopher

[25] *PT*, 98-9.

that stands at the source of his thought beyond the details and elements of the argument.[26] Gilson, echoing his *maître* Bergson, says,

> ...to see how all developments fall under a few main theses and these theses under one, and how this single thesis in its turn is traceable to a kind of primary image—born of a unique and ineffable intuition from which the entire system stems…."[27]

Gilson thought it was the duty of a historian of thought and of philosophy to get beyond the argument of a philosopher or theologian and his works to the "spirit" that guides and animates his whole system.[28] Articulating the 'spirit' of a thinker is not simply an academic exercise for Gilson but is an inner experience whereby the historian or philosopher participates in the original intuition of a philosopher.

Gilson consistently follows this intuitive approach throughout his life. For instance, Gilson attempts to show the following: that the spirit that guided Bonaventure and Franciscan thought in general was the interior life of St. Francis of Assisi;[29] that the spirit of Augustine was a "metaphysics of conversion;'[30] that the spirit of medieval philosophy was encapsulated by the idea of 'Christian philosophy understood as revelation generating reason';[31] that a cycle of

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[26] "Pour de tels historiens, l'objet propre de l'histoire est au contraire de dépasser la matérialité même du system une fois construit, négligeant l'oeuvre déjà faite, de retrouver par delà les sources où elle puise, par delà même les concepts et les images où elle s'exprime, l'intuition originale qui l'engendra." *Le rôle*, 170.

[27] "…voir comment tous les développements rentrent sous quelques thèses principales, et ces thèses sous une seule, et comment cette seule thèse à son tour se réduit à une sorte d'image première—née de l'intuition unique et ineffable dont le système entier découle.…" Étienne Gilson, "Saint Thomas et la pensée franciscainse," *Etudes Franciscaines* 38, (1926): 191.

[28] Gilson criticizes the neo-scholastic manuals for not looking for the motives that lie behind Kant's philosophy but are only concerned with disproving his conclusions and making insults like Kant is "insane." *PT*, 48.

[29] Un fils spirituel de Saint François, que son oeuvre s'est reconstruite tout entière dans ma pensée comme une expression abstraite de sa vie intérieure et sa personnalité. *UHA*, 70. Cf. Étienne Gilson, *La Philosophie De Saint Bonaventure,* 2nd ed. (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1943), 396.

[30] "Métaphysique de sa propre conversion, la doctrine d'Augustin reste par excellence la métaphysique de la conversion." *ISA*, 316.

[31] Étienne Gilson, *L'Esprit De La Philosophie Médiévale,* 2nd Revue ed. (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1944), 385. [Hereafter cited as *EPM*].

perennial errors in the history of philosophy have time and again supplanted metaphysics and led to skepticism;[32] that the spirit of Thomas Aquinas was his inner religious life and Christianity;[33] and that the key to interpreting Thomas Aquinas was his Christian existentialist metaphysics of *esse*.[34]

None of these ideas or notions are included in the work or explicitly spoken of by the individual thinkers themselves, but these notions or 'spirits' presented by Gilson are intended to give insight into the same reality their words and ideas are pointing to and from which they begin as their source. Gilson's way of doing the history of philosophy is to first penetrate to the single insight, image or inner truth of reality that guides the philosopher and then try to reproduce this same experience for his students or readers in his works. Gilson's historical-philosophical method is much like an artist who tries to convey his aesthetic feeling of the beauty of nature to his spectators through the medium of art. Although Gilson's historical-philosophical approach seems quite arduous, and even at times implausible, we will attempt to apply it to Gilson himself with the notion of philosophy as a way of life.

Other scholars have proposed similar theses regarding the 'spirit' that brings unity to Gilson's thought: Schmitz points to the distinct union of history and philosophy in his work;[35] Maurer underlines Gilson's life long concern with defending metaphysics from positivism and scientism;[36] Murphy proposes Gilson's reaction to the modernist crisis as the fountainhead of his

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[32] *UPE*, 241.
[33] *Le Thomisme* 6th ed., 459.
[34] *Le Thomisme* 6th ed., 436-59.
[35] Kenneth L. Schmitz, *What Has Clio to Do With Athena? Étienne Gilson: Historian and Philosopher*, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987).
[36] "One of the themes that give unity to Gilson's philosophical thought is his rejection of positivism and his conviction of the validity of philosophy as a way of knowing specifically distinct from that of science." Armand Maurer, "Étienne Gilson, Critic of Positivism," *The Thomist* 71, (2007), 200. [Hereafter cited as *EGCP*].

thought;[37] Yeung uncovers the consistent influence of Gilson's early *Essay on the Interior Life;* and defines the spirit of Gilson as the unity of both creativity and submission;[38] and Redpath emphasizes Gilson's renaissance style of Christian humanism as the centerpiece of his thought;[39] Gouhier treats Gilson as an authentic philosopher in his own right from the beginning;[40] and finally Gilson himself tended to see the overall trajectory of his own intellectual life as constantly moving backwards within history[41] beginning with Descartes and culminating in his discovery of the true nature of theology or *sacra doctrina* as a transcendental science. He realized finally that the true nature of the gift of faith is indeed a real participation in divine life according to Thomas Aquinas.[42]

All of these positions indeed provide important insight into the work of Gilson. Without presenting any major disagreements with these positions, we would like to propose to build on them by adding a new perspective on Gilson's over sixty year intellectual career. Our claim in this dissertation is that Gilson's view of philosophy as a way of life is indeed the 'spirit' that animates his thought and life's work. This thesis explains the various disagreements with, and difference in writing style from, the neo-scholastics. However, one of the main additional benefits of seeing Gilson's work from the perspective of philosophy as a way of life is that it accounts for the founding of PIMS as part of Gilson's own approach to philosophy. For with PIMS Gilson turned his unique approach to philosophy into a concrete program to directly

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[37] Francesca Aran Murphy, *Art and the Intellect in the Philosophy of Étienne Gilson*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004). [Hereafter cited as *AIP*].
[38] Alex Yeung L.C., "Imago Dei Creatoris: Étienne Gilson's 'Essay on the Interior Life' and Its Seminal Influence" (Dissertatione ad Doctoratum in Facultate Philosophiae, Athenaeum Pontificum Regina Apostolorum, 2012), 19.
[39] Peter A. Redpath, "Gilson as Christian Humanist," *Studia Gilsoniana* 1, (2012). [Hereafter *GCH*].
[40] Henri Gouhier, "De l'histoire de la philosophie à la philosophie," in *Étienne Gilson: Philosophe de la chrétienité,* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1949). [Hereafter cited as *HPP*].
[41] Cf. De Lubac's comments on this in *LEGH*, 9.
[42] *PT*, 87-105; esp. 98-9.

produce medieval culture and save the sources of Western civilization. In this way, the idea of philosophy as a way of life brings a certain unity to Gilson's thought and actions in a way that other theses on Gilson, which do not highlight the centrality of PIMS, may not.[43]

In this regard, it is important to remember that Gilson did not found PIMS simply for a teaching opportunity; he could have easily remained a prominent professor at Harvard or the Sorbonne. PIMS was the accomplishment of Gilson's personal dream which began for him at the University of Strasbourg and even before in the trenches and POW camps of World War I. One indication of this is that Gilson consistently poured much of his energy into PIMS for well over forty years and remained its titular head until his death. PIMS for Gilson was nothing less than a sort of philosophical school focused on research in order to bring a renewal of medieval culture into the modern world. The notion of philosophy as a way of life then helps us see how PIMS was a concrete extension and fruit of Gilson's own existential understanding of philosophy.

This approach is what sets this thesis apart form the other theses. For the idea of philosophy as a way of life unifies the three major facets of Gilson's intellectual career: his pre-occupation with defending philosophy especially metaphysics from positivism, idealism, and rationalistic scholasticism; his founding of PIMS; and his desire to create a life-giving medieval culture for the sake of saving Western civilization. The type of unity that we are expressing here is more of what Gilson would call a less visible "organic unity" and not a modern "dialectical unity." As Gilson says, encouraging McKeon to publish a collection of his essays:

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[43] Two exceptions are Redpath and Michel who see the founding of PIMS as a central part and expression of Gilson's thought. See *GCH* and LPC.

> I have always been aware of the unity of inspiration which pervades all your essays. This kind of **organic unity** seems to me more real than the merely **dialectical unity** which looks so impressive to our own contemporaries; only it is less visible and I think you will simply do justice to your own thought in a collection some of your essays. [emphases added].[44]

Gilson's important distinction between organic unity and dialectical unity is important to apply to Gilson's work itself to get a proper understanding of his own thought.

Gilson's metaphysical doctrine

This then moves us to the second difficulty in applying the notion of philosophy as a way of life to the thought of Gilson. For comparing Gilson with Nietzsche, Adams, Strauss and Hadot appears odd for two reasons. First, Gilson is much more emphatically 'doctrinal' in his approach to philosophy than the others who tend to be more skeptical in terms of producing a positive metaphysical doctrine. Second, Gilson explicitly does his philosophy from the perspective of Christian faith opting for the medieval model instead of the Greek philosophical model like Hadot, and Strauss, and Nietzsche. Adams would be the exception in this regard, who, although he does not share an explicit Christian faith with Gilson, still turns to the medieval model of the synthesis of faith and reason as the best producer of a unified culture and the beautiful art shown by the Gothic churches of France.

From the very beginning of his scholarly career, Gilson, like Strauss, is concerned with positivism's reduction of philosophy to science and with philosophy becoming the "*ancilla*

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[44] Étienne Gilson to Richard McKeon, 18 October 1953, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.

scientiae."[45] Gilson, like the others we have covered, wanted to fight for the right of philosophy to move toward truth beyond the physical sciences and, like Nietzsche, does not see science as a solid basis of a life-giving philosophy or culture. Gilson, however, goes a step further than the rest and wants to also fight for the real possibility of a positive metaphysical philosophical knowledge and doctrine. Whereas the other thinkers we have covered like Nietzsche, Strauss, Foucault, and Hadot seem to limit philosophy to the Kantian denial of metaphysical knowledge, Gilson wants to advocate for a real metaphysical doctrine that is not a closed system and the final word on philosophy, but part of an on-going dialogue in the conversation in the history of philosophy. Again, the exception to this is Adams who attempts to present his own metaphysics of Force that seems influenced by Nietzsche's scientific phase and is a precursor of Heidegger's historicism.[46]

This important difference then poses the question of whether a more skeptical or critical Kantian attitude toward a positive metaphysics is a necessary condition to be qualified as someone who sees philosophy as a way of life in the mold of the ancient philosophers? For admittedly the de-emphasis on doctrine can be very effective in leading to a refocus of energy on the search for truth which the philosopher has not yet attained as in the case of Strauss, or on the spiritual exercises that open the philosopher to a deeper apprehension of the truth, as in the case of Hadot.

Yet, it seems that the modern turning away from metaphysical theory is not a necessary condition that qualifies a philosopher to be considered among those who approach philosophy as

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[45] Étienne Gilson, "Sur le Positivisme Absolu," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 68, (1909), 65. [Hereafter cited as *SLP*]. See *EGCP*.
[46] *EHA*, 1153-75.

a way of life. This is especially true if one considers the ancient philosophical schools which had well formed metaphysical doctrines. Rather, the defining quality of philosophy as a way of life seems not to be a total turn from positive doctrine itself, but a recognition that no doctrine, or set of principles, will finally put an end to the on-going wonder of philosophy as the search for wisdom and that the theoretical element of philosophy must be ordered to and serve a way of life and culture. In other words, philosophy from this perspective is primarily the act of a philosopher rooted in wonder and not a doctrine that aims to effectively end this act of wonder.

Gilson himself does not lay out a comprehensive metaphysical system but he does lay down some enduring principles like the real distinction between essence and existence and a receptive sympathetic approach to both reality and philosophers. However, Gilson still keeps alive the search for truth as part of philosophy in three ways (some of which have already been mentioned): First, Gilson's concept of being as *esse* participating in the *esse* of a mysterious Creator makes reality fundamentally mysterious and inexhaustible by the concepts of reason. Second, for Gilson, philosophy remains an on-going dialogue in the course of history that does not stop at the discovery of a permanent comprehensive system. Hence, for Gilson, there are no self-made philosophers and the aspiring philosopher must enter this great dialogue in order to properly do philosophy. Third, for Gilson, philosophical discourse, or doctrine, is not the whole of philosophy but only one its theoretical component. Third, theory or *theoria,* for Gilson, is ultimately ordered to a praxis of the philosophical life. In Gilson's thought, much like Nietzsche, there is a primacy of life and the existential order over knowledge and theory.

Gilson's dependence on faith

The third difficulty is that unlike Hadot and especially Strauss, who argues for a strong neo-Averroistic separation between faith and reason, Gilson allows faith and Christian revelation to be an intrinsic part of philosophy and the philosophical life. The root of this alternative position is partially that Gilson, like Henry Adams, is consciously choosing the medieval model of the philosophical life beginning with Augustine leading on to the medieval universities, instead of the model of the ancient philosophical schools. Gilson, along with Adams, does not see a dramatic rupture between the ancient philosophical schools and the Christian philosophical schools and monasteries that produced the medieval universities. For Gilson, the university of Paris and the religious orders simply carry on the old tradition and practices of the philosophical life inherited from the patristic philosophical schools and the pagan philosophical schools. In fact, in Gilson's view, the intervention of Christian revelation gives a decisive boost to the progress of philosophy and helps solve many of its metaphysical problems especially by revealing that God is Being Itself, or *Ipsum Esse,* in Exodus 3:14.

In this regard, it seems that one would only be justified in absolutely disqualifying religious faith from philosophy if one sees philosophy as reduced to a closed science or doctrine that would be based upon a certain scientific ideal of pure rationality. This results in a reduction of philosophy to logic or simply to a series of arguments and concepts. For if philosophy is indeed open to all the existential aspects of life it will then be open to all the helps of faith and revelation. For if philosophy is a way of life, in his search for the truth the philosopher will draw on all his resources no matter what their source in the age in which he lives. Only a purely doctrinal approach to philosophy would put *a priori* artificial limits on the sources of truth in the

philosophical search. Indeed, Plato and Aristotle draw on Homer and the Greek poets much like Thomas Aquinas who draws on Exodus for his metaphysics.[47] Furthermore, religious faith does not end the philosophical search, as many suppose, but sustains it and often intensifies it by making it more fruitful.

In this way, Étienne Gilson's great accomplishment in the twentieth century is showing how philosophy as a way of life as conceived by the ancients, and sustained by the medievals, can remain a way of life and, at the same time, remain open to a positive metaphysical doctrine as well as remain open to the help of Christian faith and revelation. In this way neither faith nor metaphysics in Gilson's thought puts an end to the philosophical life but in fact energizes it and renders it more fruitful.

Gilson's turn to the philosophical life

The fourth important difficulty is that Gilson never really points to a key moment in his life where he had a conversion to philosophy as a way of life that we find signs of in the lives and works of Nietzsche, Adams, Strauss and Hadot. If there is a turn to philosophy as a way of life in Gilson's life it is very early and most probably during the Bergson lectures he attended in 1904. Gilson's view of philosophy as a way of life, as a constant search for the truth in the on-going dialogue of history, seems to be basically the same for most of his life. One can also detect a rather gradual trajectory of Gilson seeing more and more the necessity of the primacy of theology and the help of faith in the life of any Christian philosophy. But there seems to be no definitive Gilsonian "turn to theology" or to philosophy as a way of life. For Gilson always saw

[47] It should be noted that this comparison is not totally proportional because while Plato and Aristotle draw on the poets yet also critique them while Aquinas does not critique Exodus.

faith and theology as part of philosophy and presented Thomas Aquinas in the theological order as far back as his lectures in 1913. The slight difference in Gilson's earlier and later views of philosophy is when he makes the implicit influence of faith in his philosophy more explicit. Gilson also makes a change in emphasis that had much to do with his audience. For in the early years when Gilson was addressing exclusively secular audiences he remained silent about the primacy of theology and revelation in his thought but later in his career, when his audiences became more and more Catholic, he tended to explicitly emphasize the necessity of theology for philosophy.

The influence of Nietzsche on Gilson

Another difficulty is that one does not find an explicit influence of Nietzsche or Romanticism in the early work of Gilson, but rather only later, towards the end of his career, does he explicitly deal with Nietzsche and discuss his appreciation of the literature of Romanticism, but not the philosophy.[48] In the thought of Strauss Nietzsche played a key role in his choosing the philosophical life and was a revelation much like Schopenhauer was for Nietzsche himself. Interestingly, Gilson himself, seems to play this same role in converting the young Hadot to the philosophical life, who only comes under the influence of Nietzsche later in life.

[48] Gilson sees Romanticism as giving up on reason and leading to a "complete philosophical skepticism" which is rooted in an "anti-rationalist spirit." Because of this lack of faith in reason he observes that "Romanticism makes good literature; it seldom makes philosophy." *Origins and Meaning of Neo-Scholasticism*, p. 5, Winter 1962 (?), Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's Library, Toronto. This very interesting unpublished piece may be a lecture given at PIMS in the winter of 1962. See *EG*, 363.

However, considering Gilson's deep immersion in philosophical research during World War I, it seems most likely that the young Gilson encountered the work of Nietzsche which was so popular at the time in the trenches and POW camps. Two points should be noted here. First, Gilson, throughout his career, does show the same concern that Nietzsche does about the downfall of civilization. In this regard, Gilson agrees with Nietzsche on three scores: that modern science has failed to produce a stable culture; that a lack of religious faith would continue to lead to cultural disasters like world wars and tyranny; and that a new more stable culture must be created with the help of philosophy and especially art. However, for various reasons, on which we could only speculate, Gilson does not let his sympathies with Nietzsche explicitly known until much later in his career.[49]

Hadot and Strauss are also aware of this cultural problem but they do not propose a sweeping cultural solution in the manner of Nietzsche, Adams and Gilson. On the one hand, Nietzsche's solution to the break up of religion and modern science is a myth-making philosophical aristocracy; whereas Henry Adams and Gilson see a return to the culture of the Middle Ages based on a balance of faith and reason. We see this concern for the continuation of Western culture in Gilson's perpetual wrestling with Comte, whom he very much respected because Comte does not just reduce philosophy to scientism but wants a positivism that also produces culture through religion and philosophy. Gilson, like Henry Adams, indeed agrees with Nietzsche's critique of a Western science-based culture but not Nietzsche's solution of myth-making supermen like Zarathustra. Furthermore, Gilson, though not a Romantic in the strong

[49] Gilson was permanently scarred by the modernist crisis where many of his friends were condemned. This made him rather cautious about explicitly defending philosophers like Nietzsche, a move which could get him put on the Index of Prohibited Books.

sense, does consistently argue that an abstract and stale rationality can dissolve unity and life with its analysis and that every philosophy should lead to a way of life. Furthermore, Gilson's quasi-Romanticism especially comes out markedly in his approach to art and aesthetics which is fundamentally a Romantic theory focused on conveying a feeling and against the rationalist neo-classical view of art as a copy of nature which reduces art to a lower subjective form of knowledge.[50]

Gilson's Genre of Philosophy

Instead of Nietzsche, it was in fact Henri Bergson who plays the role of converting the young Gilson to the philosophical life when he was an undergraduate at the Sorbonne when Bergson was giving his famous lectures at the Collège de France. This, then, seems to plant at least the early pre-thomist Gilson in the French spiritualist tradition of philosophy that goes from Bergson back to Maine de Biran[51] and then beyond him to Pascal and Montaigne. Bergson himself admitted to being influenced by Maine de Biran[52] and Gilson also identifies this same influence on Bergson in several places.[53] Gilson also often speaks about this lineage of French

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[50] Étienne Gilson, "Art et métaphysique," *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 23, (1916): 243-267; [Hereafter cited as *AM*]; Étienne Gilson, *Forms and Substances in the Arts,* trans. Salvator Attanasio, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966). [Hereafter cited as *FSA*].

[51] For Gilson on Maine de Biran see Étienne, Gilson, Thomas Langan and Armand A. Maurer, *Recent Philosophy: Hegel to the Present,* (New York: Random House, 1962.), 180-91. [Hereafter cited as *RP*]. Étienne Gilson, "Une philosophie de la vie intérieure: Maine de Biran (1766-1824)," 1925, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. [Hereafter cited as *PVI*]. This is an unpublished address given by Gilson in the municipal building of the sixteenth arrondissment at the request of the mayor.

[52] *EG*, 124.

[53] Gilson says, "Dans l'histoire de la philosophie française, son oeuvre ouvre la voie aux doctrines de Ravaisson, de Lachelier et plus nettement encore peut être, de Bergson, où le moi se cherche dans une observation toujours plus exigeante de la conscience pour s'y saisir enfin dans un sentiment de l'effort qui est aussi expérience d'une liberté." *PVI*, 13; Étienne Gilson, "Un Exemple," in *Existentialisme Chrétien: Gabriel Marcel*, 1-9, (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1947),1-2. [Hereafter cited as *UE*].

thinkers with great admiration and seems, at times, to include himself in their company. As Gilson says in a 1925 lecture he gave in a city hall in memory of Maine de Biran:

> The misery of the of philosophies in this genre is to work on a given whose inexhaustible richness they are forbidden to completely reach; their granduer is to go after the exploration of this mystery, not by means of the dream of poets, but in the manner of searchers after wisdom and philosophers, by means of thought.[54]

Based on this quote it seems the early Gilson sets himself squarely, albeit implicitly, in this genre of philosophy because he shares the misery and grandeur of working on a mysterious created reality that will never be exhausted by thought. For as mentioned above Gilson's creationism makes him see created reality as fundamentally mysterious and inexhaustible by human thought and the philosophical life as an on-going pursuit that never ends in this life. Furthermore, in this statement Gilson seems to identify the traits of those who approach philosophy less as an academic cognitive enterprise but as a dedicated way of life. This way of life works on the same mysterious reality as the poets but instead of applying *rêver* the philosopher applies *penser*. This is an important distinction by Gilson between poetry and philosophy that helps show his view of philosophy and the genre he sees himself fitting into.

In a much later piece (1947) on Gabriel Marcel's *Journal métaphysique,* Gilson identifies Marcel in this lineage of French philosophy the characteristics of which he describes somewhat differently than he did in 1925. Marcel, like Bergson, Maine de Biran, Pascal and Montaigne, does philosophy by reflecting primarily on his own concrete inner experiences and his interior life. Marcel does this in a particularly fruitful way because he does not make his interior experience inaccessible to his readers and allows it to actually be shared by them, but, at the

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[54] "C'est la misère des philosophies de ce genre de travailler sur un donné dont la richesse inexhaustible leur interdit de complèment aboutir; leur grandeur est de s'acharner sur l'exploration de ce mystère, non pour y rêver en poètes, mais, à la manière des savants et philosophes, pour le penser." *PVI*, 13.

same time, his own inner life is not also violently forced on them.[55] Gilson, who was a world expert on all the details of the history of French philosophy, reflects that this particular tradition of French philosophy will always endure due to its deep authenticity. Gilson says of both Marcel and this genre: "In his work man speaks directly to man: it will always have readers because he will never cease to make new friends."[56]

In another much later piece on Maine de Biran (1962) Gilson again reflects on this genre of philosophy which he calls "philosophy of the inner sense"[57] and contrast it with notional philosophy that relies more heavily on logic and concepts. The great difficulty of the philosophers of the inner sense, or the interior life, is that their ultimate conclusions can never be completely communicated. He says, "Every philosopher has to go through all the moves of the reflexive method and to do it for his own account."[58] That is, the philosophy of inner sense is based upon and communicated primarily by a lived experience. This genre of philosophy is primarily lived because there is always a loss when trying to articulate an incommunicable reality. The notional philosophers, on the other hand, have the advantage of using logic and concepts which make their philosophy more easily transmissible from person to person.[59] Gilson here contrasts a philosophy that is primarily an experiential way of life and one that is more doctrinal.

Now Gilson never puts himself in this genre of inner sense explicitly and always fiercely resisted being identified in a school or being called a Bergsonian or Neo-scholastic. Also

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[55] *UE*, 1-2.
[56] "En son oeuvre l'homme parle directement à l'homme: elle aura toujours des lecteurs parce qu'il ne cessera jamais de se faire de nouveaux amis." *UE*, 2.
[57] *RP*, 188.
[58] *RP*, 188.
[59] *RP*, 188.

Gilson's historical and formal doctrinal approach seems to set himself outside of this tradition, for he does not write personal metaphysical journals like Marcel or Maine de Biran, nor does he construct thought-experiments like Bergson. With some rare exceptions, Gilson's mode of presentation is indeed not as personal as this tradition, but through the history of philosophy, and especially by seeking an intuition of the spirit of a thinker's interior life, Gilson aims at presenting the same philosophical reality of an interior life. For example, Gilson aims first for himself to encounter and be in conversation with Thomas Aquinas and then to pass this same intuition and conversation on to his attentive readers. Although Gilson chooses a more notional way of presenting his philosophy he still holds for the ultimate mystery of reality and wants to convey the same experience of an interior life.

Furthermore, at times, Gilson does in a way tend to see himself as the true heir of Bergson who carries on his revival of French metaphysics in the face of positivism. Shook points out that Gilson saw the history of philosophy as a dialectic that moves between effort and discouragement and just as Bergson had overcome Comte's positivism, so Gilson must build upon but also move beyond Bergson.[60] Interestingly, Gilson sees the beginnings of his metaphysics of the act of existence in Marcel. Gilson says,

> Entirely personal and original to his spirit, the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel seems to reach out spontaneously to a metaphysics of the act of existence without quite achieving it. By what scruple does it stop at the threshold? Perhaps, is it simply that the beyond the threshold, where the dialectical exploitation begins of an experience which is all that counts for such a philosophy, he could know nothing of interest to him.[61]

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[60] *EG*, 87.

[61] "Entièrement personnelle et neuve en son esprit, la philosophie de Gabriel Marcel semble tendre spontanément vers une métaphysique de l'acte d'exister sans toutefois y tout à fait parvenir. Par quel scruple s'arrête-t-elle sur le seuil? Peut-être est-ce simplement que l'au-delà du seuil, où commencerait l'exploitation dialectique d'une expérience qui seule compte pour elle, ne saurait en rien l'intéresser." *UE*, 7.

It seems that Gilson believes that Marcel stops at the threshold of a more notional metaphysics of the act of existence because of a concern with the dialectical exploitation of experience. In other words, in some way the practice of dialectic will tend to do damage and lose something of the original experience. Gilson, however, also coming out of this lineage of philosophy, is willing to cross over the threshold and involve himself in the dialectics of experience. In some way, Gilson is a philosopher of inner sense who has crossed over into the realm of dialectic and notional philosophy. One could say that whereas Marcel presents a philosophical life and mysterious reality in the genre of inner sense, Gilson attempts to present the same philosophical life or mysterious reality in the notional order. This sets Gilson in this genre of French philosophy because he is trying to present the same mysterious reality, and way of life, but in a different style from that associated with Marcel, Pascal and Montaigne.

Section Two: Gilson's Early Intellectual Influences

The Religious, the Secular and the Humanistic Influences on Gilson

In a relatively early interview in 1925 when he was only forty-one years old, Gilson provides a very helpful hermeneutical principle to help understand the dynamics of his early education. Gilson says,

> I have the impression that my work would not have occurred if we had removed one of the two elements that have formed my youth and my adolescence: the

> minor seminary or the Sorbonne. The opposition that some want to see between free education and the university, is something radically false.[62]

These two schools were indeed influential in themselves but they are also expressions of an interesting mix, just slightly unusual at the time in a deeply bifurcated France, between a deep and explicit Catholic faith and extensive modern secular learning. On the one hand, Gilson set himself apart from other Catholics in the world of secular academia, like his professors Victor Delbos and Jules Lachelier who were quiet Catholics,[63] with a very pronounced and zealous faith in both his personal relationships and his professional scholarship.[64] Yet, on the other hand, he also set himself apart from other Catholics in the ecclesial world, like his friend Jacques Maritain, by being a life-long supporter of the French Republic and against the restoration of the monarchy, a measure especially favored by Charles Maurras.[65] A third element that could be added to these that bridges the gap between Gilson's religious and secular education is a rich humanism that he was given at a very early age in the Catholic schools. Thus the religious, the humanistic and the secular aspects characterize Gilson's early education, his professional scholarship, and produced his distinctive approach to philosophy as a way of life guided by an

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[62] "J'ai l'impression que mon oeuvre ne se serait pas produite si l'on avait supprimé l'un des deux elements qui ont formé ma jeunesse et mon adolescence: le petit séminaire ou la Sorbonne. L'opposition que certains veulent établir entre l'enseignement libre et l'université, est quelque chose de radicalement faux." *UHA*, 65.

[63] *PT*, 35; 60.

[64] In preparation for writing the Gilson's biography Fr. Shook conducted an interesting interview with Fr. De Lubac about Gilson. When Shook asked him what was Gilson's greatest legacy, De Lubac replied: "his strong and simple faith; his open and forthright acknowledgment of his Catholicism, and the scholarly prestige he brought to his positions." 11 May 1975, Gilson Archive, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.

[65] *PT*, 57-61. Gilson was deeply disturbed by the Pope Pius X's anti-modernism in general. But Gilson was especially dumbfounded by the Pope's condemnation of *Sillon,* which was an explicitly Catholic party that supported the French Republic, and by his support of *l'Action Française,* an agnostic lead movement seeking restoration of the monarchy. This rather strange situation made Gilson even question his own orthodoxy at the time. *EG*, 66-7.

explicit Catholic faith. It is helpful to track these three elements in Gilson's early education and work.

Gilson's Youth (1884-1903)

Gilson has deep Parisian French roots that also gave him republican sympathies. Gilson's father, Paul, was a Parisian tailor whose own *Grandpère* Charette barely survived the French revolution. Gilson also received a deeply held Catholic faith from his Burgundian mother Caroline. As Shook says, "Étienne was always first a Catholic, then with equal fervor of a different order, a Frenchman of the Third Republic."[66] One of the primary movers in Étienne's religious education was an Ursuline nun, Mother Saint-Dieudonné, who acted as a spiritual director to the whole Gilson family.[67] Receiving a devout Catholic faith and education in France was of course not extraordinary at the time, but what set Gilson's Catholic education apart is that it was always undergirded from the beginning with a deep love for the arts, literature, and classical learning. Redpath highlights this aspect of Gilson's education by pointing out that Mother Saint-Dieudonné was a humanist and imparted simultaneously the Catholic faith with a love of letters.[68] This humanistic aspect is also brought out by Gilson's correspondence with his mother throughout her life. Their letters involved deep discussions of French literature and Caroline late in her life would regularly attend her son's lectures in Paris especially when they

[66] *EG*, 6.
[67] *EG*, 5.
[68] *GCH*, 55.

were on classical literature.[69] The young Gilson during military service in 1905 instructed his mother to have his little brother Maurice read the classics because, as he says, "it is the only way for him to become an architect rather than a house-builder."[70]

Gilson learned excellent Latin from the age of six from the Christian Brothers and then went to the *Petit Séminaire de Notre Dame-des-Champs* [NDC] from 1895-1902 which, at the time, was considered the best Catholic secondary school in Paris.[71] As was common at the time, Gilson matriculated at NDC as a lay student not as a seminarian at the age of eleven and entered a curriculum that was designed by Bishop Dupanloup on the model of a sort of ancient school of philosophy: Gilson was given a spiritual director, and his life consisted of a strict regimen of classes, common meals, study halls, assemblies, and spiritual exercises.[72] NDC education was deeply Catholic but also deeply humanistic, focusing on the literature and history of Greece, Rome and France, as well as promoting a love of liturgy and music.[73] Gilson says that NDC was a school: "Where there were excellent teachers and where reigned, with a strict religious faith and morality, the most open humanism."[74] This most open humanism indeed continued to reign the rest of Gilson's life.

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[69] *EG*, 12-6; esp. 15. Caroline Gilson attended Gilson's famous *Collège de France* lectures on Heloise and Abelard and when she got mortally ill during the lectures she complained to Gilson that now she would never know how the love story would end. *EG*, 232.
[70] *EG*, 15.
[71] *EG*, 6.
[72] *EG*, 7.
[73] It seems somewhat common for Catholic secondary education to focus on humanities because Hadot also describes his *Petit Séminaire* in Rheims as deeply humanistic. *PAH*, 4.
[74] "…où il y avait d'excellents professeurs et où régnait, avec une foi religieuse et une moralité strictes, l'humanisme le plus ouvert." *UHA*, 64.

In his autobiography—that carries a rather ironic and humorous tone and is at times uncharacteristically factually inaccurate[75]— Gilson says that he decided that he wanted to live the life of a perpetual student teaching French literature in the secular *Lycées* and so decided to do his last two years of philosophy (1902-1903) at Lycée Henri IV to receive his Bachelor's degree.[76]

Gilson relates that his first encounter with philosophy was in the classroom of M. Dereux (who incidentally also introduced the slightly older Maritain to philosophy[77]). According to Gilson Dereux taught a bland rationalism revolving around the platitudinous phrase: "the unifying power of reason."[78] Gilson believes that he probably would also have received the same bland rationalism from Fr. Ehlinger who taught philosophy at NDC if he had stayed there for his Bachelor's degree.[79] After reading Descartes and Brunschvicg during his military service, Gilson says he still did not know what philosophy was really about.[80] Gilson in retrospect diagnoses himself with an incurable metaphysical disease known as "crass realism" which he defines as a naive expectation that philosophy should be about actual things and not just about ideas after the manner of Descartes. Part of what makes Gilson expect philosophy to be about

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[75] Gilson wrote *Le philosophe et theologie* with no footnotes in a period of only twenty-three days after a bout of illness. For various reasons De Lubac in a 1975 interview with Shook calls it an "unfortunate book." Shook agrees and holds that *PT* was written hastily and is not considered "great Gilson." *EG*, 347. In his seventies Gilson entered what Murphy aptly labels his "grumpy years" where he tended to be more openly critical of other thinkers. *AIP*, 290-330. Shook also confirms Gilson's heightened irritability in his later years. *EG*, 357. Reflecting on a letter by the now 87 year old Gilson, that is quite critical of a post-Vatican II liturgy, De Lubac says, "It is certainly regrettable that, in certain of his later writings, Gilson may have mixed really pertinent remarks with one or two curmudgeonly traits that make one think of an elderly parishioner with eccentric ways; and this can give people an excuse not to listen to him." *LEGH*, 167, n. 3.
[76] *PT*, 15-16. Shook shows that there was much more involved in the decision to finish his Bachelor's degree at the Lycée than what Gilson presents in *PT*. *EG*, 9.
[77] *EG*, 11.
[78] *PT*, 17.
[79] *PT*, 17.
[80] *PT*, 17.

actual existence was his reading of Pascal in literature classes who indeed wrote about actually existing things.[81]

The Sorbonne (1904-1907)

Gilson gave up his dream of teaching French literature and no doubt went to the University of Paris to answer the question about the true meaning of philosophy. However, according to a letter to his mother there was something much deeper going on in this decision. The young Gilson writes:

> You cannot guess how hard it sometimes is to doubt oneself in this way, especially when one is moving with all one's soul toward a life that ought to render beautiful a perpetual effort toward truth. Don't worry, however; I won't let these passing doubts break me. I rather think they are the necessary condition for new and more vigorous efforts than before. God willing, and by His path, I shall reach my goal.[82]

Here we see Gilson seeing philosophy not only as about real things and the meaning of life but also as a kind of vocation from God toward the truth. Gilson seems to have felt a divine call to pursue truth in philosophy and thereby sacrifice his life long love of French literature. The idea of a vocation to philosophy is a recurrent theme in Gilson's works throughout his life and is one of the key elements of his conception of philosophy as a way of life.[83]

The two most influential figures on the young Gilson at the Sorbonne were Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Henri Bergson who gave his famous lectures at the nearby *Collège de France*. Lévy-Bruhl gave Gilson his taste for the history of philosophy and Bergson his taste for metaphysics.

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[81] *PT*, 18.
[82] *EG*, 16.
[83] Gilson presents his notion of philosophy as a vocation in *EP* and *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1948). [Hereafter cited as *HPE*].

Gilson paid tribute to both of these men as his main French influences at his introduction into the *Académie française*[84] and was rabidly loyal in defending them in the face of criticism—especially and repeatedly coming to the aid of Bergson—for the rest of his life. We will briefly examine the influence of each on the young Gilson and then see how they combined to help form his distinctive approach to philosophy as a way of life.

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl

Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939) was a professor of the history of modern philosophy at the Sorbonne who directed Gilson's dissertation and remained a life-long friend. Gilson eulogized his mentor after this death saying: "In a country where many have done well, none has done better."[85] Gilson indeed appreciated Lévy-Bruhl for his personal kindness and professionalism[86] but also because of the role he played that might be called 'a saving grace' in the life of the young Gilson. It is hard to see how the young Gilson, who had such a deep desire to do the type of metaphysical speculation that was forbidden at the time at the Sorbonne, would have survived there without the gracious tolerance and professionalism of Lévy-Bruhl.

The Sorbonne at the time was dominated by Émile Durkheim's absolute positivism and sociology, which like that of Comte, saw modern science as the only true and objective knowledge.[87] Whereas Comte saw philosophy playing a humanistic role separate from, yet still

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[84] Étienne Gilson, *Discours de réception d'Étienne Gilson á l'academie française et réponse de Pasteur Vallery-Radot. 29 Mai, 1947*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1948). See *EG*, 270.
[85] *EG*, 235.
[86] Gilson even felt comfortable enough to publish an article critical of Lévy-Bruhl's absolute positivism on the eve of the defense of his dissertation. *SLP*. See *EG*, 41.
[87] Gilson enrolled in every course Durkheim offered while he was at the Sorbonne. To get into Durkheim's class Gilson had to submit to an orthodoxy examination conducted in a one-on-one meeting by Durkheim himself to prove his scientific objectivity. *PT*, 22.

subject to, modern science, the absolute positivists like Durkheim saw philosophy as part of science with sociology being the objective science of "social facts." Social facts for Durkheim were collective representations that count in the order of science as objective realities or 'things' that exist beyond and outside an individual consciousness and exert a coercive influence on a given individual.[88] These social facts can be seen in institutions, laws, customs, literature, works of art and in statistical rates, like suicide rates.[89] These implicit social facts are especially made manifest when an individual attempts to depart from their restraining force and is invariably punished. Furthermore, because social facts exist outside of individual minds they are subject to a science called sociology and not just history.[90] Sociology as the most fundamental science then for Durkheim assumes the role that philosophy once played.[91]

Although Gilson did not agree that sociology was the fundamental science, he did believe that Durkheim made an important discovery in his notion of social facts. As Gilson says,

> Durkheim put his finger on one of those elementary evidences that are visible to all, but which no one notices. Discoveries of his sort are the most beautiful of all, and whatever one may think of the doctrine of Durkheim, there is no denying that it is founded in reality.[92]

Nevertheless, under this sociological regime at the Sorbonne, all traditional philosophical speculation about the world, God, or the soul was considered simply out of date. Gilson says,

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[88] Peter Winch, "Durkheim, Émile," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy Vol 2,* ed. Paul Edwards, Vol. 2 (New York: MacMillan, 1972), 438-9. [Hereafter cited as Winch].
[89] Winch, 438.
[90] Winch, 439.
[91] *PT*, 25.
[92] *PT*, 25. Gilson goes to to say that Durkheim's philosophy was a "sociology of Leviticus" because Durkheim grew up in a rabbinical family and hence was especially sensitive to the function and personal impact of laws, prescriptions and sanctions and so conceived them as "social facts" imposed from without to constrain human freedom. *PT*, 26.

"As long as you granted them this triple negation, they were satisfied."[93] Lévy-Bruhl himself was also an absolute positivist and wrote a book on morality that ironically concludes that there is simply no answer to the question of what one should do.[94] For a committed Catholic, such as Gilson, who was interested in engaging in speculative philosophy in areas like art and religion, this was a rather unfriendly environment.[95]

However, Lévy-Bruhl willy-nilly provided Gilson a kind of exit from this bind by allowing him to focus his attention on the history of philosophy.[96] Gilson says of his predicament at the positivist Sorbonne, "A way of escape had to be found. It lay in the history of philosophy."[97] Gilson often related the anecdote in his classes that Lévy-Bruhl required him to study something positive and nothing speculative and Gilson proposed the history of philosophy which was still considered positive.[98] In this regard, Lévy-Bruhl, along with Delbos, taught Gilson to strive as much as possible to sympathize with the view point of the author and not to be critical of his thought, even if one personally disagrees.[99] Interestingly, Gilson found that this sympathetic historical approach enabled him to actually engage in traditional metaphysical speculation through the history of philosophy in the midst of a positivist atmosphere that did not even believe philosophy in the traditional sense was desirable (or perhaps any longer possible). In this way, Lévy-Bruhl was a saving grace for Gilson by providing him a way to do traditional philosophy at the Sorbonne.

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[93] *PT*, 37.
[94] *PT*, 27.
[95] *PT*, 37.
[96] *PT*, 37-8.
[97] *PT*, 37-8.
[98] *EG*, 18.
[99] *EG*, 235.

The second way Lévy-Bruhl was a saving grace for Gilson was his interesting suggestion that Gilson look at the relationship between Descartes and scholasticism, which was the point of departure for Gilson's life-long adventure of rediscovering the riches of medieval philosophy and theology.[100] Gilson points out that Lévy-Bruhl suggested this topic knowing he was Catholic and assuming, quite wrongly, that Gilson was familiar with scholasticism.[101] Gilson observes that up to that point he had never read a line of Thomas Aquinas.[102] Under the sociologist-positivist regime at the Sorbonne the history of philosophy was indeed acceptable but only figures in it like Hume, Kant and Comte, who were considered precursors to Durkheim's grand discovery of sociology. Descartes was seen as mathematical, and even though his physics and metaphysics were false, he was acceptable as a, "forerunner of scientism."[103] All this points to the remarkable graciousness of Lévy-Bruhl and the instrumental role he played in Gilson's discovery of the philosophical life.

Henri Bergson

Whereas Lévy-Bruhl prepared the way for Gilson to escape from the world of positivism into the world of traditional philosophy, Henri Bergson (1859-1941) was for Gilson the living example of a philosopher. Gilson says, "Please do not fail to report how much influence the great Bergson had on me: he showed us in flesh and bone what it was to be a philosopher."[104]

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[100] *UHA*, 65; *PT*, 87-8.
[101] *PT*, 87.
[102] *PT*, 87.
[103] *PT*, 39.
[104] "Ne négligez pas, je vous prie, de signaler combien considérable a ètè sur moi l'influence de grand Bergson: il nous a montré en chair et en os ce que c'etait qu'un philosophe." *UHA*, 65.

Although Gilson was not close friends with Bergson,[105] as he was with Lévy-Bruhl, Bergson may have had more philosophical influence on Gilson by showing, by his personal example, that metaphysics and the philosophical way of life were indeed still possible.

Along with many other young intellectuals like T.S. Eliot, Jacques and Raïssa Maritain,[106] and Jean Wahl, Gilson attended Bergson's standing-room-only *Collège de France* lectures in the early 20th century.[107] Gilson says, "In philosophy, these years were for us the age of Bergson."[108] In 1904 the young Gilson attended two Bergson courses one on Herbert Spencer and the other on "The Intellectual Effort."[109] In this series of fifteen lectures Bergson would take one thinker per lecture like William James or Wundt and lay out what Bergson called the thinker's "intellectual effort." This is very interesting because its seems that Bergson was not focused as much on a thinker's resultant doctrine but on his intellectual process of effort. Much later, reflecting back, Gilson would say that these Bergson lectures were the "highlight" his life.[110] As Gilson says,

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[105] Gilson says: "One would not go and see Bergson. It was not done. How could we monopolize even an hour in a life whose every minute was precious to all?" *PT*, 44.

[106] Jacques Maritain and his wife Raïssa agreed to commit suicide if they were not shown that materialism was not true and at the insistence of Charles Péguy they went hear Bergson lecture in 1902 and his lectures saved their lives. *AIP*, 25.

[107] Leonard Lawlor and Valentine Moulard-Leonard, "Henri Bergson," *The Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2013 Edition)*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/bergson/>. [Hereafter cited as Lawlor]. Bergson lectured at the *Collège de France* from 1900-1921. T. A. Goudge, "Bergson, Henri," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Volumes One and Two)*, ed. Paul Edwards, 287-295, (New York: MacMillan, 1972), 287. There are several remarkable similarities between Gilson's and Bergson's professional lives which are worth noting. Both Bergson and Gilson drew huge crowds to their lectures at the Collège de France and both were members of the French Academy. Both also both worked on international politics with Bergson serving as a French diplomat to the United States during World War I, and Gilson serving as a diplomat to Canada during World War Two. Bergson was involved in the foundation of the League of Nations and the International Commission of Intellectual Cooperation which was the cultural wing of the League of Nations and Gilson worked on the founding of the UN and UNESCO the cultural wing of the UN. Lawlor. In many ways, one can say that Gilson followed in the footsteps of his *maître* Bergson.

[108] *PT*, 107.

[109] *EG*, 18.

[110] *EG*, 18.

> I followed his courses over three years and I thus saw the work of philosophical thought being done right in front of me. Nowadays, whenever I study philosophers who died many centuries ago, I call back to mind, in order to help me understand them better, the example of Bergson **living his philosophy before us** [emphasis added]. Ah, it is a great pity that Bergson did not teach even longer. We needed to hear him come up with his ideas in public. The presence of this philosopher among us young people made us understand so much better what the lives of Socrates and Plato, conducted in the midst of their disciples, must have been like. (All of this, of course, is quite independent of the question of whether someone is a Bergsonian or not, even assuming that such labels mean something.)[111]

Four points should be made on these comments. First, Gilson's comments show that he was not focused so much on the doctrine of Bergson, nor did he ever consider himself a Bergsonian; he even questions if this label or labels like it have any real meaning. Gilson's focus, rather, is on the fact that Bergson was living the philosophical life before a whole generation of young people; this instantiation of philosophy opened up the way for them to understand Plato, Socrates and all the great philosophers in a new light. Gilson believed that Bergson was the first great French metaphysician since Descartes and Malebranche who pierced beyond the world of scientific laws into the "core of being."[112] In another place, Gilson even argues that Bergson may have been the purest philosophical intelligence since Plotinus.[113]

Second, the comparison with Socrates is significant for two reasons: First, Bergson as 'Socrates' showed the 'young Platos' of Gilson's generation that the philosophical life was

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[111] "J'ai suivi ses cours pendant trois ans et j'ai vu ainsi le travail de la pensée philosophique se faire devant moi. Aujourd'hui, quand j'étudie des philosophes morts depuis plusieurs siècles, j'évoque, pour m'aider à les mieux comprendre, l'exemple de Bergson vivant devant nous sa philosophie. Ah! c'est un grand malheur qu'il n'enseigne plus! Il fallait l'entendre inventer ses idées devant le public. La presence de ce philosophe parmi les jeunes gens nous faisait mieux comprendre ce qu'avait dû être la vie de Socrate ou de Platon au milieu de leurs disciples. (Tout ceci est d'ailleurs indépendant de la question de savoir si on est bergsonien ou si on ne l'est pas, à supposer que de telles étiquettes aient un sens.)" *UHA*, 65.
[112] *PT*, 107.
[113] *PT*, 123.

possible and so they all believed they too could actually live the philosophical life. As Gilson later says,

> He did it under our very eyes, in our presence, in such a simple way that we were surprised not to be able to do it ourselves, introducing us to a new world as he himself was discovering it step by step. No words will adequately express the admiration, the gratitude, the affection we felt and still feel in our hearts for him.[114]

Third, calling Bergson 'Socrates' also indicates that Gilson saw himself as a kind of heir to the legacy of Bergson by rediscovering the historical sources for metaphysical thought. Gilson sees his own intellectual journey between 1904-1939 as a process of rediscovering metaphysical notions that should have belonged to Catholics but had been forgotten; Bergson is the one who started this process of metaphysical rediscovery.[115] As Gilson says, "Between 1905 and 1939, through uncertainties and at the price of many false starts, a Catholic philosopher was bound to waste much time in rediscovering notions that he should always have possessed."[116] Gilson would rise to the defense of Bergson anytime he was publicly attacked, and it seems that Gilson felt obliged to carry on his legacy. It also seems that Gilson saw himself as a kind of French successor of the great Bergson much like Plato succeeding Socrates.[117]

Fourth, Gilson mentions that he would bring to mind the example of Bergson living the philosophical life in order to better understand the dead philosophers he was studying. It seems then that Gilson used Bergson's living the philosophical life as a kind of hermeneutical principle

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[114] *PT*, 107-8.
[115] *PT*, 107.
[116] *PT*, 107.
[117] De Lubac adds some details to a story told by Gouhier at his own acceptance into the *Académie française* about Gilson admirably and eloquently defending Bergson in 1959. Gilson at the time said it was due to Bergson that we now can do metaphysics and not due to the neo-scholastic manuals *LEGH*, 10-11; 18 n. 7. Gilson also could never bring himself to forgive Maritain's criticism of Bergson in his book *La Philosophie bergsonienne*. Gilson could not understand how Maritian could criticize the work of a man who played a pivitol role in saving his own life. *EG*, 346.

or tool of the imagination to help him see into the inner workings of the history of philosophy. This shows that Gilson wanted to penetrate through the words and arguments to the philosopher or theologian himself. In this way, Gilson looked at philosophers not in terms of doctrine but through the lens of Bergson living the philosophical life.

As a side note, there is a very intriguing intersecting parallel between the role that Bergson played in the life of the young Gilson and the role Heidegger played in the life of the young Leo Strauss seen above. Although Gilson and Strauss were not personally close friends, for both of these men the raw intellectual power of their mentors' lectures moved them so much as to show them that the philosophical life was a concrete possibility and inspired both of them to pursue this ideal. Also neither Strauss nor Gilson became a Heideggerian or a Bergsonian respectively, but each was greatly inspired to philosophy as a way of life through the lectures they heard and both sought to reproduce this experience for their students in their own lectures.

Moreover, it is also interesting that Gilson, at various times over the years, had the occasion to meet Heidegger and listen to his lectures. At Heidegger's lectures Gilson would often be moved to tears as he was also once moved to tears in the lectures of Bergson. Shook says of Gilson, "Heidegger never failed to arouse in him stirring emotions: he had been embarrassed more than once by the tears Heidegger's words inevitably sent rolling down his cheeks."[118] For Gilson, the philosophical impact of both Bergson and Heidegger was not only their example of the philosophical life in their lectures, but also the content of their lectures on metaphysics. Gilson concludes in a letter after hearing Heidegger: "I think the new

[118] *EG*, 227; 334.

philosophical 'shiver' brought to bear by the philosophy of Heidegger consists in the distinguishing between *être* and *étant*."[119] In another place Gilson says:

> Still, who is the last word in philosophy today? If you really want to be up to date, your answer should be: the philosopher of Freiburg-im-Breisgau, Martin Heidegger. He surely is a philosopher. I heard him once, and that was for me an experience I am not likely ever to forget. But what is his main concern? Heidegger would like to know what it is to be. Not merely what it is to be a being (*das Seiende*) but, quite precisely, what it is to be (*das Sein*). Now that was the very question raised by Thomas Aquinas in his treatise *On Being and Essence*, when he undertook to show that every reality only deserves to be called a being, because over and above being this and that particular kind of thing, it actually is.[120]

In this regard, Gilson sees his and Heidegger's philosophical projects as profoundly connected.[121]

Gilson's Sympathetic Approach to Philosophy

In a rather rich statement, Gilson unifies the teaching of his two early mentors by saying that Lévy-Bruhl taught him the same lesson on the plane of history that Bergson taught him on the plane of metaphysics. Gilson says:

> Lévy-Bruhl, by his teaching and his works, such as the *Philosophy of Auguste Comte* or the *Philosophy of Jacobi*, taught me to present the thought of philosophers in itself and by placing oneself in their own point of view; which brought together on the plane of history the teachings that another master [Bergson] gave at the same time on the plane of metaphysics, which I consider as the essential contribution of his method: "it is necessary to make an original effort to sympathize with each subject which one treats."[122]

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[119] *EG*, 228.

[120] *Origins and Meaning of Neo-Scholasticism*, p. 14, Winter 1962 (?), Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's Library, Toronto.

[121] Gilson said that if he were now a young student of philosophy he "could not resist the seduction of the disconcerting genius bearing the name Martin Heidegger." *EP*, 16.

[122] "Lévy-Bruhl, par son enseignement et par ses ouvrages comme la *Philosophie d'Auguste Comte* ou la *Philosophie de Jacobi*, m'a appris à exposer la pensée des philosophes en elle-même et en se plaçant à leur propre point de vue, ce qui rejoignait sur le plan de l'histoire l'enseignement qu'un autre maître donnait au même moment

From the context of the interview it is obvious that the other *maître* to whom Gilson is indeed referring is Henri Bergson. It is worth taking the time to unpack this layered statement to show how it reflects Gilson's distinctive approach to philosophy as a way of life that he implemented the rest of his life.

Regardless of how exactly Lévy-Bruhl himself understood his principle of objective historical research, Gilson completely internalized it, made it his own, and employed it in all his work to great effect for the rest of his life. First, these comments show how Gilson was not so much focused on a presentation of a coherent philosophy but on the "thought of a philosopher in itself." This may seem like a small distinction but it was an important one for Gilson, who was not just focused on a cognitive understanding of all the words, arguments, and conclusions of the philosophy. Rather, by means of historical and textual as well as the careful reconstruction of the relevant cultural context, Gilson's goal was to move beyond the words and arguments to the inner thought processes or 'intellectual effort' of the philosopher who produced them. The reason for this is that from Gilson's perspective the essence of philosophy was not in the philosophical system but in the act of the philosopher himself. Gilson's approach aimed at gaining access to the philosophical act on the existential level. In other words, Gilson was less focused on philosophies and more focused on philosophers.

The way Gilson approached his goal of understanding the thought of the philosopher was to, as he says above, "place oneself in his point of view." As it may seem, Gilson was not here calling for a neutral historical approach that lays out the arguments and logic of a thinker in an

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sur le plan de la métaphysique et que je considère comme l'apport essentiel de sa méthode: «Il faut faire un effort original pour sympathiser avec chacun des sujets que l'on traite.»" *UHA*, 64-5.

objective fashion. Rather, Gilson is invoking a decided sympathy or favor for the philosopher, Gilson wanted to move beyond the arguments of a thinker in order to gain access to the philosopher's own perception of reality which produced his arguments and word-symbols in the first place.[123] As Gilson says above, referring to Bergson: "It is necessary to make an original effort to sympathize with each subject that one is treating."[124]

For example, when Gilson was a young professor at the Sorbonne he was called into one of his former teacher's office, whom he leaves unnammed[125] but with some research it is not hard to figure out that he is referring to Lévy-Bruhl. He inquired as to whether Gilson was using his classes on the history of medieval philosophy to promote religious propaganda. Gilson says that this simply left him "flabbergasted" because he was only employing the principles that he had been taught at the Sorbonne to present the thought of philosophers in a sympathetic light. Gilson says, "But I have always thought that in order to teach any doctrine, a historian should present it in the fullness of its intelligibility, and how can he show that a philosophy is intelligible without somehow justifying it?"[126] Gilson immediately offered to teach modern philosophy but his offer was not taken up and the matter dropped.[127] This example shows how seriously Gilson took this principle of trying to take on the viewpoint of the author and how Gilson took it well beyond the expectations of Lévy-Bruhl who taught it to him in the first place.

One could say that Gilson is here, in a way, playing a game of leap frog: First, with the help of history and cultural context, Gilson leaps over the word-webs and systems of the

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[123] Gouhier also describes this method of sympathy probably also referring to the same 1925 interview. *HPP*, 56.
[124] *UHA*, 65.
[125] This could have possibly been Brunschvicg but more likely it was Lévy-Bruhl because Gilson says of the professor in this meeting that he "owed him so much." *PT*, 34.
[126] *PT*, 34.
[127] *PT*, 34-5.

philosopher to the original intuition of reality of the philosopher that forms and inspires his thought. Then, again Gilson leaps over the thought of the philosopher to reality itself. For by internalizing and absorbing the efforts and principles of a philosopher's thought they can become his own. By comprehending the philosophical act of the philosopher one can participate in it and make it one's own through habituation. Thus through a persistent engagement with the history of philosophy one begins to actually philosophize. This multi-step process where one internalizes the principles of a philosopher and makes them one's own is what makes Gilson's approach to philosophy truly a way of life. For as one moves in this sympathetic way from thinker to thinker in the history of philosophy, one trains oneself in the perception of truth so that one can move beyond these thinkers and perceive the truth for oneself. This training in truth through a sympathetic attitude in the history of philosophy is a major aspect of Gilson's understanding of the philosophical life.[128]

To understand what Gilson means by making an "original effort to sympathize with each subject" one must understand Bergson's unique notion of intuition to which Gilson is directly referring. Based on the perspective of the evolution of biological life into the human being Bergson makes a fundamental distinction between intellect and intuition.[129] According to

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[128] Gilson's philosophical process of leaping over the arguments to the philosopher himself, and then over the philosopher to the truth itself is very similar to Gilson's Harvard friend Alfred North Whitehead's three stages of education especially the move from the second stage of precision or mere knowledge to the third stage 'generalisation' or wisdom. Whitehead says, "The stage of precision is the stage of growing into the apprehension of principles by the acquisition of a precise knowledge of details. The stage of generalisations is the stage of shedding details in favour of the active application of principles, the details retreating into subconscious habits." Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*, (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 37. Similarly, through historical study and the precise detailed study of texts and culture the would-be Gilsonian philosopher passively absorbs the principles of the thinker and at a certain point of habituated mastery is able to freely apply these principles so that knowledge is then transformed into wisdom or the philosophical life.

[129] Much of these reflections on Bergson are based on Winch and Lawlor.

Bergson, there are three main pathways that the vital impetus (*élan vital*) that drives evolution can take: stability, as in plants; instinct, as in insects; and intelligence, as in animals.

Intellect then is intelligence made self conscious in human beings. Just as perception evolves and is ordered to action toward its objects, so too intellect is also ordered to action. In this way, intellect always remains outside of its objects and uses symbols like theories, concepts, language, words, numbers and formulas to predict their motion and control them. Because it is ordered to action, intellect tends to break up its objects like time and substances into homogenous pieces. The problem comes when these abstractions of analysis are taken to be reflective of the true being of the objects when they are in fact illusions. According to Bergson, there are also certain realities that intellect cannot explain in its homogenous categories like time, real duration, becoming, real novelty, or free will. When metaphysics is based only on intellect, or scientific reason, everything gets explained in terms of static being in the fashion of Plato; such understanding and analysis is not truly reflective of human experience, which is often more heterogenous and deals with novelty.

Since there are certain realities and human experiences that intellect or scientific reason cannot explain, Bergson points to another human faculty which he calls intuition. Intuition in the evolutionary schema is instinct, as exemplified in social insects, that has become self-conscious. (This is why Bertrand Russell famously said Bergson simply wants to turn us all into bees.)[130] Indeed, intuition for Bergson is not a quick flash of insight as one might at first suspect, but the result of a long focused intellectual effort. Intuition enters into its object and is an immediate, non-conceptual knowledge of its object. Intuition participates in its object and identifies with its

[130] Lawlor.

object in a disinterested way. Unlike intellect, intuition is free from the driving concerns with social and practical life and is absolute knowledge. It is not focused on practical action like intellect but is a pure perception like that of a painter perceiving the object he is painting. Intuition dispenses with conceptual symbols and language and can only resort to images and metaphors. Whereas intellect is the basis of scientific knowledge, intuition is the basis of metaphysics.

One of the main examples of a function of intuition and a reality of life that intellect cannot articulate adequately is the moral feeling of sympathy which for Bergson is "putting ourselves in the place of others, feeling their pain."[131] This is a complex experience that juxtaposes two concurrent opposite feelings like sharing pain along side of an inner need to help the suffering. This interpenetration of two heterogeneous feelings is what Bergson calls a "qualitative multiplicity" which cannot be represented by a symbol and is inexpressible by the intellect and only accessible by intuition.[132] One of the things this indicates is that when Gilson speaks of sympathy he is also referring to intuition as the basis of sympathy.

Now Gilson is not a Bergsonian in the strong sense and does not fully agree with Bergson's notion of intelligence which was condemned by Pius X during the modernist crisis. Yet, on the other hand, Gilson is more disposed to agree with Bergson's notion of intelligence and intuition than with the weak arguments made against Bergson by his neo-scholastic critics.[133] Gilson says, "It is at least doubtful that the fundamental opposition introduced by the

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[131] Lawlor.
[132] Lawlor.
[133] *PT*, 137-8.

philosopher between intellection and intuition was philosophically justified."[134] According to Gilson's account of the genesis of this opposition, Bergson, (who as a Jewish philosopher who had no prior obligation to be committed to the Aristotelean or neo-scholastic notion of intellect),[135] simply began with the generally accepted notion of intellect in the sense of scientific analytical reason as laid out by his opponents—Kant, Comte, and Spencer—and critiqued it on its own terms.[136] Bergson wanted to revive metaphysics; and positivistic intelligence or scientific reason was not robust enough to carry such a project out. So, as Gilson says, Bergson "had to look elsewhere" and he articulated the notion of intuition upon which he built his metaphysics.[137] In this way, Bergson was not an irrationalist or against science, but he just did not think the modern scientific notion of reason was adequate to the challenge of articulating reality, especially the reality of life. So Bergson expanded or dilated reason with the added notion of intuition which could comprehend life.[138] According to Gilson, Bergson, like Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl apropos of sociology and science, used intuition to achieve freedom and burst through the confining limits of a closed Jewish religion.[139]

Gilson is highly influenced by Bergson's critique of scientific reason as inadequate to articulate reality and life but also by his notion of intuition. For example, Gilson marvels at how the neo-scholastics are able to describe quality from the outside as "an accident that perfects a

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[134] *PT*, 137; 139.
[135] *PT*, 140.
[136] *PT*, 142.
[137] *PT*, 115.
[138] *PT*, 138-9. Bergson's critique of intelligence as not being able to comprehend life and his turn to intuition is very much in line with the Romantic critique of reason and explains the roots of the Romantic influence on Gilson.
[139] *PT*, 32.

substance both in its being and in its operations." Bergson, however, is able to describe quality more usefully "from the inside."[140] Gilson says,

> Instead of describing it from the outside, he progressively brought his reader to perceive it such as it was in itself. In short, Bergson was teaching us to purify the category of quality from all contamination by that of quantity.[141]

What is interesting is that, although he does not totally agree with Bergson on intelligence, Gilson applies Bergson's method of intuition not just to metaphysical subjects but to philosophers themselves in a way that Bergson would not have ever imagined. For Gilson, the method of intuition applied to thinkers is a kind of sympathy and is such that the object determines the thought and not the thought determining the object with predetermined formulas in the manner of scientific reason. Sympathy is putting oneself into the place of another. This is an "original effort" in the sense of a unique or very focused impressive effort to try to understand the philosopher from the inside out on his own terms. For by gaining an intuition of the philosopher beyond his arguments and seeing the truth he saw, the historian can participate in the philosophical act of the philosopher and thereby live the life of the philosopher through an intuitive approach to the history of philosophy. As Gilson says, "it was necessary to pause, to ponder on the doctrine, to walk personally in the philosopher's footsteps, in short, to embark upon this philosophical venture on one's own."[142] This is how Bergsonian intuition or sympathy is at the root of Gilson's notion of the philosophical life.

Gilson and Neo-scholasticism

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[140] *PT*, 118.
[141] *PT*, 118.
[142] *PT*, 119.

One last comment must be made about Gilson's early education; not so much about what it included but what it did not include, which was neo-scholastic philosophy. Gilson says that he never read one of the neo-scholastic manuals until much later in life and claims to have never even heard of Thomas Aquinas at NDC.[143] This actually remained a point of pride for Gilson throughout his life who carried a critical attitude toward the neo-scholastics all of his life. This is mainly because of the dry rationalism along with the political overtones[144] of their philosophy and theology that lead to many of his friends and teachers like Abbé Lucien Paulet, Bergson, Loisy and Laberthonnière losing their jobs and/or being publicly condemned during the modernist crisis.[145] Gilson indeed acknowledges that some of the modernists made doctrinal errors with which, of course, he does not agree; but on another and higher level Gilson blames the neo-scholastics and churchmen, for they should have been presenting a true and genuine scholasticism based on the thought of Thomas Aquinas. But instead they were presenting a "decadent" and "degenerate" model of scholasticism that was closer to positivism than to scripture and that forced competent intellectuals like his friend Abbé Paulet to look elsewhere than Thomas Aquinas for philosophy.[146] In a letter to De Lubac Gilson says famously:

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[143] *PT*, 87; 45-6.

[144] Gilson says, "What the self-appointed spokesmen of orthodoxy were saying was mixed up with too many temporal interests to inspire complete confidence, but since every time a priest would try to speak differently he was penalized for it, not always however without some guilt on his part, we did not know which way to turn." *PT*, 63.

[145] *PT*, 63. For Gilson's account of the modernist crisis see: *PT*, 44-61.

[146] *PT*, 52-3. Gilson was very close to Abbé Lucien Paulet who taught philosophy at a seminary and would attend and discuss Bergson lectures with Gilson. Paulet was the one who seems to have first made Gilson aware of the dry rationalism of the neo-scholastic manuals. Paulet was forced to quit teaching philosophy because he was teaching a Bergsonian form of scholasticism. Sadly, his close friend Abbé Paulet along with intellectual greats like Charles Péguy and Pierre Rousselot all died in World War I. We can hear the deep impact their loss had on Gilson when he eloquently says, "The purity of their sacrifice does not console us for such losses. Nothing will give us back the spiritual riches that we would have received from them had they lived." *PT*, 51. Gilson is convinced that if his friend Paulet would have known the real Thomas and his metaphysics of Exodus he would have indeed been a loyal Thomist. The sacrifice of these men, especially Paulet, whom he always kept a picture of, inspired the young Gilson to bring forth a genuinely Catholic way of doing philosophy. *EG*, 21. Cf. *AIP*, 32.

> That's just what's so awful: orthodoxy in the hands of its destroyers. The drama of modernism was that the rotten theologies of their adversaries was, for the most part, responsible for their errors. It [Modernism] was wrong, but the repression was led by men who were unreasonable and whose pseudo-theology rendered a modernist reaction inevitable.[147]

Gilson concludes that it would indeed have been a disaster if he learned scholastic philosophy from the manuals when he was young. Gilson's objection was not with the specific philosophical conclusions of the philosophy which as a Catholic he agreed with for the most part,[148] but with their philosophical approach which included a rather insulting tone and glaring historical inaccuracies. For these manuals were claiming to be based on Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas but in fact were more based on Wolff and Suarez. There was also an *a priori* refusal to enter into any respectful dialogue with figures from the history of philosophy like Kant who they called disparaging things like 'insane.' Gilson was quick to criticize neo-scholasticism for the rest of his life and give much more credit to thinkers like Bergson for a revival of metaphysics than to the neo-scholastics. One of the deeper reasons that Gilson criticized this non-historical approach is that cutting oneself off from the great dialogue in the history of philosophy means cutting oneself off from the philosophical life as he conceived it.[149]

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[147] "Voilà ce qui est affreux: l'orthodoxie aux mains de ses destructeurs. Le drame du modernisme fut que le théologies gâtée des ses adversaires était, pour beaucoup, responsable de ses erreurs. Il avait tort mais la répression fut conduite par des hommes qui n'avaient pas raison et dont la pseudo-théologie rendait une réaction moderniste inévitable." *Lettres*, 76.
[148] *PT*, 47.
[149] *EP,* 15-14.

CHAPTER VII

Gilson's Pre-World War I Works

The Three Principles that Direct Gilson's Philosophical Project

As we have seen above, as a young student at the Sorbonne, Gilson learned three important lessons that would stay with him the rest of his life and direct all of his scholarship. First, through the living witness of Bergson, Gilson came to see that metaphysics and the philosophical life is indeed fully alive and a viable option for contemporary philosophers..

Second, through the mentorship of Lévy-Bruhl, Gilson also understood that a sympathetic approach to philosophers and reality itself—what we would like to label "the principle of sympathy"—is the key to unlocking the philosophical life from the history of philosophy. As Marion says,

> The first lesson that was given to E. Gilson, and without a doubt one of the more decisive ones, concerns just this question: how to raise the history of philosophy to the dignity of an authentic philosophical act.[1]

Marion holds that this theme in Gilson's thought, the idea of doing *philosophy* through the *history of philosophy,* is never stated explicitly by Gilson in any of his writings but that is exactly what he is doing.[2] One of Gilson's early students, Henri Gouhier, also sees his mentor as doing

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[1] "Le premier enseignement que donne E. Gilson, et sans doute l'un des plus décisifs, concerne justement cette question: rendre à l'histoire de la philosophie la dignité d'un acte authentiquement philosophique." Jean-Luc Marion, "L'Instauration De La Rupture: Gilson a La Lecture De Descartes," In *Étienne Gilson Et Nous: La Philosophie Et Son Histoire*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin 1980), 14.

[2] Marion, 14. What Marion may mean here is that Gilson does not explicitly announce at the beginning of his historical works on Augustine, Bonaventure, Thomas etc. that he is not just doing history but also doing philosophy. However, Gilson's historical approach to philosophy is no secret. For in interviews, and some lesser known writings, Gilson is very explicit about his being primarily a philosopher who uses history for his philosophical purposes. Nevertheless, because Gilson did history so well, it seems his status as a philosopher is often lost on many people especially on North Americans. For instance, in an interview Gilson responds to those who criticize him for only being a historian and not a philosopher by saying: "All the philosophers I've known were teaching the history of philosophy. There's not one philosopher who could fill up a whole year of lectures with ideas of his own. Kant never taught Kant. Bergson taught Plotinus. Whitehead was teaching Locke and Hume at Harvard; he never taught Whitehead…A philosopher must know as much as possible of what has already been said,…There is no self-made

philosophy through history in a fashion similar to both Hegel and Brunschvicg. Gouhier sees Gilson's work as sliding back and forth on a scale from erudite history to historical synthesis and then into philosophy itself. Also in Gilson's historical syntheses philosophy serves as the form and the history serves as the matter upon which it operates.[3] As Gouhier says, "A thinker may be both a philosopher and a historian of philosophy, the fact may seem normal. But it must be understood."[4]

Third, through his doctoral work on the influence of scholasticism upon Descartes, Gilson rediscovered the philosophical riches of medieval thought covered over by the tradition and prejudices of both neo-scholasticism and modern positivism. As Gilson says, "From scholasticism to Cartesianism the loss in metaphysical substance seemed to me frightening."[5] In this way, the 'principle of sympathy' became for Gilson the key needed to rediscovering and reviving a genuine scholasticism. For the situation of the modernist crisis as Gilson saw it—an inventive heterodox departure from tradition, on the one side, and an 'orthodoxy in the hands of its destroyers', on the other—in particular showed Gilson that a new and more creative scholasticism was desperately needed in the Roman Catholic Church in the early twentieth

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man in philosophy." Kass Dalglish, "Gilson Ponders Pleasure of Art" *Catherine Wheel* (Student Newspaper of The Colllege of St. Catherine, St. Paul, MN.) no. 6, (1965): 1-4. So according to Gilson doing philosophy through history was not just his own personal philosophical style but every true philosopher does philosophy through history to some degree or other.

[3] *HPP*, 54.

[4] "…un penseur soit à la fois philosophe et historien de la philosophie, le fait peut paraître normal. Mais il faut s'entendre" *HPP*, 54. Many European scholars view Gilson as primarily a philosopher but Gouhier''s point has to be demonstrated to many North American commentators, like for instance Fr. Shook, who see Gilson as primarily a historian of thought who at times made forays into philosophy itself. Gilson himself may have unintentionally contributed to this bifurcated perspective by presenting more historical lectures at PIMS and more purely philosophical lectures at the Collège de France.

[5] Gilson continues, "Looking back across forty-five years I distinctly remember the feeling of fear I experienced on the day when, after holding back my pen for a long time, I finally wrote this simple sentence: 'On all these points the thought of Descartes, in comparison with the sources from which it derives, marks much less a gain than a loss.'" *PT*, 88-9.

century. We see this concern clearly in a letter to Maurice Blondel wherein Gilson is speaking of the need to understand Augustine, Bonaventure and Thomas in their own integrity and not to reduce them to one another. Gilson says:

> I think my generation of Catholics have suffered a profound ignorance of its own tradition, and I consider as its tradition the whole of Catholic thought. Therefore, being myself ignorant of it, I strive to give those who come after me a better point of departure. I am not closed by a historical empiricism which would lead to the conclusion that what has been will be: I believe that it is necessary to know what has been, in order to make what should be come to pass. We have wanted to invent where we had only to learn: this is why we fail to invent where it would be in fact necessary to invent.[6]

On the secular level the absorption of philosophy into scientism also contributed to Gilson's desire for a new scholasticism which would help continue the progression of Western metaphysics. Thus, for Gilson, the revival of an authentic scholasticism involved the use of modern historical methods to return to the original Christian philosophical and theological sources; the goal of this demanding and rigorous historical study was not to remain trapped in the past but rather to foster an authentically Catholic way of living the philosophical life. This life is rooted in its proper sources so that it may not waste its time being creative in areas it need not be so and that it may be creative in the areas where it truly needs to be so, especially in the assimilation of the Catholic tradition to the needs of the modern world. The renewal of the

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[6] "Je pense que ma génération de catholiques a souffert d'une ignorance profonde de sa propre tradition, et je considère comme sa tradition celle de toute la pensée catholique.
Voilà pourquoi, l'ignorant, je travaille à m'en instruire, pour donner à ceux qui viendront après moi un meilleur point de départ. Je ne suis donc pas fermé par un empirisme historique qui conduirait à la conclusion que ce qui a été sera: Je crois qu'il faut savoir ce qui a été pour faire que ce qui doit être devienne. Nous avons voulu inventer ce qu'il n'y avait qu'à apprendre, c'est pourquoi nous échouons à inventer là où il faudrait en effet inventer." Ètienne Gilson to Maurice Blondel, 29 April 1928, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. Blondel felt that too much history would get Catholics stuck in the past and therefore make it so Catholics not engage in modern philosophical and cultural problems in. In his reply to Blondel Gilson is arguing, on the contrary, that history is actually the only way to properly engage modern problems and revive the Catholic philosophical life in a creative fashion.

Catholic philosophical life thus became Gilson's life mission that began during his years at the Sorbonne. In this way, the following three elements make up and drive the direction of Gilson's view of philosophy and his own philosophical project and stay consistent throughout his life: the philosophical life, the historical method, and the setting aside of the Catholic pseudo-tradition and rotten theology that he saw as the root cause of the modernist crisis.

A Division of Gilson's Works and his 'Turn to Theology.'

Gilson produced a huge body of published work, which, according to McGrath, consists of over one thousand two hundred and ten published items.[7] Gilson's corpus consists of everything ranging from scholarly monographs (172), journal articles (307), and lectures to newspaper articles and popular and political public speeches, which McGrath categorizes as 'general interest articles' (296).[8] Gilson was also a life long letter writer and has numerous unpublished letters in the PIMS archive in Toronto. Furthermore, all of Gilson's work spans a remarkably long sixty-six year period of fruitful academic productivity that lasted from 1909-1975. It would seem highly probable, then, that Gilson's views on philosophy would go through several separate and evolving phases over time. This especially seems to be the case when comparing his earlier work where he is more strictly philosophical and his later work from 1950 onwards when he makes a marked turn to theology seen especially in his autobiography *Le philosophe et la théologie*.

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[7] McGrath.

[8] McGrath. Gilson avoided book reviews and only did them when he had to, so his book reviews (104) though still numerable are relatively few compared to his many other scholarly works. Gilson's personal distaste for book reviews is why he did not allow book reviews in his journal *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age* which he started with Gabriel Théry, O.P. in 1926. Gilson likewise did not allow book reviews in the PIMS journal *Mediaeval Studies*. Gilson simply felt that research scholars should be writing books not reviewing them. *EG*, 138; 89.

For instance, in his first published writing, *Sur le positivisme absolu*, Gilson defends the autonomy of philosophy and argues that philosophy should not be the handmaid of science in the manner of absolute positivism just as it should not be the handmaid of theology as in medieval theology.[9] Yet, in his famous "bombshell"[10] lecture in Rome in 1950 at the International Scholastic Congress, for the first time, Gilson explicitly argues that all Catholic philosophers, if they want to be effective philosophers, must first be theologians and calls for all scholastic philosophers to return to theology.[11]

However, this contrast from 1909 to 1950 does not actually constitute an about face in Gilson's personal view of philosophy, but rather, a natural development, or his making explicit what had always been implicit in his work. Furthermore, this contrast is much more indicative of Gilson's change in his view of theology and not philosophy. For he discovered the Thomistic view of faith as a participation in divine life. This discovery led to a better understanding of theology as a truly transcendent science that operates from the perspective of this participation in divine life and does not interfere with the integrity of philosophy.[12] Gilson, moreover, does not make a major shift in his view of philosophy itself when he engages the debates over Christian philosophy, or when he indicates his allegiance to the thought of St. Thomas in his William James Lectures of 1936.

As has been said, it is our present thesis that Gilson's view of philosophy as a way of life, and his distinctive method of accessing the philosophical act of a philosopher through the history

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[9] *SPA,* 63-65.
[10] *LEGH*, 210.
[11] Étienne Gilson, "Les recherches historico-critiques et l'avenir de la scolastique." *Antonianum* 26, (1951): 40-48. Étienne Gilson, "Historical Research and the Future of Scholasticism," In *A Gilson Reader*, ed. Anton C. Pegis, 156-76, (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1957). This work was translated into English and edited by Gilson so we will opt to use the English version.
[12] *PT*, 98-9.

of philosophy remains the same throughout his career. From the beginning of his publishing career in 1909, Gilson's writings show that he is concerned with guarding the integrity and autonomy of metaphysics as well as the philosophical way of life of which metaphysics is an essential element. Gilson wanted to rescue philosophy from the positivism of his Sorbonne professors, the origin of which he began to see in Descartes' subordination of philosophy to science in the seventeenth century. Gilson, in a gradual movement backwards from Descartes to the seventeenth Suarezian scholasticism at *La Flèche,* to the original works of Thomas Aquinas, discovered, to his surprise, that, in the context of theology, philosophy actually had much more autonomy and fecundity than it did under the regime of science whether this be the the new physics of Descartes or Aristotelean physics. Although Gilson made this discovery as a doctoral student at the Sorbonne in 1909, and this discovery drove his subsequent research into Thomas, Bonaventure, Augustine, and Scotus during the nineteen twenties and thirties, he did not actually make an explicit call for philosophy to return to the guidance of theology until the 1950s.

One can only speculate as to why Gilson did not explicitly call for a return to theology until 1950. One reason could have been that the modernist crisis was gripping the intellectual life of the Roman Catholic Church and one who called for philosophy to return to theology could get himself quickly accused of fideism and his works put on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* just like Gilson's friends Bergson, Loisy, and Laberthonnière.[13] Another reason could be that

[13] Gilson did technically make the *Index* when Laberthonnière's journal *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* was put on the *Index* containing Gilson's article "Notes sur Campenella" (1913). *EG*, 57. Gilson did not agree with many of the modernist's philosophical opinions but he did think that the modernists were quite well intentioned to the degree that they aimed at presenting Catholic doctrine in such a way that accounted for modern historical methods. Thus Gilson did not agree with the many condemnations and deplored the restrictive atmosphere in the Church they created among scholars. However, being a supporter of the Republic Gilson was very careful to not get himself in trouble with Church authorities by presenting what could be labeled as 'fideist' positions which was a kind of catch all condemnation used at the time by Church authorities in a very political atmosphere.

positivism was the only acceptable approach to philosophy at the University of Paris where he was a student and then became a philosophy professor in 1921. An explicit call for a return to theology in a school where the faculty of theology had been suppressed since the French Revolution would have possibly been quite detrimental to his career which Gilson, having a wife and two young daughters, could not afford.

So one could plausibly argue that Gilson indeed changed his view of philosophy when he made his public turn to theology. But this approach risks missing the fact that from the beginning Gilson was driven by a personal mission to find a way to preserve the autonomy of metaphysics from science and to renew the Catholic philosophical life and that he discovered both of these in scholastic theology. Gilson made this discovery in 1909 but only made it explicit in 1950. From this perspective then his understanding of philosophy as a way of life stayed basically the same throughout his life and found the safest shelter in the home of scholastic theology.

In this way, there is not a sudden turn to philosophy as a way of life in the middle of his career after the manner of Hadot. It seems that Gilson holds his distinctive take on philosophy and its need to turn to the sources of scholastic philosophy/theology at least as early as his lectures on Thomas Aquinas at the University of Lille in 1913. It is this view of philosophy that drives Gilson's turn to an in-depth study of Bonaventure in the German POW camps during World War I, which resulted in his 1924 masterpiece *La philosophie de saint Bonaventure*. Thus Gilson's intellectual life and views of philosophy do not easily lend themselves to a division into

temporal phases as evolving from one position to another after the manner of Nietzsche and Hadot.[14]

Gilson: Historian or Philosopher?

In the scholarship on Gilson how one divides Gilson's work depends mainly on how one interprets his famous turn to theology in 1950. Some, especially North American scholars like Shook, see this turn to theology as a break from the past.[15] However, others, especially from Europe, see the turn to theology as a continuation of Gilson's early vision.[16] This disagreement over Gilson's supposed turn to theology is often only symptomatic of a deeper misunderstanding about Gilson's identity as a philosopher or a historian. North American scholars for various reasons like Shook, Fitzgerald, and even Maurer tend to view Gilson as first a historian who in the later 1930s and early 1940s attempted to move into philosophy. In this regard Fitzgerald says,

> Fr. Shook's biography, É*tienne Gilson*, has presented in superb fashion the details of Gilson's education and development, first as an historian of philosophy, then, by gradual steps, as the dynamic philosopher we associate with *Painting and Reality* or *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again*. It should be of interest to study the first steps Gilson took as he emerged from his work as an historian and began to take his own position on the controversial issues of his day.[17]

Fitzgerald's argument is that Gilson was always just a historian of medieval thought, yet when he started to become embroiled in the controversies over Christian philosophy and Thomistic

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[15] *EG*, 299.
[16] Yves Floucat, "Gilson et la métaphysique thomiste de l'acte d'être." *Revue Thomiste* 94 no. 3, (1994): 362-3. Cf. *AIP*, 290.
[17] Desmond J. Fitzgerald, "Étienne Gilson: From Historian to Philosopher," In *Thomistic Papers II*, ed. Leonard A. Kennedy, and Jack C. Marler, 29-55. (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1986), 29.

realism in the nineteen thirties, Gilson made a gradual transition from a historian to a metaphysician.[18] According to this common thesis, Gilson's slow transformation into a pure metaphysician gets even more emphasized in the fifth edition *Le Thomisme* (1949) and *L'être et l'essence* (1948). This North American tendency to see Gilson as primarily a historian is also reflected in the fact that Gilson has no entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* but Maritain does.[19]

However, European scholars often tend to see Gilson as primarily a philosopher who used history for his philosophical project. For instance, French philosopher Henri Gouhier, one of Gilson's earliest students, sees his *maître* from the beginning to the end as primarily a philosopher who frequently used history to do his philosophy.[20] In a similar piece on Gilson at the reception of Gilson's successor at the *Collège de France* Gouhier again presents Gilson as essentially a philosopher or metaphysician and makes no mention of any turn by Gilson from history to philosophy or a turn from philosophy to theology. Gouhier, then, tends to see more continuity in Gilson's thought.

The so-called 'turn to theology' becomes a non-issue if one sees Gilson as primarily a philosopher who draws on all means necessary—whether it be history, theology, science, or art—to help him live the philosophical life. Furthermore, one of the reasons that the Europeans tend to see Gilson more accurately as primarily a philosopher is because they tend to be more familiar with Gilson's early purely philosophical and brilliant works from the 1920s and because

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[18] Fitzgerald, 40.
[19] Maurer also presents Gilson as first a medieval historian who later became a philosopher. Armand A. Maurer, "The Legacy of Étienne Gilson," In *One Hundred Years of Thomism: Aeterni Patris and Afterwards*, ed. Victor B. Brezik, (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1981), 33-43. [Hereafter cited as *LEG*].
[20] *HPP*, 59. See also Henri Gouhier, "Post-Face: Étienne Gilson," In *Étienne Gilson Et Nous: La Philosophie Et Son Histoire*, 145-57, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin), 1980.

Gilson did much of his pure philosophical lecturing at the Collège de France and in Europe. The North American scholars, however, tend to associate Gilson with his more historical lecturing at PIMS and tend to ignore his purely philosophical writings prior to the founding of IMS in 1929.[21]

Murphy also follows the European take on Gilson seeing Gilson as primarily a philosopher and also that sees the Gilsonian turn to theology present at the very beginning.[22] Even Gilson himself anticipated that his later turn to theology would, falsely, be considered, "Late Gilsonism." This term, formed as a parallel to an expression such as the "Late Roman Empire," would be intended to designate a kind of later decadent or degenerate phase that is not as good as the former. Thus "Early Gilsonism" would denote a time when Gilson was more faithful to the autonomy of philosophy prior to his later decadent phase.[23]

Following the general theme of continuity, Murphy does not divide Gilson's works into intellectual phases of Gilson moving from history to philosophy to theology, like Fitzgerald and

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[21] Michel points out that Maritain and Gilson are the exact inverse of one another from the European and North American perspectives. For in Europe Maritain's reputation is attached to the Institut catholique de Paris and he is seen more as a Catholic medieval scholar whereas in America, due to Maritain being at the University of Chicago and Princeton University, he is seen more as a secular philosopher. Gilson, on the other hand, in North America is connected to PIMS and is seen principally as a medievalist, but in Europe because he was educated at the Sorbonne, and lectured at the *Collège de France* is seen as a "university Catholic" or a "philosopher in the city". *LPC*, 547-8; See also *LPC*, 37-9. Michel concludes: "In a sense, if Gilson is a 'gift of the free education [Catholic schools] to the university,' he is also a gift of the French university to the American graduate education, notable Catholic graduate education." *LPC*, 38. Michel also says that in France Gilson is seen as a Sorbonne professor and a polite and secular version of Maritain but in North America Gilson is seen as trapped in a cultural ghetto of American Catholics. *LPC*, 39. Michel wants to present a more holistic view of Gilson as primarily a Catholic philosopher and possibly even a theologian. The key to Michel's holistic view is understanding the importance of the founding of IMS. *LPC*, 39-121.

[22] *AIP*, 290. Noone is one North American scholar who sees Gilson first as a philosopher and then as an historian. See Noone, 118. Also Mortimer J. Adler considered Gilson to be "one of the few great philosophers of the age." *An Abbreviated Biography of Étienne Gilson's Intellectual Life*, Gilson Collection, PIMS Library, Toronto.

[23] *EG*, 373; *LEGH*, 213.

Shook, but rather, according to several common recurring themes and according to major thinker or philosophical problem Gilson is consumed with at the time. Murphy says of Gilson:

> He seldom dropped a theme, and this makes it impossible to construct an empirical division of his thought into phases. One can only demarcate phases in his life by marking a particular period by the production of a classical text.[24]

This method of division resonates with Gilson's hermeneutical principle of sympathy that made him so immersed in a thinker's work that he would often reflect their ideas as his own during the time that he is working on them. So when Gilson is working on Bonaventure or Augustine he sounds very Franciscan or Augustinian and when he is working on Thomas he sounds very Thomistic even though Gilson really does not become a commited Thomist until the mid-thirties. Also, Gilson's thought is heavily influenced by the many different audiences to whom he was speaking and the political atmosphere of the time.

So, for instance, in the first twenty-two years of his career Gilson is addressing almost exclusively secular and non-Catholic audiences at the Sorbonne and at Harvard until about 1929. In these contexts, the always faithful Gilson does not, of course, hide his personal faith, but he does not appeal to it either, nor emphasize the primacy of theology. However, later, after 1929 when Gilson starts to address more Catholic audiences and emphasizes the primary role of faith in scholastic philosophy; especially after World War Two when he realizes that Nietzsche's quasi-historical prophecy that 'God is dead' has come true by a vacuum of Christian faith, Gilson starts to lead with his faith and philosophize explicitly from the perspective of faith. This may seem like a change in his understanding of philosophy. However, as we will show below, the

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[24] *AIP*, 290.

primacy of theology is there in the Lille lectures in 1913 but it is not made as explicit until later due to his addressing more Catholic audiences.

The Three-fold Division of Gilson's Works: Philology, History and Philosophy

Gouhier offers some categories which we can adapt for creating a division of Gilson's scholarly works: erudite history; historical synthesis; and philosophy in itself.[25] Similarly, Prouvost says, "'Gilsonism rests on this unity of philology, history and philosophy."[26] For instance, Gilson's works connect on a sliding scale. He begins with erudite history that focuses on precise historical facts, such, for instance his *Index Scholastico-Cartésien.*[27] This, in turn, lays the necessary groundwork for Gilson to enter into a historical synthesis wherein he compares different movements of thought, as in "L'innésme cartésien et la théologie."[28] Then, Gilson at times slides into a form of philosophy that uses history as its matter or stage for presentation, as in *Le réalisme méthodique* where Gilson is focused on a direct philosophical critique of the Cartesian approach to philosophy as such.[29]

Other works under the category of 'erudite history' or philology could be almost anything that Gilson published in the scholarly journal he founded: *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age*; such pieces are items such as, "Les seize premiers 'Theoremata' et la

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[25] *HPP*, 53-5.
[26] *HPP*, 53-5. "Le «gilsonism» repose sur cette unité entre philologie histoire et philosophie, qui lui permet de considérer la métaphysique à partir de la totalité de son histoire." Géry Prouvost, "Avant-propos," "Autour d'Étienne Gilson: études et documents," Special Issue, *Revue Thomiste* 94, no. 3 (1994): 356.
[27] Étienne Gilson, *Index Scholastico-Cartésien,* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1913).
[28] Étienne Gilson, "L'innésme cartésien et la théologie," In *Ètude de philosophie médiévale*, 146-190, (Strasbourg: Commission des publications la Faculté des Lettres de l'Université de Strasbourg, 1921). [Hereafter cited as *ICT*].
[29] Étienne Gilson, *Le Réalisme Méthodique,* (Paris: Pierre Téqui, 1936).

pensée de Duns Scot"[30] and "L'âme raisonnable chez Albert le Grand."[31] Then, too, there are Gilson's works of historical synthesis that focus either on the history of philosophy, such as, like in the Gifford Lectures *L'Esprit de la Philosophie Médiévale* or on the philosophy of an individual philosopher, such as, Thomas, Bonaventure, or Augustine.

Finally, there are the properly philosophical works which still often engage history but use history as a kind of material or platform to present properly philosophical positions; for instance, *Le réalisme méthodique*, and *Réalisme thomiste et critique de la connaissance*. Gilson's use of history for philosophy becomes much more heavy handed, as in *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* and especially in *L'être et l'essence*. These last two can at times seem to the unwary reader to be historical syntheses but really they should be approached as philosophical works in their own right. In *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* Gilson, instead of his usual history of individual philosophies, takes on a much grander history of philosophy itself and tracks its repeating pattern of turning from metaphysics to skepticism which makes it a properly philosophical work and not a historical synthesis. *L'être et l'essence* is a presentation of Gilson's own personal existential metaphysics deeply inspired by Thomas Aquinas. Gilson uses history to help the presentation and, at times, in the process it seems that he even sacrifices historical accuracy, which would also seem to betray the early Gilson's stress on fidelity to

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[30] Étienne Gilson, "Les sieze premiers 'Theoremata et la pensée de Duns Scot," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age* 11, (1937): 5-86.
[31] Étienne Gilson, "L'âme raisonnable chez Albert le Grand," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age* 14, (1943): 5-72.

history.[32] Gilson remained very proud of this work as his "finest work" according to Shook.[33] In this regard, Chenu says that,

> Although Gilson continued to argue often that he was 'only an historian' he realized that with *Being and Some Philosophers* he was writing as a philosopher and putting forward his own kind of existentialism.[34]

Gilson also presents from early in his career some properly philosophical works that use very little history: *Art et métaphysique* which he famously wrote while stationed at Verdun during World War I. While a POW he also published *Du fondement des jugements esthétiques* also a pure work of philosophy on art. Also the early *Essai sur la vie intérieure* is a straightforward piece of philosophy.[35]

In addition to these early works of pure philosophy, we should also mention here that Gilson returned much later to his purely philosophical work on art in *Painting and Reality* (1957), *Introduction aux arts du beau* (1963) and *Matières et formes* (1964).[36] Because Gilson was known as a Thomist and a historian, at the time, many continue to see these works as simply a Thomistic interpretation of art. However, Gilson, as Shook observes, held that Aquinas knew

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[32] Gouhier says, "En cette année 1948 où paraît le volume L'Être et l'Essence, Étienne Gilson ne conçoit pas plus qu'hier l'histoire subordonnée à des fins philosophiques. *Historia, ancilla philosophiae*? Toute son oeuvre protesterait contre un pareil destin. La question est alors de savoir comment philosophie et histoire de la philosophie coexistent dans cet esprit." *HPP,* 56.

[33] James K. Farge, *An Abbreviated Biography of Étienne Gilson's Intellectual Life*, Gilson Collection, PIMS Library, Toronto, p. 15. [Hereafter cited as *ABE*]. Shook says that during Vichy France, "He also began one new metaphysical study, his L'être et l'essence, which he only completed in 1948. He was always proud of this work, which was in his opinion the best of all his strictly philosophical writings and which was inspired substantially by his Bloomington experience." Laurence K. Shook, "Étienne Gilson in Bloomington," *Speculum* 60, no. 4 (1985): 789-799. [Hereafter cited as *EGB*].

[34] *ABE*, 15.

[35] Gilson, Étienne. "Essai sur la vie intérieure." Revue philosophique de la France et de l'etranger 89, (1920): 23-78. [Hereafter cited as *Essai*].

[36] Étienne Gilson, *Painting and Reality,* (New York: Pantheon, 1957) [Hereafter cited as *PR*]; Étienne Gilson, *Forms and Substances in the Arts,* trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966).

very little about art and nothing about modern art.[37] Therefore these later works on art are Gilson writing as a pure philosopher in his own right. Furthermore, it also should be noted here that the fact that Gilson wrote pure works of philosophy on art in his own voice at the beginning of his career during Word War One, and then at a much later stage of his career, shows that Gilson understood himself to be a philosopher in his own right from the very beginning to the end of his literary career. What may further the confusion about this point is that Gilson himself did not present himself as a real philosopher publicly in a fashion very similar to Leo Strauss who also did not present himself as a philosopher and was rather demure about taking the honor of this title. However, Gilson does, at times, call himself a philosopher in his letters.[38]

In this way, many of Gilson's works slide back and forth from erudite history to historical synthesis to philosophy in its own right. These categories of philology, history and philosophy are not by any means watertight but they help at least give an organized perspective on the different forms of Gilson's many works.

Three pre-World War I Works

As stated above, the overall goal of part three is to show that Gilson approached philosophy as a concrete way of life throughout his career and this view of philosophy culminates in his foundation of PIMS as the concrete expression of his view of philosophical life. The goal of the remainder of this present chapter is to present a series of early pre-World War I

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[37] Laurence K. Shook, *Étienne Henry Gilson*, Gilson Collection, PIMS Library, Toronto, 6.

[38] "I am very sorry to be prevented by a most untimely sciatica from spending some more time with you in Brussels. There is much common sense in foreseeing a retirement age even for philosophers. Beyond a certain time limit, the body can no longer be trusted." Étienne Gilson to Richard McKeon, 18 October 1953, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.

works by Gilson that show that he held a view of philosophy as a way of life from the very beginning. This will part will also help demonstrate our claim that Gilson's view of philosophy as a way of life stayed essentially continuous throughout his life and that Gilson was a philosopher who did philosophy through history from the beginning. In this chapter we will intentionally choose works that are both historical syntheses and pure philosophy in their own right.

Sur le positivisme absolu (1909)

In his first published work Gilson presents a work of pure philosophy that defends the autonomy of philosophy against any attempt to reduce it to positive science. In a very short piece Gilson first argues against Abel Rey's notion of "postivisme absolu." Whereas the less robust positivism of Comte is a philosophy that is still separate from science, Rey's philosophy along with Durkheim's is an "absolute positivism" which is not afraid to take the step of simply reducing its content to the positive sciences and so refuses to say anything that scientists don't already say.[39] Maurer points out that Abel Rey deplores the split between science and idealist philosophy in the nineteenth century and wants philosophy, which he claims has always been done by scientists, to come back under the umbrella of science.[40] Rey sees the distinctive role of philosophy as primarily dealing with the history of contemporary science. According to Gilson, Rey also claims that sociology and psychology can scientifically deal with the traditional philosophical questions of human destiny and the meaning of life.[41]

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[39] *SPA*, 65.
[40] *EGCP,* 202.
[41] *SPA*, 65.

Gilson, however, sees this reduction of philosophy to science as incompatible with Rey's claim that positive science will be able to adequately answer these fundamentally non-scientific, "humanistic" questions that are not posed by science but rather by metaphysics and religion. Gilson says,

> The incompatibility of these propositions seems obvious to us when we consider that this philosophy, which claims to reduce itself to the content of positive science, considers as essential problems the problems of human destiny and of the meaning of life, problems that positive science ignores by definition, problems that it will never reach, not because we predict that the object will always elude it, but because they are, in their very meaning at any rate extra-scientific, problems that—far from arising from the positive sciences—have been posed by metaphysics and religion. [42]

So here Gilson is claiming that there are certain questions science will ask but others that it chooses to ignore "by definition." According to Gilson, science chooses to ignore these humanistic questions because they are "in their very meaning" or by their very essence simply beyond the nature of science. This act of choice by science, to ignore certain questions, implies the possibility that there may be other fields of knowledge beyond the ken of positive science which can answer them. What this means for science is that it is not the highest perfection of the mind, as Rey believes, but only a certain perfection of the mind.

Several points can be made here. First, by focusing on the self-limiting action of science Gilson carves out an area where philosophy can have its own autonomy and attempt to find the truth behind these humanistic problems. Second, Gilson is often criticized for reducing

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[42] "L'incompatibilité de ces propositions nous paraît évidente lorsque nous considérons que cette philosophie qui prétend se réduire au contenu de la science positive, envisage comme des problémes essentiels les problémes de la destinée humaine et du sense de la vie, problémes que la science positive ignore par définition, problémes qu'elle n 'atteindra jamais, non parce que nous prédisons que l'objet lui en échappera toujours, mais parce qu'ils sont, dans leur esprit même, extra-scientifiques, problémes enfin qui bien loin de naître des sciences positives nous ont été posés par la métaphysique et par la religion." *SPA*, 65.

philosophy to metaphysics[43] but he shows that his conception of metaphysics here is not just a science of being but focused on getting to the truth of the ultimate questions of human destiny and the meaning of human life. This is not so much reducing philosophy to metaphysics but raising metaphysics up to the level of philosophy itself. Third, by saying that metaphysics and religion pose these humanistic questions that science chooses to ignore, he shows there to be an inner compatibility between metaphysics and religion on a level of reality that is beyond science.

However, Gilson also separates metaphysics and religion or at least theology when he concludes his article with the following comparison.

Gilson says:

> It was said in the Middle Ages: "*Philosophia ancilla Theologiae*" Philosophy has freed itself from this bondage. We are told today: "*Philosophia ancilla scientiae*"; This second servitude would not be better than the first. Philosophy is nobody's servant. Let us therefore, without isolating it from science but also without reducing it to science, continue the work begun many centuries ago; as science itself it will come, from the point of view proper to it, to more and more rigorous approximations of the truth.[44]

Gilson's main goal here is to defend the autonomy of philosophy from science and positivism's reduction of philosophy to science. However, he also defends the autonomy of philosophy from theology as well. This, of course, is not Gilson's main concern since theology at the Sorbonne did not even exist, much less pose a threat to philosophy like positivism. However, Gilson is

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[43] Commenting on Gilson's *Unity of Philosophical Experience* Mortimer Adler in a letter to Gilson says, "In short, the error with which you might be charged is metaphycisicm, that is, reducing the whole field of philosophical knowledge to one of its parts, namely, metaphysics; and this I am sure you would say is just as bad an error as any of the others." Mortimer Adler to Ètienne Gilson, 8 July 1938, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. See also *EG*, 231. Cf. *EGCP*, 216.

[44] "On disait au moyen âge: «Philosophia ancilla theologiae.» La philosophie s'est libérée de ce servage. On nous dit aujourd'hui: «Philosophia ancilla scientiae»; ce second servage ne vaudrait pas mieux que le premier. La philosophie n'est la servante de personne. Laissons là, sans l'isoler de la science mais aussi sans l'y résorber, poursuivre l'œuvre commencée depuis plusieurs siècles; comme la science elle-même elle réalisera, du point de vue qui lui est propre, des approximations de plus en plus rigoureuses de la vérité." *SPA*, 65.

rhetorically keen to say that what Rey and Durkheim are doing by making philosophy the servant of science is essentially the same error as the medieval scholastics making philosophy the servant of theology. Gilson knows that this is a comparison they would not have enjoyed but would be hard to defend against. Maurer holds that Gilson "in the spirit of the Enlightenment" sees the need for philosophy to be liberated from theology and that Gilson had not yet discovered the Thomistic notion of theology which he would see as a benefit to philosophy.[45]

Maurer is right about the second point but presenting Gilson as an Enlightenment thinker and the need for separate philosophy from theology may be a bit exaggerated here especially considering Gilson's other writings from this early period. Maurer does not here seem to consider the rhetorical nature of Gilson's poignant comparison that would have had a stirring and even annoying effect on the positivists. Gilson's main concern is not theology but with positivism and he makes this comparison because it will be effective rhetorically to claim that the positivists are making the same mistake as their archenemies, the medievals. It seems that Gilson, at this point, may have been open to philosophy as the servant of theology considering all of his discoveries in his research for his dissertation but he does not mention that here. The next section in this chapter will show why Gilson had already turned to theology.

Gilson shows that he sees philosophy more as a way of life here in two ways: First, by saying that metaphysics and religion pose the ultimate questions about human destiny and the meaning of life he shows that he sees metaphysics as concerned not just with knowledge but with how to live, much like religion. Second, Gilson also shows here that he sees philosophy as an on-going work that was begun centuries ago that must continue (*poursuivre l'œuvre commencée*

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[45] *EGCP*, 208.

depuis plusieurs siècles) on toward the truth. Philosophy is an on-going work alongside science toward the truth but not reduced to science. This means that the work of philosophy is not a single final doctrine, but like science, an on-going work of approximating the truth with more and more rigor.

L'innéisme cartésien et la théologie (1914)

This article by the newly minted Dr. Gilson is important because it summarizes and extends the discoveries of his recently defended thesis *La liberté chez Descartes et la théologie* (1913).[46] In his thesis Gilson compares the thought of Descartes with the Suarezian text books used at *La Flèche* but now he goes deeper behind the text books and compares Descartes to the texts of Thomas Aquinas himself who Gilson dubs as the true "adversary of Descartes."[47] The reason Thomas Aquinas is the adversary of Descartes is that his doctrine of the unity of body and soul, and the empirical *a posteriori* proofs for the existence of God based on Aristotelean physics, stands in the way of the new physics which Descartes wants to promote.

Without getting too much into the details of this somewhat technical work, Gilson's basic thesis is that, as was at that point recently shown in his own dissertation and in the work of Lévy-Bruhl, Descartes is not *sui generis* as some have imagined and that he did not simply discover his theory of metaphysics out of nowhere, especially his doctrine of innatism.[48] As Gilson says, "The recent research conducted around Descartes leaves little to doubt the influence

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[46] Marion argues that in this essay Gilson revises his thesis of a continuity between Thomas and Descartes and presents here a more discontinuous relationship. Marion, 15-23.
[47] *ICT*, 146.
[48] *ICT*, 166.

that certain theological movements have exercised on his mind."[49] Rather, Gilson shows in this article how Descartes is heavily influenced by three prior sources: his education at *Le Fleche*, his reading of Thomas Aquinas and his Platonic spiritual director at the Oratory, Cardinal Bérulle.[50]

Just as Gilson had shown in his dissertation that Descartes' doctrine of divine freedom was based upon the theology of the time, so also Gilson is now attempting to show that Descartes' doctrine of innate ideas also has a theological origin. Gilson says, "We already know that innatism could not constitute for Descartes a discovery or an accidental revelation."[51] Gilson is also showing how Descartes' prior commitment to the new physics leads him to choose innatism and how this ultimately results in Descartes needing to reject Thomas's doctrine of the unity of body and soul.

Gilson begins the article by explaining that Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of the unity of body and soul implies that knowledge of God is based on the sensible knowledge of natural substances and God's effects and not by innate knowledge.[52] Now this popular Thomistic position poses a major problem for Descartes whose overarching goal is to pave the way for the new mathematical physics. For Descartes has to do away with the old Aristotelean physics which operates on the basis of what he sees as the illusion of "occultic qualities"[53] like substantial form and final causes in nature. The main problem Descartes faces is that the proofs for the existence of God are based on Aristotelean physics and so the new physics threatens religious orthodoxy.

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[49] "Les recherches récentes poursuivies autour de Descartes ne permettent guère de mettre en doute l'influence que certains mouvements théologiques ont exercée sur sa pensée." *ICT*, 146.
[50] *ICT*, 146.
[51] "Nous savons déjà que l'innéisme n'a pu constituter pour Descartes une découverte ou une révélation accidentelle." *ICT*, 166.
[52] *ICT* 146-7.
[53] *ICT*, 155.

Descartes is trying to avoid the fate of his friend Galileo and so is taking a more prudent and gentle approach that utilizes a metaphysics and anthropology that will be, at the very least, acceptable to religious authorities especially by not posing a threat to the proofs for the existence of God.[54] For Descartes, along with his friend Mersenne, does not want to be accused of atheism nor does he want to foster atheism with a metaphysically bald mathematical physics.[55]

One of the major points here is that Gilson argues that Descartes' metaphysics follows and serves his physics. For Descartes already formulated the method and spirit of his mathematical physics without occult qualities, or substantial form in matter by 1619-1620.[56] As Gilson says,

> He already knows how to treat the problems of physics by the mathematical method and, although he does not yet seem to have realized the metaphysical consequences that the application of such a method to the problems of physics could entail, he already solved all the problems which were proposed to him without involving any occult quality or substantial form within matter.[57]

Yet, Descartes does realize at a certain point after 1619 the dangerous metaphysical consequences of his method and that he cannot follow Thomas Aquinas on the doctrine of the unity of body and soul. This is why, according to Gilson, Descartes hesitates and does not

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[54] Gilson was more aware of Descartes' subtle and, at times subversive, rhetoric than his publications may convey. According to Shook in 1924 when discussing a collaborative work on Descartes with members of the *Société de Française de Philosophie* he quoted the first line of Descartes in Discourse on Method Part I: "Good sense is the most widely distributed thing in the world because everyone thinks himself to be so well provided with it." Gilson said to the group that Descartes here was "certainly ironic" but some in the group disagreed. For whatever reason, Gilson decided not to bring out this irony in his commentary on Descartes' *Discourse* [Étienne Gilson, *René Descartes: Discours de la méthode: texte et commentaire* (Paris 1925)] as was later done so well by Richard Kennington and his students. See Richard Kennington, *On Modern Origins: Essays in Early Modern Philosophy,* ed. Pamela Kraus, and Frank Hunt, (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2004), 109-110; Michael Davis, *Ancient Tragedy and the Origins of Modern Science,* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 36.

[55] *ICT*, 189-90.

[56] *ICT*, 155.

[57] "Il sait déjà traiter les problèmes de la physique par la méthode des mathématiques et, bien qu'il ne semble pas encore avoir pris conscience des conséquences métaphysiques que l'application d'une telle méthode aux problèmes de la physique pourrait entraîner, il résout déjà toutes les difficultés qu'on lui propose sans faire intervenir aucune qualité occulte ou forme substantielle au sein de le matière." *ICT*, 155.

elaborate his metaphysics until 1629.[58] One of the main points Gilson wants to make here is that Descartes' metaphysics follows, and is subordinate to, his new physics in terms of both time and importance.

Thus Descartes, seeing the political problem prudently turns to the less popular, yet still acceptable, Platonic doctrine of innate ideas taught by his Augustinian spiritual director Cardinal Bérulle as the solution to his problem.[59] As Gilson says,

> To the number of early theologians that Descartes had courted who were won over to this doctrine, we must add Cardinal Bérulle, founder of the Oratory, and his disciple Fr. Gibieuf. We know what close relations Descartes maintained with them for some time; it is difficult to believe that the spiritual director of the young philosopher did not make some efforts to incline the thought of his penitent [spiritual directee] to a doctrine which he held close to his heart.[60]

With extensive quotes Gilson goes through the theological doctrine of Bérulle and the more philosophical doctrine of Gibieuf in a manner that makes them additional interlocuters in the dialogue between Aquinas and Descartes. Both Bérulle and Gibieuf are not Thomists but are committed Christian Augustinian Platonists. Similar to the way Descartes uses innatism for his physics, Bérulle draws upon the Platonic doctrine of innate ideas to help him in his theological/spiritual project of "painting" the image of Jesus on the human heart through infused light.[61] Bérulle, according Gilson, holds that in comparison to Plato and his disciples Christians

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[58] *ICT*, 155.
[59] *ICT*, 173.
[60] "Au nombre des premiers théologiens gagnés à cette doctrine que Descartes ait fréquentés, nous devons completer le cardinal de Bérulle, fondateur de l'Oratoire, et son disciple le P. Gibieuf. On sait quelles relations étroites Descartes entretint avec eux pendant quelque temps; il est malaisé croire que le directeur de conscience du jeune philosophe n'ait pas fait quelques efforts pour incliner la pensée de son pénitent vers une doctrine qui lui tenait à cœur." *ICT*, 173.
[61] *ICT*, 173.

are students in a better school "taught by a higher philosophy" and illumined by a much brighter and supernatural Sun.[62]

Bérulle presents Christianity as a kind of training in the art of painting where the image of Jesus Christ is painted upon human hearts with: "Our soul is the worker, our heart is the canvas, our mind is the brush, and affections are the colors that must be used in this divine art, and in this excellent painting."[63] According to Bérulle it is ultimately Christ who paints himself on the human heart.[64]

For his spiritual program of being transformed by Christ—a program Descartes would have been quite familiar with—Bérulle is using the Platonic doctrine of innate ideas to say that the knowledge of God is burned deep into the human heart.[65] Yet, this knowledge of God is not always apparent because humans, due to the allurements of the world, tend to always be focused outside of themselves. As Bérulle says, "By means of principles born in ourselves, we would recognize this principle of principles if we were not always focused outside of ourselves."[66] Thus Gilson notes that Bérulle concludes that it is necessary to "efface" our soul from the world in order to see the appearance of God.[67] This program of self-effacement, stripping oneself of the corruption of the world and finding God in the soul sounds much like Descartes' program of doubt toward the world that ends up discovering God in the soul.

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[62] *ICT*, 173.
[63] "Notre âme est l'ouvrière, notre cœur est la planche, notre esprit est le pinceau, et nos affections sont les couleurs qui doivent être employées en cet art divin, et en cette peinture excellent." *ICT*, 17.
[64] *ICT*, 173-4.
[65] *ICT*, 174.
[66] "Par principes nés en nous-mêmes, nous reconnaîtrions ce principe des principes si nous n'étions toujours hors de nous-mêmes." *ICT*, 174.
[67] *ICT*, 174.

The doctrine of innate ideas taken from Bérulle's theology allows Descartes to insert an absolute distinction or separation between body and soul such that any knowledge of God must come from within the soul itself and not through the mediation of the bodily senses. With the religious authority of Bérulle, Descartes confidently turns to the *a priori* Anselmian proof for the existence of God and thereby proves the existence of God on the innate idea of perfect being. Innatism does two things for Descartes: First, it gives a metaphysical basis to the new physics that is acceptable to orthodox theology. Second, the separation of soul and body implied by innatism unburdens physics from the need to prove the existence of God and so science can be based on mathematics.

This brings forth two somewhat paradoxical conclusions for Gilson. First, Gilson's research shows a deep continuity between Descartes and medieval theology and philosophy. Consequently, no contemporary scholar of Descartes and the history of philosophy can ignore medieval philosophy any longer. For the discovery of this inner continuity between Descartes and medieval philosophy shatters the myth that Descartes rescued philosophy from a servitude to theology and that there was no philosophy during the medieval period. Therefore, this discovery opens up the field of medieval philosophy to the study of the modern university.

Second, Gilson also shows a radical discontinuity between Descartes and medieval philosophy. Whereas in medieval and ancient Greek philosophy metaphysics holds the primacy, Descartes, for different reasons, decides to subordinate his metaphysics to his new physics. This purposeful subordination explains why Descartes' metaphysics carries with it a kind of artificial,

incomplete, or "obscure" quality as mentioned by Hamelin.[68] In this regard, speaking of the doctrine of innatism, Gilson concludes his article by saying:

> Through it, Mersenne discredited atheism whose foundation he undermined; however, also thanks to this, Descartes could base proofs of the existence of God solely on the content of a thought radically distinct from extension. Considered from this point of view, Cartesian innatism perhaps neither appears to us more as a shapeless rudiment nor as a set of indications to deepen and coordinate; it will be rather exactly what its author had wanted it to be: an adaptation of a Platonic doctrine, restored to honor by certain theologians, to the mechanistic physics of extension and movement.[69]

Thus, according to Gilson's analysis, Descartes' purposes are not purely metaphysical but he wants to find a functional Platonically-inspired metaphysics that has honor among theologians that will support his mechanistic physics. This is why Descartes is willing to countenance an "obscure" or "amorphous" metaphysics.

By employing his 'principle of sympathy' Gilson goes beyond the words and arguments of Descartes in order to capture the 'spirit' of Descartes' project. He does this by carefully laying out the theological influences on Descartes and the historical context of the time when the new physics was bursting forth. Gilson also does, too, this by rather creatively putting Descartes in dialogue with Thomas Aquinas along with Bérulle. Gilson makes it a dialogue and not a diatribe by being as sympathetic as possible with each thinker but also by offering some criticisms of both Thomas and Descartes. Gilson criticizes Thomas for offering little empirical evidence for intentional species in phantasms and this implies a sympathy for Descartes' new

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[68] *ICT*, 189.

[69] "Par elle, Mersenne ruinait l'athéisme dont il sapait le fondement, cependant que, grâce à celle, Descartes pouvait fonder les preuves de l'existence de Dieu sur le seul contenu d'une pensée radicalement distincte de l'entendue. Envisagé de ce point de vue, l'innéisme cartésien ne nous apparaîtrait peut-être plus comme un rudiment informe, ni comme un ensemble d'indications à approfondir et à coordonner; il serait exactement ce que son auteur avait voulu qu'il fût: l'adaptation d'une doctrine platonicienne remise en honneur par certains théologiens, à la physique mécaniste de l'étendue et du mouvement." *ICT*, 190.

physics which does not account for species.[70] Gilson also mildly criticizes Descartes at the end for being content with such a simplistic proof for the existence of God and an obscure metaphysics.[71]

Gilson, furthermore, shows the consequences of subordinating philosophy to physics but also keeps sympathy with the need to develop the new physics. By keeping such a sympathy with all the interlocutors along with some mild criticisms, Gilson makes their dialogue accessible to the modern-day reader and also applicable to the modern-day situation. For in 1913 Gilson's readers in France were also faced with the same problem of Descartes: which is whether to choose to follow the Durkheimian positivists who, like Descartes, subordinate metaphysics to the needs of physics; or to follow Bergson and the medieval philosophers who respect the autonomy of metaphysics, and recognize a plane of truth, and a way of thinking and a way of life—beyond the ken of modern science.

By making this dialogue among philosophers accessible and relevant to the modern-day reader Gilson is doing much more than a piece of historical research. With creative rhetoric Gilson is also subtly inviting his readers to enter into the dialogue and so philosophize and apply philosophy to their own lives. In this way, Gilson's work is an invitation to philosophize and an opportunity to access the philosophical life through the history of philosophy and the principle of sympathy.

It should be briefly noted here that Gilson always speaks of the "theological" and not the "philosophical" origin of Descartes' thought. As he says,

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[70] *ICT*, 158-9; 187.
[71] *ICT*, 190.

> Recent research conducted on Descartes hardly allows placing into doubt the influence that some theological movements had on his mind.[72]

This shows a higher level of comfort with theology and philosophy as the handmaid of theology than it would seem from his rhetorical comment at the end of his first publication in 1909. Also this point does not fit in well with the thesis that Gilson turned to theology out of nowhere in 1950; we see Gilson's "turn to theology" in his early work on Descartes.

In fact Gilson seems to use the terms 'philosophy' and 'theology' in overlapping ways in this and all his early works. When he speaks of the theological origins of Descartes' doctrine of innate ideas he does not mean that Descartes is a theologian or his doctrine is really a theology.[73] Gilson always speaks of the philosopher and theologian together as a complementary pair in this article.[74] Indeed, Gilson sees philosophy operating within the ken of theology. For instance, when Gilson moves from the theological doctrine of Bérulle to the philosophical doctrine of Gibieuf he says the following:

> According to Fr. Gibieuf, more the philosopher than his superior, the doctrine of innate ideas is clearly affirmed, stripped of the mystical allegory and theological transposition under which we first encounter it.[75]

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[72] "Les recherches récentes poursuivies autour de Descartes ne permettent guère de mettre en doute l'influence que certains mouvements théologiques ont exercée sur sa pensée." *ICT*, 146.

[73] *ICT*, 146. This was actually a popular position at the time that Descartes was essentially a theologian with regard to his metaphysics. Gilson held that there was both philosophy and theology in Descartes but his main concern was the new physics. *EG*, 53. However, at the second defense of his thesis in 1914 before the *Société Française de Philosophie* Maurice De Wulf, who was Gilson's invited guest, objected to the idea that there is theology in Descartes, and Lévy-Bruhl agreed. He felt that Gilson called 'theological' anything that had to do with God and not just knowledge based on revelation. Nevertheless, Gilson never changed his position on theology in Descartes. This exchange with De Wulf was Gilson's first official conflict with the neo-scholastics. Notice, too, that Gilson's use of 'theology' here refers to the historical concrete reality of Descartes' philosophizing. *EG*, 64.

[74] *ICT*, 190, 166, 187.

[75] "Chez le P. Gibieuf plus philosophe que son supérieur, la doctrine des idées innées s'affirme nettement, dépouillée de l'allégorie mystique et de la transposition théologique sous laquelle nous venons de la rencontrer." *ICT*, 174.

So based on this observation Gilson holds that both Bérulle the theologian and Gibieuf the philosopher have the same Platonic doctrinal content. Gibieuf strips the mystical allegory and theological adaptations from Bérulle's work and presents the inner philosophical content. Gilson also, at times, speaks "strictly philosophically" and so recognizes a difference between theology and philosophy in this work.[76]

Le Thomisme (1913-1919)

Having opened up the way into medieval philosophy with his work on the theological origins of Descartes, in the fall of 1913 Gilson turns his attention from Descartes to Thomas Aquinas in his own right. Reflecting back on this important transition in his autobiography, Gilson claims that he found, to his surprise, that Christian theology had actually produced the metaphysical conclusions found in Descartes, conclusions such as a singular, infinite, simple, free, omnipotent, all-knowing creator God, and human beings made in this same God's image and likeness with an immortal soul separate from the body.[77] What this means is that Descartes' philosophy is not simply Greek ideas passed through the medium of Christian theology to modern philosophy. In fact, Gilson says, "On every one of these points Descartes came after the Middle Ages almost as if the Greeks had never existed."[78] Because these discoveries conflict with the conventional wisdom of an absolute opposition between philosophy and theology, Gilson feels emboldended to investigate the precise nature of the philosophy of the great

[76] *ICT*, 187.
[77] *PT*, 90.
[78] *PT*, 90.

medieval Christian theologians.[79] These retrospective reflections indicate that Gilson, at this early point, is urgently seeking the true nature of philosophy within the history of philosophy.

So after teaching in the Lycées since 1907 Gilson took a new professorial position at the Université de Lille in 1913-1914; this change in his professional position gave him the freedom to offer a series of public lectures entitled: "*Le système de Thomas d'Aquin*." With the sort of eagerness proper to a missionary, Gilson introduced Aquinas into the secular French universities for the first time in centuries and so, of course, he expected some negative reaction from his colleagues.[80] Instead, to his surprise, Gilson's public lectures on Aquinas were warmly received and well attended. He even received a generous offer by Fernand Strowski to publish his lecture series which eventually after some editing became the first edition of *Le Thomisme* (1919). Gilson, nonetheless, many years later calls this first edition of *Le Thomisme* "miserable"[81] and says in another place that it should only be preserved "as a monument to the ignorance of its author."[82]

However, when one sits down and actually reads these Lille lectures (1913-1914) it is hard to know exactly what Gilson means. For they still carry all the tight rhetorical force, clarity of insight, striking brevity and modern-day relevance so characteristic of the the early Gilsonian writings which attracted so many people to these public lectures.[83] Furthermore, there are important sections of the Lille lectures that have survived unscathed from Gilson's constantly revising pen. Gilson's retrospective self-criticism may be referring to a lack of erudition relative

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[79] *PT*, 90.
[80] *EG*, 56.
[81] Étienne Gilson, "Compagnons De Route." In *Étienne Gilson: Philosophe De La Chrétienté*, 275-295, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1949), 289. [Hereafter cited as *Compagnons*].
[82] *PT*, 91. Elsewhere Gilson calls this first edition of *Le Thomisme* "miserable." *Compagnons*, 289.
[83] *EG*, 62.

to the high level he would later demand of himself and his students. This self-criticism may also refer to his early lack of awareness of the Thomistic notion of faith as a personal participation in the divine nature, and the rich notion of Thomistic *esse* which he discovered later, as evidenced in his later editions. Nevertheless, the Lille lectures (1913-1914) are certainly a monument, not to Gilson's ignorance, but to the marked brilliance of the early Gilson as well as the remarkable consistency of his vision of philosophy as a way of life. After some initial observations on Gilson's revisions of *Le Thomisme* we will take a more focused look at the second Lille lecture which is an early presentation of Gilson's understanding of philosophy as a way of life.

Revisions of Le Thomisme

As was his habit with most of his important writings,[84] Gilson carefully revised and augmented what began as the Lille lectures six times throughout his life: *Le Thomisme* 1st ed. 1919 (174 pp.), *Le Thomisme* 2nd ed. 1922 (239 pp.), *Le Thomisme* 3rd ed. 1927 (322 pp.), *Le Thomisme* 4th ed. 1942 (532 pp.), *Le Thomisme* 5th ed. 1944 (552 pp.), *Le Thomisme* 6th ed. 1965 (478 pp.). These careful revisions and substantial additions spanning the whole of Gilson's academic career—from his twenty-ninth year to his eighty first year—make *Le Thomisme* Gilson's most important work in terms of tracking changes in his thought.[85] These revisions also stand as an interesting portrait not only of a deepening of his understanding of Aquinas, but also of his personal philosophical development.

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[84] *EG*, 111.
[85] Maurer claims that *Le Thomisme* was Gilson's "*chef d'oeuvre*." Armand Maurer, "Translator's Introduction," In *Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, ix-xii, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002), ix. For more on Gilson's revisions of *Le Thomisme* see *ibid*., ix-xiv.

For instance, there is an important change in the 1942 and the 1944 revisions where Gilson integrates his discovery of the existential sense of Thomistic *esse* as the "very core of the Thomistic interpretation of reality" and the key insight into all the philosophy of Thomas which is his concrete orientation.[86] This shift toward *esse* and other changes seem to signal a strong turn from a more formal approach in the first three editions to a more concrete or existential approach in the last three editions.

So, for example, the titles of the first three editions are couched in a more modern tone, speaking of the "system of Thomas Aquinas" but in the fourth-fifth edition[87] this term is dropped and replaced by the "philosophy of Thomas Aquinas" and in the fourth-fifth edition in the body of the text "system" is often replaced by "theology" and "doctrine."[88] Furthermore, Gilson also augments his more formal reflection on the spheres of faith and reason in Aquinas with an expanded introduction zeroing in on the "personality" of Aquinas as a Christian teacher, the transcendent nature of theology and the Thomistic idea of the "revealable" which is the notion of

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[86] Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas* Aquinas, trans. L.K. Shook, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), vii. [Hereafter cited as *CPST*]. For Gilson's new interpretation of *esse* see *CPST*, 29-45; 84-9. This 1956 English translation of *Le Thomisme* by Fr. Shook carries an authority all its own because Gilson was involved in the translation process and because he added his new discovery that Bañes in the 16th century also discovered the existential sense of Thomistic *esse* within this particular English translation. *CPST*, vii.

[87] The fourth (1942) and fifth (1944) editions of *Le Thomisme* were revised by Gilson in Paris during the German occupation during the Second World War. These revisions integrate Gilson's discoveries during the 1930s when he became a convinced Thomist along with his discovery of *esse*. Although Gilson sent the fourth revision to the press in 1942 he never really stopped revising. Since the fourth and fifth revision are so close in time and content they will be treated here as one continuous revision. See *EG*, 244.

[88] Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme: Introduction au Système de Saint Thomas d'Aquin,* 3rd ed., (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1927); [Hereafter cited as *Le Thomisme*, 3rd. ed. (1927)]; Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme: Introduction À La Philosophie De Saint Thomas D'Aquin,* 4th ed., (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1942) [Hereafter cited as *Le Thomisme*, 4th ed.]; *CPST*, 23; 20. For more on Gilson dropping the use of the word 'system' because it switched the focus from the philosopher to the philosophy see *EG*, 97.

a truth that could have been known by natural reason but is actually contained in revelation.[89] So for these and other reasons, Shook observes that in the first edition of *Le Thomisme* Gilson is rather formal and purely philosophical but later becomes less formal and more theological. As Shook says:

> At this stage Gilson approached the works of St. Thomas as a formal objective system, maintaining a sharp focus on philosophy as such. Clearly Gilson was still far from his later, more mature understanding of Thomas as a theologian drawing on a unique philosophical competence.[90]

On the one hand, Shook is indeed correct to point out that Gilson's discovery of Thomistic *esse* in the later fourth (1942) and fifth (1944) editions of *Le Thomisme* indicates a Gilsonian shift to the concrete. On the other hand, Shook's statement tends to exaggerate a later turn to theology in Gilson's thought. For from the very beginning in his Lille lectures in the fall of 1913 Gilson treats Aquinas as "le philosophe théologien."[91] Almost by an instinct derived from his strict Sorbonne training in the methods of history, Gilson presents the philosophy of Aquinas in the theological order beginning with the existence of God and divine ideas then moving to creatures and then to man's final end.[92] However, Gilson does not explicitly explain his theological approach in the Lille lectures (1913-1914). Still, by the first edition of *Le Thomisme* (1919) Gilson forthrightly explains that he consciously has decided to take the philosophy of Aquinas not from his properly philosophical works, like his minor philosophical works or "opuscula" and the *Commentaries* on Aristotle, but only from his theological works

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[89] Étienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Edward Bullough, ed. G. A. Elrington, (New York: Dorset Press, 1948), 37-55 [Hereafter cited as *PST*]; Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine,* trans. L.E.M. Lynch, (New York: Random House, 1960), 3-25.
[90] *EG*, 61.
[91] Étienne Gilson, "Le système de Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue des cours et conférences* (1913): 352. [Hereafter cited as *LST*].
[92] Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme: Introduction Au Système De S. Thomas D'Aquin*. (Strasbourg: A. Vix, 1919), 157. [Hereafter cited as *Le Thomisme* 1st. ed. (1919)].

with special focus on his two *Summae.* For in the theological works Thomas presents his own unique philosophy separate from, and improving on, Aristotle by integrating the Christian idea of creation.[93]

Then in *Le Thomisme* 2nd. ed. (1922) Gilson bolsters his case for keeping the theological order when he presents his position of being adamantly against the common neo-scholastic approach of cutting up the theological works of Thomas into philosophical fragments, extracting them from their theological purposes, and rearranging them into a new synthetic "ideal" philosophy of Thomas in a philosophical order.[94] In this edition, Gilson objects to this on purely historical grounds, saying that no one can guarantee that this ideal philosophical order is according to the mind of Thomas. For Thomas himself never laid out his original philosophy in the philosophical order.[95]

In *Le Thomisme* 3rd. ed. (1927) Gilson again bolsters his case for the theological order by adding another more personal reason to the reasons already given. Gilson speculates that Thomas may have had good reason not to present his philosophy in the philosophical order of beginning with creatures and moving toward God. By presenting his philosophy within theology Thomas may have intended to model the natural movement of a Christian philosopher's speculation that begins from revelation and God and then moves to creatures.[96] Gilson opines that Thomas may have recognized that a purely philosophical approach would leave out the concrete proof of the tangible help that reason gains from its dialogue with faith and also risks missing the great joy of

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[93] *Le Thomisme* 1st. ed. (1919), 23-4.
[94] Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme: Introduction Au Système De Sant Thomas D'Aquin*, 2nd ed., (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1922), 34. [Hereafter cited as *Le Thomisme*, 2d. ed. (1922)].
[95] *Le Thomisme*, 2d. ed. (1922), 34.
[96] *PST*, 50.

discoursing in the same order with the angels which is the theological order that moves from God to creatures.[97]

Indeed, we can see here in the first three editions of *Le Thomisme* a marked increase in the momentum of Gilson's theological approach to Aquinas, one that continues through the next three revisions, but nothing that would qualify as a marked "turn to theology." Indeed, we can see Gilson's theological approach to Thomas and philosophy itself is there from the very beginning in Lille lectures (1913-1914), although Gilson becomes more vocal and adamant about this theological approach for all Christians doing philosophy beginning in 1950. Thus, as it seems clear from a close reading of the early editions of *Le Thomisme,* there is more continuity in Gilson's theological approach to Thomas than Shook's presentation of discontinuity.[98]

However, the deepest layer of Gilson's philosophical approach is not properly attained by zeroing in on his treatment of Thomas as a theologian. Rather, as Murphy points out, in all the editions of *Le Thomisme* Gilson is primarily focused on Aquinas as a person or individual.[99] According to Murphy, this approach to Thomas as an individual is a reflection of what Schmitz calls Gilson's "metaphysical realism" where Gilson is less focused on abstractions like 'philosophy' and 'theology' and more focused on describing concrete realities like philosophers, theologians and the existential search for wisdom.[100]

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[97] *PST*, 50.
[98] Referring to the famous 'Christian philosophy debate' in the early 1930s Shook says, "Unlike Bréhier, Gilson was finding that philosophical systems meant less and less to him. Philosophers on the other hand, such as Aristotle, Thomas and Bergson, were coming to mean more and more. It was the act of philosophizing, Gilson was beginning to feel, that constituted true philosophy." *EG*, 199. Whereas Shook locates a kind of turn to his more concrete approach in the early thirties it is our present thesis that Gilson viewed philosophy in a more existential, non-systematic way from 1913 onward.
[99] *AIP*, 61-2. Murphy says that with regard to certain abstractions like 'philosophy' and 'theology' Gilson is a kind of Bergsonian nominalist.
[100] Schmitz, 14.

While this position regarding the essence of Gilson' approach by Murphy and Schmitz is indeed true, we would like to presently to add to their thesis; namely, that Gilson, in his historical synthesis of Aquinas in *Le Thomisme,* is not just interested in him as a concrete individual per se but more specifically in him as an individual *who is seeking wisdom*. Schmitz and Murphy indeed get to the heart of *what* Gilson is doing but do not also qualify exactly *why* he is doing it. For as we have seen from the biographical details of his time at the Sorbonne, Gilson's over-arching approach is not just history as such in the manner of a Montaigne but the attempt to live the philosophical life through the medium of history.[101] As we have seen, Gilson is trying to exercise the philosophical act through a sympathetic contact with concrete individuals in the history of philosophy. In other words, Gilson is focused on Aquinas as individual living the philosophical life so that Gilson himself can live this philosophical life. We especially see Gilson's interpretation of Aquinas as an individual pursuing wisdom in the second Lille lecture: *Foi et raison: l'objet de la philosophie*.[102]

The Second Lille Lecture: Foi et raison: l'objet de la philosophie (1913)

This second lecture is very important and interesting because the substance of its fourteen paragraphs quite remarkably survived all six of Gilson's heavy handed revisions of *Le Thomisme* over a period of fifty or so years. This second lecture is particularly interesting to us because it gives the outline of how Gilson sees the philosophical life as a search for wisdom and more specifically how he sees the Christian philosophical life as a search to see God face to face. In this way, philosophy is not a doctrine, or even the search for the doctrinal truth in general, but a

[101] *HPP,* 59.
[102] *LST*, 352.

trans-cognitive and existential search to "touch" or "see" the truth understood as a concrete object or divine person. For these important reasons we will make an analysis of this second lecture while making mention of its significant revisions to help underscore how Gilson understands the philosophical life.

Gilson begins his second lecture in the first paragraph by observing that when dealing with a philosophical system ("modern philosophical system" in *Le Thomisme* 1st ed. [1919])[103] the first question would be: what is the concept of human knowledge held by the philosopher?[104] However, he also observes that one cannot quite approach Thomas and other philosopher-theologians in this way but rather must in their case ask what are the relations between faith and reason? For as Gilson says,

> Whereas the philosopher, as such, claims to draw truth only from the springs of his reason alone, the philosopher-theologian receives the truth from two different springs: his reason, and, since he is a theologian, from faith in the revealed truth of God of which the Church is the interpreter.[105]

It must be noted that as a master rhetorician and linguist Gilson would habitually put great effort into his choice of words and also insert veiled meaning into his opening statements alluding to something that will come later.[106] So there is much to unpack in this statement.

First, Gilson's point of departure is to move the reader's focus from a system of abstract philosophy or epistemology to the concrete philosopher himself. Gilson wants to engage

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[103] *Le Thomisme* 1st. ed. (1919), 15.
[104] *LST*, 352.
[105] "Alors que le philosophe, en tant que tel, prétend ne puiser la vérité qu'aux sources de sa raison seule, le philosophe-théologien reçoit la vérité de deux sources différentes: sa raison, et puisqu'il est théologien, la foi en la vérité révélée de Dieu dont l'Eglise est l'interprète." *LST*, 352.
[106] *EG*, 8-9.

sympathetically with how the philosopher himself understands his own approach to wisdom and truth, whether this be through reason alone or through faith and reason.

Second, Gilson is also trying to build a bridge from the modern approach to the medieval approach by arguing that if scholars are willing to begin by being sympathetic with a modern philosopher's views on knowledge, then there is no reason to not also be sympathetic with a medieval philosopher-theologian's view of philosophy. In this way, Gilson is trying to build a bridge to get over the commonplace modern prejudice against taking medieval thought seriously, since modernity sees medieval thought as essentially superstitious. So Gilson, suspending all personal philosophical positions or assumptions, here is focused precisely on how the philosopher himself concretely approaches truth whether this be ancient, medieval or modern. In other words, Gilson is interested in directly connecting with how Thomas Aquinas himself concretely does philosophy.

Third, the first obvious difference between the modern philosopher and Thomas is that the first gets truth from one source, that is, reason alone; whereas Thomas gets truth from two sources, both faith and reason. However, with an interesting contrast in phraseology, Gilson seems to indicate that there is a second deeper difference between the modern philosopher and Thomas than just the different number of truth sources for their coming to know the truth. For the modern philosopher, as he says, "claims to draw" truth where as the medieval philosopher-theologian simply "receives" truth. Gilson seems here to be evoking an image of the modern rationalist drawing water with a pre-measured container from a spring of water consciously limiting himself to only this one spring. On the other hand, the ancient philosopher simply, and

perhaps more naively, just receives water with no technical mediation and from any spring that offers the truth for which he is thirsting.[107]

In other words, the modern philosopher simply by his *a priori* claim to draw from reason alone takes a more active, even more technological, approach to truth. So, for example, the modern deliberately claims to limit him or herself to reason alone. Thus the modern, by an *a priori* act of the will, contrary to his natural inclinations, consciously closes himself off to all other possible sources of truth. Furthermore, by the use of the word "*prétend*" Gilson not only points to a more active approach to truth, but also seems to implicitly call into question the existential possibility of a "pure reason" separate from all belief and faith. In other words, it may be that the moderns—some knowingly, some unknowingly—only claim or 'pretend' to be drawing on reason alone in a fashion that is totally free from any acts of belief. For the claim to pure scientific reason alone as the basis of philosophy may in fact involve an act of faith.

On the other hand, a medieval philosopher-theologian like Thomas has a much more naturally passive or receptive approach to truth and so freely "receives" truth from wherever it may come, whether it be faith or reason. This approach sees no preliminary problem or interference between the knower and the known which would seem naive to the modern. Gilson, with these subtle differences in language, is here then focused on two different ways of approaching truth and doing philosophy: one more active approach concerned with certainty and the other more passive or receptive approach concerned with attaining its final object no matter what the means or level of obscurity involved in the apprehension. As we will see, Gilson will

[107] This image of water and thirst is important because in the final paragraph of this lecture Gilson again evokes the image of a man thirsting for the truth of the Divine Essence. Thus man is willing to sacrifice his modern concerns for certitude and formality for even a small taste of the Divine Essence. *LST*, 359.

return to this theme of contrasting the modern and medieval approaches to truth in the final paragraph so as to form a literary inclusion within this lecture.

In *Le Thomisme* 1st ed. (1919) Gilson expands on what exactly he has in mind in this first paragraph of the original Lille lecture (1913) by adding four paragraphs to it. Employing another rhetorical technique that he often uses throughout his corpus, Gilson underscores his own approach to Thomas by contrasting it with two opposing extremes.[108] On the one hand, there are those (university rationalists) who would simply dismiss Aquinas as not a philosopher at all before even glancing at his work because of an *a priori* position that the integrity of philosophy would be corrupted by any contact with theology. On the other hand, there are those (neo-scholastics) who see Aquinas' philosophy as indeed having integrity precisely because it exists independently of his theology. Although they come to different conclusions, Gilson points out that both of the approaches begin the study of Aquinas with a predetermined philosophical dogmatism which sees philosophy and theology as pure abstractions that exist in separate watertight compartments. Gilson here implicitly critiques both the rationalists and neo-scholastics for a philosophical prejudice that is overly focused on abstract conceptual categories, or mere labels, and less focused on the concrete realities the concepts are supposed to describe. So Gilson then adopts a third approach of suspending all value judgments and dogmatisms in order to more clearly see what exactly are the relations of philosophy and theology in the system

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[108] *Le Thomisme* 1st. ed. (1919), 15-6. Gilson also uses the contrast with the neo-scholastic and the pure rationalist in *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy,* trans. A.H.C. Downes, (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1991), 3-6. [Hereafter cited as *SMP*]. Gilson also makes a similar rhetorical contrast between the Calvinists, on the one hand, who underestimate reason and the neo-scholastics, on the other hand, who overestimate the powers of pure reason without grace and so tend toward a semi-pelagianism. Étienne Gilson, *Christianity and Philosophy,* trans. by Ralph MacDonald, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), 82-102. [Hereafter cited as *CP*]. Murphy points out that Gilson took this rhetorical technique of contrasting opposites from his teacher Bergson. *AIP*, 58.

of Aquinas.[109] Gilson wants the readers to suspend for a time their preconceptions about philosophy and theology and to take on the perspective of Thomas Aquinas in a sympathetic light.

Returning back to the original 1913 Lille lectures, in paragraphs 3-14, Gilson offers a reflection that generally follows the opening eight chapters of Aquinas' *Summa Contra Gentiles* Book One,[110] a work whose content would have been totally new to his audience at Lille in 1913. Gilson here is indeed shadowing and interpreting Thomas but also at the same time also speaking directly in his own voice and sometimes quite forthrightly. In other words, the lectures delivered in such a fashion that the listener can hear the voice of Gilson along with Thomas. In a quite remarkable way, these eleven paragraphs (paragraph 11 gets reworded in 2nd edition (1922) but the theme stays the same) remain in their essence basically the same in all of Gilson's six editions of *Le Thomisme.* This makes this 11 paragraph literary piece a kind of "trunk" around which Gilson adds and then takes away all of his other reflections on faith and reason.[111]

Gilson begins to attempt to elucidate Thomas' original answer to the problem of faith and reason by taking a step back and focusing less on the means or the subjective principles of demonstration in his philosophy or theology and more on the objective goal or object of Thomas'

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[109] *Le Thomisme* 1st ed. (1919), 16.
[110] [Hereafter cited as *SCG*].
[111] *Le Thomisme* 1st ed. (1919) adds twelve additional paragraphs to this eleven paragraph "trunk" (paragraphs 3-14 in LST). *Le Thomisme*, 2nd ed. (1922) adds another eight paragraphs to this "trunk," while pruning nine other paragraphs from *Le Thomisme* 1st ed. (1919) and and retains three of the twelve added in 1919. *Le Thomisme*, 2nd ed. (1922) also removes paragraph eleven from the original *LST* lectures and it never reappears again. In similar fashion the rest of the editions of *Le Thomisme* continue to rotate different reflections around this core of ten paragraphs: 3-10, 12-14 from the Lille lectures in 1913. *LST*, 352-9. This makes these ten paragraphs extremely important in understanding the Gilson's own thought on the nature of philosophy and philosophy as a way of life guided by the light of faith.

system itself.[112] This step is connected to why the use of the word "system" is very helpful to Gilson early on because it helps him present Thomas in a fresh light as a concrete seeker of wisdom. For the more general term "system" avoids getting caught up in all the entanglements of concerns over which parts of Aquinas' system of thought are properly called philosophy (if any at all) or theology. Gilson thinks that these stumbling-blocks regarding nominal categories keep the modern reader from truly encountering Aquinas himself. Gilson does not use the term 'system' here in the sense of a comprehensive doctrine but simply in the sense of personal and particular approach to wisdom. Paradoxically, the more non-committal modern label 'system,' is quite convenient for Gilson to disarm the modern reader and so facilitate a more concrete and non-prejudicial approach to Thomas as a seeker of wisdom in the mode of an ancient philosopher. In other words, Gilson quite deftly uses the word 'system' in order to neutralize modern scrupulosity about mixing theology and philosophy and thereby enables moderns to encounter Aquinas' particular approach to wisdom.

To find the goal of philosophy, however, Gilson, following Thomas, takes a second step back and begins by looking at the concrete philosopher himself.[113] As Gilson points out, following *SCG* 1.1, people call an artist "wise" because he can arrange things according to their end precisely because he knows their end. The philosopher is therefore an absolute sage because he strives to know, not a particular end like a doctor strives to know health, but to know the

[112] Our treatment of Gilson in this dissertation is focused on him as a philosopher in his own right and therefore less concerned with the historical accuracy of his interpretations of Thomas Aquinas which will only be commented on insofar as they have bearing on Gilson's own philosophy.
[113] *LST*, 353.

universal end of all existing things. Reflection on the expertise of the philosopher means that first philosophy is the study of the highest or first causes.[114]

Again following Thomas, Gilson argues that since the first mover of the universe is an intellect, it follows then that the end of the universe is the good of an intellect which is universal truth. This indicates that the proper object of philosophy is the truth.[115] It is the philosopher's job to attain, not just truth in general, but the source of all truth and since things are the same in being as in truth this first source of truth is only found in a Being who is the first cause of all being. In other words, the truth that is the object of first philosophy will be this truth which the Word-made-flesh manifested to the world according to Jn 18:37. Then diverting from the text of Thomas, Gilson says: "In a word, the true object of metaphysics is God."[116]

Now, according to the flow of the argument, it seems that Gilson is possibly inclined to conclude that the object of philosophy is not the idea of truth in general but the truth as a personal being who is also the Creator of all truth and being; or, more specifically, that the true object of philosophy is Jesus Christ the truth made flesh. However, Gilson quickly veers back to Aristotelean terminology after Thomas' scriptural flourish. Gilson holds that Thomas in the *Summae* is speaking more in his own name, yet still not totally contradicting Aristotle, when he makes philosophy less about being in general and more about God as the highest cause of being.[117] Gilson holds fast to this controverted position that the object of metaphysics in Aquinas is God and not being as being as some argue. What is operating behind this position is Gilson's decision to focus less on precision in labels like philosophy, theology and metaphysics

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[114] *LST*, 353.
[115] *LST*, 353.
[116] "D'un mot, l'objet véritable de la métaphysique, c'est Dieu." *LST*, 354.
[117] *LST*, 354.

and more simply on the concrete rational human pursuit of wisdom. This is also the reason Gilson sees a strong overlap in philosophy and theology, and at times, uses them synonymously especially early on, and why he also, at times, tends to conflate philosophy and metaphysics in his writings as we have seen and see again here.

Having begun with the philosopher and concluded that the goal of philosophy is God himself, Gilson then asks, again shadowing Thomas, what are the means at our disposal to attain this object, that is, God?[118] The first answer is obviously natural reason which can prove the existence and unity of God, but then the question remains whether reason can totally comprehend the Divine Substance. With regard to this important question Gilson says, in *Le Thomisme* 1st edition (1919), this is where: "The Christian sage will add to Greek sage."[119] That is, it is the job of the Christian sage in this regard, like Aquinas, to demonstrate to a Greek sage, like Aristotle, that there is indeed a disproportion between the human intellect and the Divine Substance.

Here Gilson departs slightly from the flow of *Summa Contra Gentiles* and mentions one of his favorite themes in Aquinas: the unity of body and soul.[120] This doctrine, according to Gilson, implies that all human knowledge comes through the senses and so cannot attain to the fullness of the Divine Substance which is a non-material spiritual substance known only through its material effects. Thus there are truths about God beyond reason and truths about God accessible to reason and both of these types of truths are fittingly proposed by faith in

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[118] *LST*, 354.
[119] "le sage chrétien va s'ajouter au sage grec." *Le Thomisme* 1st ed. (1919), 18.
[120] *LST*, 355.

revelation.[121] The truths proposed by faith that are accessible to reason, like the existence or unity of God, are proposed fittingly because of natural human ignorance and the human tendency toward error. Whereas the truths regarding God beyond human reason, like God being triune, are also fittingly proposed by revelation because our end is God himself who exceeds our reason. Here Gilson switches to *Summa Theologiae* 1.1.1 and summarizes it's content in his own words saying:

> "In a word, since man needed knowledge concerning the infinite God that is his end, whose knowledge, exceeding the limits of his reason, could only be offered by the acceptance of his faith."[122]

In other words, the weakness of the human situation makes it impossible for human beings to attain their end, that is, to have knowledge "touching" God, except by way of divine revelation and faith.

After coming back to *SCG* 1.5 and showing how faith actually is a help to reason by instilling in it the idea of God's incomprehensibility, Gilson finally returns to his original question at the beginning of the lecture. He asks whether there is not only an external accord but also an internal accord, from the point of view of truth, between faith and reason?[123] Gilson again summarizes Thomas by saying: "We believe as well as the apparent incompatibility between reason and faith are reconciled in the infinite Wisdom of God."[124]

Then, having established the mutual benefits of faith and reason and their internal accord, Gilson claims that this accord of faith and reason mandates two things for philosophy. First, it

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[121] *LST*, 355.
[122] "D'un mot, puisque l'homme avait besoin de connaissances touchant le Dieu infini qui est sa fin, ces connaissances, exédant les limites de sa raison, ne pouvaient être proposées qu'à l'acceptation de sa foi." *LST*, 356.
[123] *LST*, 356.
[124] "Croyons de même que les incompatilités apparentes entre la raison et la foi se concilient dans la Sagesse infinie de Dieu." *LST*, 357.

must both rationally prove doctrines in revelation that are accessible to reason and, second, oppose false doctrines that are contrary to the truths of revelation by showing them to be sophisms.[125] Gilson calls this twofold task the "double office" of philosophy. As he says,"Such is the dual office to be fulfilled by philosophical speculation."[126] In this way, Gilson seems to be implying that this double office that philosophy must fulfill not only has God as its object but also serves the truth revealed by God by fighting against error.

Having established the ultimate object of philosophy as God, the internal accord of faith and reason and the two-fold office of philosophy, Gilson, in the penultimate paragraph thirteen, begins a reflection on the qualities of the study of wisdom. Gilson says, "Seen under this aspect, the study of wisdom is the most perfect, the most sublime, the most useful and the most consoling."[127] Gilson here, following Aquinas, reflects on how philosophy, when it makes God its explicit object, and is elevated by faith, is also made more perfect, sublime, useful, and consoling than in its purely natural state prior to an encounter with revelation.

Then Gilson, again following Thomas, explains the reasons why philosophy enjoys these qualities:

> The most perfect, because, to the extent that he consecrates himself to the study of wisdom, the man participates here below in true beatitude. The most sublime, because the wise man approaches somewhat to the divine likeness, God having established all things in wisdom. The most useful, because it leads us to the eternal kingdom. The most consoling, because, in the words of scripture (Sap, viii., 16) his conversation has neither bitterness nor familiarity with sadness; we find only pleasure and joy.[128]

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[125] *LST*, 358.
[126] "Tel est le double office que doit remplir la spéculation philosophique." *LST*, 358.
[127] "Envisagée sous cet aspect, l'etude de la sagesse est la plus parfaite, la plus sublime, la plus utile et la plus consolante." *LST*, 358.
[128] "La plus parfaite, parce que, dans la mesure où il se consacre à l'etude de la sagesse, l'homme participe dès ici-bas à la véritable béatitude. La plus sublime, parce que l'homme sage approche quelque peu de la ressemblance divine, Dieu ayant fondé toutes choses en sagesse. La plus utile, parce qu'elle nous conduit au royaume éternel. La

Two points should be noted about this progression. First, if we closely follow Gilson's wording, philosophy in the abstract does simply enjoy these qualities in its own right but only *because* the concrete philosopher himself participates in true beatitude, comes to resemble the divine, is conducted to the eternal kingdom and has fellowship with wisdom filled with peace and joy. What this may imply is that, for Gilson, philosophy does not have an existence of its own beyond the concrete philosopher. This approach is typical of Gilson's metaphysical realism or his nominalism regarding categories like philosophy and theology under the influence of Bergson.

Second, Gilson here also presents a portrait of the philosopher living the philosophic life and its subjective effects on his person. For as Gilson observes to the degree that a philosopher "consecrates himself to the study of wisdom" he will participate even in this life in true beatitude and come to resemble the divine and experience joy.[129] This notion of a consecration to the study of wisdom envisages philosophy as a way of life much more than a mere doctrinal knowledge of God.

For the end of philosophy is not just the doctrinal knowledge of God but also the participation in beatitude, divinity, the kingdom and joy by the person who diligently strives after knowledge of God. In other words, the objective end of philosophy is the knowledge of God, but the subjective ends of philosophy the beatified, divinized and joyful life. For participating in beatitude here below and resembling the divine implies a deep transforming effect which striving after the truth of God has on the philosopher himself. The beatitude, divinization and joy of the philosopher also implies a sort of personal fellowship with God that goes beyond mere

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plus consolante, parce que, selon la parole de l'Ecriture (Sap., viii, 16) sa conversation n'a point d'amertume ni sa fréquentation de tristesse; on n'y trouve que plaisir et joie." *LST*, 358.

[129] *LST*, 358.

knowledge of propositions about God. It implies a movement beyond the words and arguments of philosophical discourse to an encounter with the reality they signify. In a certain way, then the philosophical life imitates even now the life of heaven in union with God. In these several ways, philosophy for Gilson, and Aquinas, is not so much focused on doctrine about God but on a life in union with God.

So here we see Gilson again confirm that the knowledge of God is the objective end of metaphysics as he claimed at the beginning and a life directed toward and by the knowledge of God is the subjective end of metaphysics. What is interesting is that Gilson does not mention theology here nor does he ever use the word "theology" in the whole of the Lille lectures except when he calls Thomas a 'philosopher-theologian' twice at the beginning.[130] This is significant for two reasons. First, it shows that from early on Gilson is focused primarily on how Thomas as a concrete individual seeks wisdom and lives the philosophical life and so he is not concerned with whether it is technically philosophy or theology. As mentioned above, this is why Gilson uses the more neutral term 'system.'

Second, Gilson at this early period tends to see philosophy and theology as overlapping and both leading to God. Gilson's neglect of the word 'theology' may seem like he is playing the role of a more formalistic philosopher, but it is actually the opposite; for he already sees philosophy as operating under the influence of faith and even attaining real beatitude in this life. This means that Gilson's theological perspective with regard to philosophy and the ends of philosophy is there from the beginning of his work in 1913. For Gilson treats philosophy here as having the same end as theology: the vision of God face to face.

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[130] *LST*, 352.

Only in later versions does Gilson focus on articulating the distinction between philosophy and theology and this focus can be seen in the many alterations he makes to this paragraph thirteen in *LST* in the later editions of *Le Thomisme*. In the later editions of *Le Thomisme* Gilson removes the mention of the "double office of philosophical speculation" and instead states more simply that, for Aquinas, philosophy is a divine science because it is focused on grasping rationally what can be known about God. Also Gilson observes that because of philosophy's focus on the revealable in revelation it takes on the attributes of theological wisdom which are beatitude in this life, resemblance to God, eternal life, and joy.[131] This later position only adds some more nuance to Gilson's original position which is that the metaphysics, philosophy, theology, the study of wisdom, or "system" of Aquinas are all simply different perspectives on a concrete way of life, using reason as an instrument, that leads to a personal union with God.

Gilson then ends the second Lille lecture in paragraph fourteen more directly in his own voice with one of his most eloquent reflections on the nobility of philosophy and metaphysics. Gilson contrasts two different kinds of philosophical minds: one preferring the certitude of science over the obscurity of metaphysics; the other preferring the nobility of the object of metaphysics over the less noble objects of science. Gilson observes:

> It seems some minds, that feel only or primarily logical certitude, will readily challenge the excellence of metaphysical inquiry. In the investigations that do not declare themselves totally helpless, even in the presence of the incomprehensible, they will prefer certain deductions of physics or of mathematics.[132]

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[131] Étienne Gilson, *Thomism: The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas,* trans. Laurence K Shook, and Armand Mauer, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2002), 26. [Hereafter cited as *TPT*].

[132] "Sans doute certains esprits, que touche uniquement ou surtout la certitude logique, contesteront volontiers l'excellence de la recherche métaphysique. A des investigations qui ne se déclarent pas totalement impuissantes,

Gilson has just exalted the excellence of metaphysics by having it end in an anticipated vision of God. Now, Gilson anticipates the protests that will inevitably come from those in France at the time—many of whom would have been in his audience at Lille—who would claim that Gilson is overstating his case about metaphysics which has as its objects illusions or mysteries simply impenetrable by reason. Thus, due to the weakness of reason in the face of this metaphysical illusion these positivists have chosen the certainty of mathematics and physics over the obscurity of metaphysics. Although the positivists would consider themselves rationalists and defenders of reason, Gilson is pointing out that they actually mistrust reason by rejecting all investigations that do not declare themselves totally incompetent before an incomprehensible object like God. The positivists would see their turning to the certitude of modern science not as a choice but as a rational necessity.

However, Gilson is trying to show that what is presented as a rational necessity is actually more of a personal choice based on personal proclivities. For according to Gilson the weakness of reason and its lack of certitude does not simply disqualify it from the science of metaphysics. For even though there is indeed less certitude in metaphysics it is still worth pursuing simply in virtue of the immense nobility its object, that is, God. For Gilson argues that the nobility of a science is not just found in its certitude but also in the nobility of its object. Gilson shows here that the positivists have made a judgment that certitude is more important than the object of a science such that they end up giving up on rational investigations of more obscure religious and metaphysical questions like the meaning of life or the nature of God. Their

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même en présence de l'incomprehensible, ils préfèreront les déductions certains de la physique ou des mathematiques." *LST*, 358.

personal choice of the process or method of a science over its goal or object indicates a certain inclination of mind that is only or chiefly moved by logical certitude and not by an inner drive to attain the exalted ends of metaphysics. In other words, the positivists simply give up prematurely not due to any rational demonstration that metaphysics or ethics is impossible but due to a personal discomfort with the obscurity inherent in these sciences.

Gilson contrasts the mind inclined to logical certitude with a mind that is "tormented by a thirst for the divine."[133] This divine thirst will never let him be satisfied with the certitude of numbers offered by a purely calculative reason.[134] In a rather Neo-platonic tone Gilson says,

> To the minds that are tormented by thirst for the divine, it is in vain that we offer the most certain knowledge regarding the laws of numbers or disposition of this universe. Stretching toward an object that eludes their grasp, they strive to lift the corner of the veil, all too happy to see sometimes, from the depths of thick darkness, a slight reflection of eternal light which must one day shine upon them.

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[133] When speaking of minds inclined to logical certitude or formalistic minds in this lecture it is most likely that Gilson is primarily thinking of his positivist professors at the Sorbonne like Durkheim and when he speaks of minds that thirst for the divine he is thinking of Bergson. However, he also has in mind the neo-scholastics who also see form as the highest reality and are oriented toward logical certitude in a way quite similar to the positivists. In a letter to Gerald Phelan after Van Steenberghen visited him at his house in Vermenton in 1950 Gilson says, "He is a saintly priest, a hard worker and a very great scholar. The only trouble is that he has also got a somewhat literal mind. He is out for scientific demonstrations and clarifications in a field where they don't work. But the main trouble is that the Lovenienses have turned the formal distinction between philosophy (*in divinis*) and theology into a practical separation with the result that, ultimately, Siger is their man in philosophy. Good old Siger is right!" Ètienne Gilson to Gerald Phelan, 22 May 1950, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. Cf. *EG*, 297.

In a parallel contrast between humanists and scholastics in a letter to De Lubac Gilson says: "Je crois que les esprits font comme les chats: ils se flairent une seconde le museau et savent aussitôt si Dieu a mis en eux une amitié ou une inimitié. … Vous êtes un théologien de haute lignée, mais vous êtes aussi un humaniste selon la grand tradition des théologiens humanistes. Ceux-ci n'aiment guère les scolastiques et les scolastiques les détestent généralement. Pourquoi? C'est en partie, je pense, parce qu'ils ne comprennent que les propositions simples, univoques ou qui semblent l'être. Vous vous intéressez plutôt à la vérité que la proposition se propose de formuler et qui lui échappe toujours pour une part. Alors eux ne comprennent plus bien, ils s'inquiètent, et comme ils ne peuvent être certains que ce qui leur échappe n'est pas faux, ils condamnent par principle parce que c'est plus SÛR." *Lettres*, 53-4. De Lubac elaborates on what Gilson meant by humanism relating that Gilson told him that it consisted in "un certain sense de l'analogie et du mystère, une certain indépendence par rapport aux schèmes d'école et aux arguments d'autorité abusifs, … qui, pensait-il, me rapprochaient de l'esprit de saint Thomas." *Lettres*, 57.

[134] *LST*, 359.

> To them, the slightest knowledge concerning the highest realities seems more desirable than the most complete certitudes concerning lesser objects.[135]

Whereas the former minds could not tolerate the risk of obscurity, the latter minds remain dissatisfied with mundane objects. In other words, these minds, tormented by a Platonic eros for the divine and the meaning of their life, are willing to tolerate uncertainty, darkness, and difficulty if they can even attain a fleeting glimpse or a slight anticipation of their divine object. For they still drive themselves toward an object that "hides itself" from the power of their grasp and still attempt to lift the corner of the veil. The divine thirst makes these minds happy to perceive at times even under the thick darkness some indirect reflection of eternal light. For this light must (*doit*) illuminate them one day.

This final phrase *qui doit les illuminer un jour* is very important because it shows the inner dynamic of the thirst for the divine.[136] For the divine thirst derives from a kind of Augustinian pre-apprehension of the divine light that offers at least the perception of a promise that one day this desire will be fulfilled.[137] This intuition of a promise instills a kind of certain hope that one day there will be a full illumination granted. This hope makes the thirsty mind

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[135] "Aux esprits que tourmente la soif du divin, c'est vainement qu'on offrira les connaissances les plus certaines touchant les lois des nombres ou la disposition de cet univers. Tendus vers un objet qui se dérobe à leurs prises, ils s'efforcent de soulever un coin du voile, trop heureux d'apercevoir parfois, au sein d'épaisses ténèbres, quelque reflet de la lumière éternelle qui doit les illuminer un jour. A ceux-là, les moindres connaissances touchant les réalites les plus hautes semblent plus désirables que les certitudes les plus complètes touchant de moindres objets." *LST*, 359.

[136] *LST*, 359.

[137] In a much later unpublished lecture given in Toronto in 1967 Gilson again argues that although with different language Plato, Plotinus, Augustine and Thomas agree on the object of metaphysics as dimly known and obscure by images. Gilson says, "The reason the intellect persists in its quest for such an elusive object is, Plato says, the love for a beauty that is guessed before being clearly seen. The Christian Augustine knows that the beauty in question is but another name for God: 'I was born up to Thee by Thy beauty and soon born down by my own weight.' … In a more sober style, but in the same sense, Thomas says the same thing. Truth is the good of the intellect, so the will is moved by the truth knowing intellect as by its final cause; conversely because the good is the proper object of the will, the will moves the intellect to operate as it should in order to know the truth." "On Metaphysical Knowledge (II)", p. 48, 1967, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.

patiently trust that the divine object is only "hiding itself" (*se dérobe à leurs prises*)[138] for a time and will one day come out from beneath the veil and fulfill the implied promise of full light. This trust, derived from divine thirst, also leads to the confidence that in the meantime a glimpse from beneath the veil may be mercifully granted. This trust in a dark illumination, then, is the point of departure for the philosophical life. Whereas a kind of quitting, mistrust or doubt is the point of departure for the minds persuaded by logical certitude. Either way both approaches begin with a kind of a choice of faith or the lack thereof.

We also see here that Gilson is speaking of an encounter with a real object and not of knowledge of a doctrine. For philosophy, conducted by the minds tormented by divine thirst, is not satisfied by numbers, doctrines, empty philosophical discourses or mere words but only by a philosophical discourse, no matter now uncertain, that will actually mediate an encounter with God himself in some form however indirect it might be. In other words, it must be a light-giving or life-giving philosophical discourse. Furthermore, the very act of seeking out the object of metaphysics, no matter how obscure, bears the fruits of joy and beatitude in the life of the philosopher. If a thirst for the divine indeed implies a pre-apprehension of the divine object, then just the sincere act of seeking after such an object, even if not attained, will transform the inner being of the seeker himself so that be becomes more like the divine object. All these aspects point to Gilson's view of philosophy as a way of life that is principally driven by a Platonic thirst for, and intuition of, the divine.

After making this contrast, Gilson then returns to Thomas and claims that he is indeed quite aware of the weakness of reason and is not exalting it beyond its domain. According to

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[138] *LST*, 359.

Gilson, Thomas even shares somewhat in the positivists mistrust of reason. This indicates that Gilson himself, by following Thomas, is not making a naive return to metaphysics. In fact, Gilson claims that Aquinas is actually even more aware of the weakness of reason than the positivists themselves by the very fact that he applies it to the divine substance that is beyond its grasp. For reason's weakness is most manifest when the philosopher applies it to an object whose essence is by its nature unobtainable merely by human reason.[139] It is in this exercise that the true weakness of reason is shown much more than prematurely giving up on any obscure science that does not involve mathematical certainty. In this way, Gilson argues that no one is more conscious of the shortcomings of reason than Thomas Aquinas.[140]

Yet, Gilson presents Thomas as a model of one who indeed sees the weakness of reason but out of a deep thirst for the divine does not allow himself to settle for the certainty pertinent to lesser objects. Thomas, rather, remains steadfast in the philosophical life and still applies an admittedly very feeble reason to the highest metaphysical objects and to know God. For again even the most confused knowledge of God, veiled in analogy and images, is much more valuable than the great certitude of numbers and knowledge of mundane objects. So even though this knowledge of the Divine remains confused and obscure, it is still worth striving for nonetheless again partly because this act of striving after the Divine itself transforms the one who strives and gives them hope that one day they will in fact see God face to face. As was seen above, this act of seeking knowledge is desirable in itself because it works perfection, transformation and joy in the practitioner. The goal then for Gilson here is not only knowledge of God but also the personal effects of the act of striving after the knowledge of God.

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[139] *LST*, 359.
[140] *LST*, 359.

In this way, we see that, by accepting a certain level of obscurity on the level of doctrine and knowledge, Gilson shows that, from his perspective, philosophy is not simply about a certain doctrine or mere correct information in the manner of the mind oriented toward logical certitude, but is also about choosing a way of life that changes the person and prepares him for the vision of God face to face. As Gilson says in his final words of his lecture:

> From poor conjectures, from comparisons which are not totally inadequate, behold that from which we draw our purest and deepest joys. The supreme felicity of man here below is to anticipate, as vague as it may be, the vision, face to face of the immobile eternity.[141]

Gilson here seems to be saying that the pure and profound joy that flows from the paltry conjectures and inadequate analogies of metaphysics seems to confirm at least partly, that the sovereign happiness of man in this life is to anticipate the vision of "the immobile eternity" face to face. In *Le Thomisme* 6th ed. (1965) Gilson replaces "l'immobile éternité" with "Être" indicating his discovery of the primacy of Thomistic *esse*.[142]

In this last statement, Gilson presents philosophy as a way of life in three ways. First, if, as Aristotle holds, the subject of metaphysics is being as being then for Gilson the goal of metaphysics, or first philosophy is to anticipate the face to face vision of *Être* himself. Gilson presents a kind of seamless continuity between metaphysics as primarily concerned with the question of being and the vision of *Être* face to face. This is another way of saying that the question 'what is being?' that has always tormented metaphysics is rooted in the human desire to see *Être* face to face. In a word, the beginning desire and final joy of metaphysics is found not in

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[141] "De pauvres conjectures, des comparaisons qui ne soient pas totalement inadéquates, voilà de quoi nous tirons nos joies les plus pures et les plus profondes. La souveraine félicité de l'homme ici-bas est d'anticipater, si confusément que ce puisse être, la vision, face à face de l'immobile èternité." *LST*, 359.
[142] *TPT*, 27.

an ontological doctrine but in an encounter with *Être* as a concrete person.

Second, Gilson is comfortable with philosophical discourse taking on the obscure and formless quality of poetry with the use of 'wretched conjectures' and 'poor analogies' and even 'images' as long as it mediates to any degree possible an apprehension of *Être*. For Gilson philosophy, like his theory of music, is less about how it is done (form) and more about being effective in attaining its goal (ends).[143] This means that philosophical discourse for Gilson is not a series of logical demonstrations of proofs but analogies and images that anticipate their object.

Third, for Gilson the philosophical life is an anticipation, imitation and also a participation in the divine beatitude of the next life. As an anticipation of the next life philosophy is not merely a discourse but a joyful and beautiful way of life. In a certain way, this

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[143] Gilson was a great fan and defender of Claude Debussy's controversial music. Gilson helped organize a concert featuring Debussy's music in Strasbourg in 1921. In the program for this concert Gilson comments on Debussy's orchestral composition *La Mer* and his controversial musical innovations that ignore the rules of scales and chords. Gilson lays down three interesting musical principles that are quite similar to his philosophical principles: "1. The melody is completely released from the scale. That is to say, that the sequence of notes that constitutes a melody is no longer justified by its conformity to fixed types once and for all of the major or minor scale. A melody is always correct provided that it be expressive.
2. Any agreement and any sound are legitimate provided that their use is satisfying to the ear and suggestive to the imagination.
3. The construction of musical pieces made of these agreements and these melodies should not be settled in advance by a fixed framework; it must be subordinated entirely to the impression that it awakens in the soul of the listener." Gilson then concludes: "The music of Claude Debussy is subject in full to a law and to only one law: to establish a satisfying rapport between our sensibility, the sounds employed and the expressive signification that it suggests. That is why we can say that there is no more freer music and that there is however no more desirable nor more thoughtful [music] than that of Claude Debussy." "1° La melodie est complètement libérée de la gamme. C'est-à-dire que la suite de notes qui constitute une mélodie ne se justifie plus par sa conformité aux types fixés une fois pour toutes de la gamme majeure ou mineure. Une mélodie est toujours correcte pourvu qu'elle soit expressive.
2° Tout accord et toute sonorité sont légitimates pourvu que leur emploi soit satisfaisant pour l'oreille et suggestif pour l'imagination.
3° La construction des pièces musicales faites de ces accords et de ces mélodies ne doit pas être règlée d'avance par un cadre fixe; elle doit se subordonner entièrement à l'impression qu'il s'agit d'éveiller dans l'âme de l'auditeur. " Gilson then concludes: "La musique de Claude Debussy est soumise toute entière à une loi et à une seule: établir un rapport satisfaisant entre notre sensibilité, les sonorités employés et la signification expressive qu'elle suggèrent. C'est pourquoi l'on peut dire qu'il n'y a pas de musique plus libre et qu'il n'y en a cependant pas de plus voulue ni de plus réfléchie que celle de Claude Debussy." Étienne Gilson, "Programme: Concert Symphonique Delgrange: Donné Par Un Orchestre De Paris De 56 Musiciens Sous La Direction De Monsieur Félix Delgrange" (Strasbourg: 1921).

final paragraph is an invitation to his audience to cast off the modern mistrust of metaphysics and to stir-up the divine thirst so as to persuade his audience to live the philosophical way of life. Gilson wants to impart to his audience the same freedom to do philosophy that was given to him by his *maître* Bergson in 1904.

Gilson concludes his evaluation of the thought or system of Thomas Aquinas with the following words.

> If one concedes that a philosophy should not be defined by the elements which it borrows but by the spirit that animates it, we will see in this doctrine neither Plotinism nor Aristotelianism, but first and foremost Christianity. It wants to express in a rational language the ultimate destiny for the Christian man; but by often reminding him that he must follow here below the roads without light and without the horizon of exile, it never ceases to direct his steps to the heights from which is discovered, emerging from a distant haze, the edges of the Promised Land.[144]

Here again Gilson shows that he does not define philosophy primarily by its formal elements or methods but by its "spirit." The spirit of a philosophy is determined primarily for Gilson by its final goal and in the case of Thomas Aquinas his philosophy is entirely Christian because its ends are the vision of Être itself. On the one hand, Aquinas' thought is indeed a philosophy because its goal is to express in a rational language the whole Christian man. However, on the other hand, philosophy here for Gilson is not just a rational discourse. Gilson here reminds the Christian philosopher that he is in a kind of exile without light, yet the philosophical way of life also directs his steps toward the summits, where like Moses on Mt. Nebo he will discover a

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[144] "Si l'on concède qu'une philosophie ne doit pas se définir par les éléments qu'elle emprunte mais par l'esprit qui l'anime, on ne verra dans cette doctrine ni plotinisme ni aristotélisme, mais avant tout christianisme. Elle a voulu exprimer en un langage rationnel la destinée totale de l'homme chrétien; mais en lui rappelant souvent qu'il doit suivre ici-bas les routes sans lumière et sans horizon de l'exil, elle n'a jamais cessé de diriger ses pas vers les sommets d'où se découvrent, émergeant d'une brume lointaine, les confins de la Terre promise." *Le Thomisme* 1st ed. (1919), 174.

glimpse of the border of the promised land. We see here a portrait of philosophy as a way of life that leads to an indirect glimpse of heaven and the vision of God. Here, Gilson with this historical synthesis in the Lille lectures and his subsequent editions of *Le Thomisme* goes beyond the words and arguments of Aquinas to the "spirit" of his work in order to retain, absorb and ingest his principles and so live the philosophical life like Aquinas.

CHAPTER VIII

Gilson's Wartime Works

Art et métaphysique (1916)

Having examined two of Gilson's pieces of historical synthesis which were written before World War One, let us now turn to the pieces Gilson worked on during his military service: *Art et métaphysique* (1915), *Bergson Lectures* (1918) and *Essai sur la vie intérieure* (1920), all three of which present different perspectives on Gilson's early notion of philosophy. *Art et métaphysique* and *Essai sur la vie intérieure* are both works of pure philosophy where Gilson speaks directly in his own voice whereas the *Bergson Lectures* is a historical synthesis.

Art et métaphysique is a particularly remarkable work because Gilson wrote it while serving as a second lieutenant in a machine gunners company in the trenches of Verdun during World War One. This twenty-four page piece has only one footnote and no scholarly references and at the end is signed with the inscription: "On campaign, November-December 1915. Étienne Gilson."[1] *Art et métaphysique* astonished the public at the time and Gilson was heroically compared to Marcus Aurelius who also wrote philosophy "on campaign."[2] A copy of the essay stored in the Gilson Room as part of the Gilson Collection in the PIMS library on the top margin in Gilson's handwriting reads: "Written at Beaumark, near Verdun, between two posts in the trenches. E.G."[3] Shook points out that Beaumark was the location of a training camp where

[1] "En campagne, novembre-décembre 1915. Ètienne Gilson." *AM*, 267.
[2] *EG*, 78.
[3] "Ecrit à Beaumark, devant Verdun, entre deux relève des tranchées. E.G." *AM*, 243; Gilson Collection, PIMS Library, Toronto.

Gilson was training troops and it was there that he probably wrote most of this essay in between stations in the trenches of Verdun.[4]

This is Gilson's second piece of pure philosophy in his own voice outside of a historical synthesis and he is very aware of the dramatic context of war in which he presents it. For instance, the most obvious allusion to the war is Gilson's *ekphrasis* and in-depth interpretation of Fernand Khnopf's *Lac d'amour* which is a tranquil scene located on a lake near Bruges, Belgium—a location relatively close to Verdun where Gilson is writing. *Lac d'amour*—both the actual place and the painting—for the most part looks like a rustic medieval lake and village but has a conspicuous modern chimney poking through the idyllic medieval scene. Discussing the painting Gilson focuses on an intentional contrast between the peaceful water and medieval rock buildings and the annoyance of the factory smokestack. The smokestack obstinately reminds us that: "modern industrial life is there with all its brutality and its clashes of overheated machinery."[5] Gilson observes that this smokestack makes it impossible for us to use the painting as a nostalgic escape to an ideal harmonious past. The smokestack makes it impossible to respond in an escapist way to: "The call of these stones and of these waters who would want to introduce us to a kingdom of love and of peace."[6] Gilson notes that the ingenious central placement of the industrial smokestack is such that we cannot stop looking at its unpleasantness without also stopping our gaze at the more pleasant peaceful rocks and water. Gilson then talks about how all the other elements in the painting like the tranquil mirror of slow moving water,

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[4] *EG*, 78. Gilson wrote *AM* prior to the famous Battle of Verdun which began on February 21, 1916. On the third day of this battle, after losing almost all of his machine-gunner squad and then being buried alive in a bombardment and then dugout by his a close friend, Gilson was taken by the Germans as a prisoner of war. *EG*, 80-2.
[5] "la vie industrielle moderne est là avec toute sa brutalité et ses heurts de machine surchauffée." *AM*, 249.
[6] "l'appel de ces pierres et de ces eaux qui voudraient nous introduire dans un règne d'amour et de paix." *AM*, 249.

the house under the shade of willows, the steeple and the belfry (images representing the virtues of what he calls, "Faith and Force"), and finally the banks of the lake which constantly bring our eyes back to behold the door of a Beguine monastery.[7] All of this calls us to renounce, as he say, "the imprudence of a passion whose ardor could disturb the peace."[8] In this way, the painting, along with Gilson's philosophical description of it, is intended to bring forth a real, present and lasting existential change of heart in the person toward peace and love and not just a romantic escape. It seems that, for Gilson, this tangible conversion within the interior life is the foundation for creating a culture of peace in the midst of war. Gilson's philosophy then is not just aimed at knowledge but the conversion of the reader and therefore is aimed at a way of life.

Gilson also mentions *paix* again when he is talking about the need for the spectator of art to establish an interior silence and peace which allows the work of art to bring the soul to a new state and be enriched.[9] In this same context, Gilson also uses the word for truce (*trêve*) twice in this same context.[10] That is, he speaks of the need for the spectator of art to "solicit a truce of inclinations"[11] and thereby put himself in a special state of active receptivity in order to be open to the effects of the work of art. The art then will bring the spectator to a new superior mode of life.

Thus Gilson's piece has a strong dramatic element because in the midst of the clanging noise of overheated machinery, the brutal destruction and the death of war, Gilson calls for inner

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[7] *AM*, 249.
[8] "l'imprudence d'une passion dont l'ardeur pourrait troubler la paix." *AM*, 249.
[9] *AM*, 256.
[10] *AM*, 256-7.
[11] *AM*. 256.

silence, creativity and life which art can produce.[12] In this way, Gilson seems to be saying that root of a culture of peace that will end war primarily comes from transformation in interior life through the culture of art and religion.

However, what is even more interesting for our present purposes is the relationship Gilson establishes between art, metaphysics and science. In this essay, with the implicit help of Bergson, Gilson clarifies the relationship between science and metaphysics and also establishes the often forgotten relationship between art and metaphysics.[13] By doing this Gilson is attempting to free both art and metaphysics from being interpreted from the perspective of modern science in the manner of the positivists, who invariably reduce metaphysics to sociology and reduce art to a mere knowledge of nature. Gilson focuses on the essentially creative and personally transformational aspect of art and beauty. This creativity and life- giving power of beauty in art perfects philosophy which tends to remain in the order of mere knowledge without it. Gilson shows how art and metaphysics need each other to be fully life-giving and grounded in the truth of reality.

Before looking more closely at his comments on metaphysics, however, let us look at an outline of the work. In paragraphs one to two Gilson states that his overall goal is to establish the relationship between art and metaphysics.[14] In paragraphs three to four Gilson begins this by showing how at times metaphysics could be confused with art due to their both being rooted in a

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[12] During his time in the trenches and then in the POW camps in Germany Gilson experienced a deep longing for interior silence. While interned as prisoner of war in Vöhrenbach Gilson requested and was granted permission to be put in solitary confinement for eight days. Reflecting on his experience in solitary Gilson says, "Being alone is not the worst situation a man can be in. Never to be alone is far worse." The usually rather extroverted Gilson continued to experience a deep longing for silence and solitude throughout his life. *EG*, 83.
[13] *AM*, 243.
[14] *AM*, 243-4.

non-conceptual or trans-conceptual intuition.[15] Then, in paragraphs six to eight Gilson says that he wants to locate the nature of art not by beginning with modern science in the manner of the positivists which inevitably leads to a neo-classical interpretation of art as a copy of nature and as a lower-level, merely affective, form of knowledge. Gilson wants to begin rather with the Bergsonian notion of metaphysical intuition which helps clarify the true nature of aesthetic intuition as a creative experience.[16]

After this eight paragraph introduction, moving on to the beginning of the body of the work, in paragraphs nine to eighteen, Gilson tries to locate the truly creative nature of art first by looking at the aesthetic intuition of the artist and how he moves from an affective intuition of nature to creating a work of art.[17] Gilson argues that the aesthetic intuition of the artist is not just the experience of an emotion before an object, nor even the ability to see an object by means of an emotion, but a special aptitude to perceive spontaneously an object as destined by its essence to be the cause of this emotion in human beings.[18] Now the artist's inner accord with the beauty of things is a fleeting state of grace that often evaporates and returns to the work-a-day world of objects apprehended as instruments of practical action. Therefore, the artist wants to prolong this state of beauty and so creates a work of art to represent and stand in the place of the original aesthetic intuition of nature and thereby prolong the personal contact with beauty. Moreover, because the piece of art is not a given object but a "constituted object," art is a truly a new creation not just a representation or extension of a naturally given object.[19]

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[15] *AM*, 244-6.
[16] *AM*, 246-7.
[17] *AM*, 247-55.
[18] *AM*, 247-8.
[19] *AM*, 248-9.

Then in paragraphs nineteen to twenty-two Gilson turns to an analysis of the spectator of a work of art and focuses on how he must prepare himself with an inner silence to properly receive the effect intended by the work of art. In paragraphs twenty-three to twenty-six Gilson shows how the work of art changes, perfects and enriches the inner life of the spectator.[20] In this way, the artist through the work of art, also works a creative action in the spectator and gives new life and enriched being. After this Gilson is then able to propose a second definition of aesthetic intuition from the perspective of the spectator as the sentiment of an enrichment of our interior life by a participation in the person of the artist by means of a work of art.[21]

In paragraphs twenty-seven to thirty-one Gilson attempts to establish an objective way of rating the value of art not on the basis of a piece of art's accuracy of representing nature—which Gilson argues leads to pure subjectivism— but on the basis of a work of art's effectiveness in enriching, to a greater or lesser degree, the interior life of the spectator.[22] Finally, Gilson concludes his piece, in paragraph thirty-two, with a reflection on science, metaphysics and art. According to Gilson, science works on the surface of the real and metaphysics is an effort to install oneself in the heart of the real to obtain a direct and immediate perception of it.[23] Art, however, as is often assumed, is not a mode of affective knowledge standing between these two modes of knowledge but abides on a totally different plane of creativity. Much like love and

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[20] *AM*, 255-8.
[21] *AM*, 262.
[22] *AM*, 263-66.
[23] *AM*, 266-7.

religion, art creates newer and richer modes of personal life in an order in which science and metaphysics remain powerless because they abide on the level of knowledge.[24]

Let us now return to the beginning of the work and look in closer detail at Gilson's comments on metaphysics. In the opening paragraph (which in Gilsonian rhetoric almost invariably provides useful allusions to the most important aspects of the essay) Gilson remarks that while many distinguish science and metaphysics very few thinkers attempt to establish the relationship between art and metaphysics.[25] Gilson observes that this lack of concern with establishing the relationship between art and metaphysics is due to the fact that art and metaphysics develop in markedly different directions whereas science and metaphysics seem to be much more alike.

However, viewing metaphysics and art as unrelated has not always been the case historically because there is an enduring tradition of philosophy, different from the positivist tradition, that sees metaphysics as having a closer kinship to art than to science. Gilson says,

> Born under the happy sky of Greece, Western philosophy is immediately expressed in works that are simultaneously imperishable masterpieces. And the tradition ushered in by Plato's *Symposium* has never been lost.[26]

According to Gilson, Plato, Schopenhauer, and Bergson are all "philosopher-artists" whose philosophy is always presented in the context of art. However this artistic context is not just due to a personal ability or preference for style, but because their philosophy is perfected by beauty

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[24] Gilson expands on this important distinction between the order of creation and the order of knowledge in his *Essai.* This distinction between creation and knowledge is Gilson's first philosophical statement he presents in his own name and it remains fundamental for Gilson's philosophy throughout his life. Gilson's philosophical mission is to defend the integrity of the order of creation found in art, morality and religion which all too often tends to be reduced to knowledge by modernity.

[25] *AM*, 243.

[26] "Née sous le ciel heureux de la Grèce, la philosophic occidentale s'est immédiatement exprimée en des oeuvres qui sont en même temps d'impérissables chefs-d'oeuvre. Et la tradition inaugurée par le Banquet de Platon ne s'est jamais perdue." *AM*, 243.

itself. Gilson says: "The essence of their philosophical thought implies a profound tendency to be fulfilled in beauty."[27]

Gilson seems to set himself in this tradition of philosopher-artists in several ways. Gilson does this first by articulating his philosophy of art primarily by means of many metaphors and comparisons. For Gilson admits that the nature of art itself cannot be expressed in a philosophical formula. As he says, "But we willingly add that the day is not yet near when the analysis will render into a formula that which is expressed in the whole meaning of which it [art] is so rich."[28] Instead of beginning with a clear definition of art, Gilson, opting for a more inductive approach, resorts to looking at works of art themselves seeing first how they are created by artists and second how they effect their spectators. Gilson expresses his observations at times in conceptual language and distinctions but these are always accompanied by many poetic analogies, images and *ekphrases*.

Second, Gilson also presents his philosophy of art within the rather dramatic context of war which creates a higher level of urgency for the inner transformation of art within in the heart of the person as a solution for peace. The unspoken context of war, which Gilson never allows his readers to forget (in the same way that *Lac d'Amour* does not let the spectator forget the smokestack), effectively opens the reader's eyes and enables them to see the true value of art as a

[27] "l'essence même de leur pensée philosophique impliquât une tendance profonde à se réaliser en beauté." *AM*, 243.
[28] "Mais nous ajouterons volontiers que le jour n'est pas encore prochain où l'analyse aura fait rendre à la formule qui l'exprime tout le sens dont elle [art] est riche." *AM*, 247.

way toward peace. In this way, Gilson, like Plato, Schopenhauer and Bergson, writes his philosophy in a rather dramatic or poetic way.[29]

Third, Gilson also puts himself in this genre of philosopher-artists because he not only presents his philosophy poetically and experientially, but, more importantly, because he sees metaphysics and philosophy itself as being perfected by the experience of beauty and the enrichment of interior life. This experience of beauty and enrichment of being is imparted by art, love and religion which then perfect Gilson's philosophy. Gilson here in the first paragraph alludes to his final comments in the last paragraph where he speaks of metaphysics as being fulfilled in art. For art, unlike metaphysics, contains a "force," much like love and religion, that introduces new forms of life into the universe that are always richer and higher.[30] Gilson concludes the essay:

> It is that from [the order of] metaphysics to [the order of] art that one of these changes of order is accomplished, the existence of which Pascal has revealed to us: of all knowledge taken together you will not achieve the least beauty, for it is of a different and superior [order].[31]

The notion of philosophy being fulfilled in beauty, therefore, forms an important literary inclusion in Gilson's essay, which underscores the importance of this notion in Gilson's philosophy.

Now as we can see here Gilson puts science and metaphysics in the order of mere knowledge (*connaissance*) in these comments and separates it from the other modes of human

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[29] If philosophy can be seen on a sliding scale between mathematics and poetry or science and art Gilson in an age of science slides philosophy down the ledger more towards art but does not reduce it to art in the way the positivist reduce philosophy to science.
[30] *AM,* 267.
[31] "C'est que de la métaphysique à l'art s'accomplit un de ces changements d'ordre dont Pascal nous a révélé l'existence: de toutes les connaissances prises ensemble vous ne ferez pas réussir la moindre beauté, car cela est d'un autre, et supérior." *AM*, 267.

interior activity on the level of the creativity and life. Hence, it may seem here that Gilson presents philosophy as a mere static form of knowledge and, much like Nietzsche, in a Romantic way, he seems to be exalting instinct over reason, and art over philosophy. Remarkably, on several different levels, Gilson's *Art et métaphysique* does indeed resemble Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. First, both works are the author's first attempt at pure philosophy and both works are on art as creating culture and implicitly saving the world. Second, Gilson talks about art creating a communion with nature and art creating a kind of illusion of beauty around everyday objects.[32]

Third, Gilson, in a very Romantic way, exalts the artistic genius as a kind of quasi-religious figure much like a priest who interprets and mediates nature to the world.[33] Gilson argues that the artist is not like an artisan who harnesses the energies of the physical world for our use, or like a scientist or philosopher who are "mirrors" in which the universe reflects itself, but the artist, "He is one of the creative forces of nature."[34] So much so that Gilson observes that the death of an artist is a diminution of value for the world.[35]

Fourth, Gilson often describes art as a "force"[36] which is an echo of Nietzsche and especially Henry Adams who frequently speaks about art as a force and sees the history of philosophy in terms of force.[37] For instance, in *Art et métaphysique* Gilson observes that we do not come before a work of art as before an inert body whose properties we study with our reason but are not also affected on the deeper level of our being.[38] Rather, Gilson argues that we come before a work of art as before a "center of forces" whose "fragrances" strike us, penetrate us and

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[32] *AM*, 248.
[33] *AM*, 254.
[34] "il est une des forces créatrices de la nature." *AM*, 254.
[35] *AM*, 254.
[36] *AM*, 254; 249; 261; 256; 258.
[37] *EHA*, 1073.
[38] *AM*, 258.

move in closer and closer to the very foundation of our being.[39] So much so that we become clay in the hands of the artist but also a clay conscious of submitting to the reception of a form accomplished by the work of art and its creator.[40]

Fifth, Gilson also presents a similar notion to Nietzsche of a piece of art effecting a kind of Dionysian shattering or dissolution of the spectator's personality After this initial dissolution the art then effects a kind of Apollinian reconstruction of the personality into a richer form of being. The spectator lends an active submission to this momentary dissociation and then regrouping of constitutive elements of the I.[41] These notions show that Gilson holds a very Romantic approach to art that he shares with Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and Henry Adams' *The Education of Henry Adams* and *Mont Saint Michel and Chartres.*

Although Gilson's thought contains these strong early Nietzschean tendencies, and possibly influences, we see Gilson depart from Nietzsche by presenting a more harmonious relationship between metaphysics and art in two important ways. First, Gilson departs from Nietzsche when he distinguishes science and metaphysics with the idea of metaphysical intuition. Gilson identifies the nature of metaphysical intuition as follows: Gilson points out that, at times, philosophers can confuse themselves with poets and thereby create a rather laborious form of poetry. Gilson notes that even poets in rare instances can also confuse themselves with philosophers.[42] Gilson then keenly asks: where exactly is the point of confusion?

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[39] *AM*, 258.
[40] *AM*, 258.
[41] *AM*, 258.
[42] *AM*, 243-4.

To answer this question Gilson presents a Bergsonian doctrine that science is not an absolute knowledge of things, or the perfection of knowledge, or the perfection of the human mind because it is only a knowledge that is always relative to our practical interests in action. Gilson, following Bergson, sees science as beginning with common sense and as a refinement of common sense that remains preoccupied with and entrenched in the practical order no matter how refined, sophisticated or theoretical it may become. Gilson gives the reason why science is always tied to the practical order:

> In the fleeting continuity of the real the understanding divides things which it designates by terms, and in doing so, it gives itself the necessary conditions of language and of action.[43]

The cutting up of the natural continuity of reality with concepts allows the human person to act and react to objects and control them for the sake of action. Nevertheless, science still does not get to the heart of the real and in some way the cutting kills the objects or takes the life out of them, so to speak. However, for Gilson, unlike the early Nietzsche, science and conceptual knowledge is not a mere illusion but treats only the surface of the real and does not go to the heart of the real.

Gilson then asks if there is something more than science, something like a purely contemplative knowledge which would be free from the pre-occupation with action that could get to the heart of the real? Gilson argues that this would have to be an immediate intuition of the real that, at the same time, would renounce a conceptual analysis of the real.[44] Yet, giving up the scientific cutting up of the real in exchanged for a metaphysics of intuition that "lets the real

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[43] "Dans la continuité fuyante du réel l'entendement découpe des choses qu'il désigne par des termes et, ce faisant, il se donne les conditions nécessaires du langage et de l'action." *AM*, 244.
[44] *AM*, 244.

live"[45] causes another problem of how to exactly express such a truth in a philosophical doctrine or writing. Gilson says, "Concepts may not be necessary to know, but they are clearly [necessary] to talk."[46] Thus the philosopher either has to renounce all expression of his metaphysical intuition (in the manner of Maine de Biran) or resign himself to denaturing the metaphysical intuition by expressing it in conceptual language. For metaphysical intuitions, which usually come as several at once, according to Bergsonian doctrine, are born prior to the practical order and its concepts and hence are, by their very essence, inexpressible by words.[47]

Yet, if one gives up on definitions and concepts this does not mean that one just uses comparisons, analogies, metaphors and images to express the inexpressible. In other word, concepts are not *simply* replaced by metaphors. Rather, the philosopher uses comparisons and analogies to prepare the reader or lead the interlocutor to an existential experience of the real. As Gilson says, "To gather from all parts the metaphors that can steer others to take the interior attitude where intuition surges almost from itself, such is the final resource that remains to the metaphysician."[48]

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[45] *AM*, 244.

[46] "Les concepts ne sont peut-être pas nécessaires pour connaître, mais ils le sont évidemment pour parler." *AM*, 244.

[47] In a later lecture Gilson holds a similar view of metaphysical intuition as "the immediate apprehension of an immaterial object." He also calls intuition: "a mental sight; comparing it with the direct apprehension of their objects by the eyes, we call it an intuition. But an intuition of what? The classical answer is an intuition of principles." "On Metaphysical Knowledge (II)", p. 37, 1967, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. In a much latter work on art, forty years later, Gilson mentions *AM* and acknowledges that his positions have somewhat changed because much has happened in art in forty years and plus Gilson became a Thomist. He says, "In metaphysics a purely personal evolution led the author of the 1915 article to the rediscovery of the solid, down-to-earth realism of the classical metaphysics of being as interpreted by St. Thomas Aquinas." *PR*, x. Despite becoming a Thomist Gilson's essentially Romantic theory of art as a creation stays the same throughout his life.

[48] "Rassembler de toutes parts les métaphores qui peuvent amener autrui à prendre l'attitude intérieure où l'intuition surgit presque d'elle-même, telle est l'ultime ressource qui demeure au métaphysicien." *AM*, 245.

However, this causes another problem because it seems like metaphysical intuition reduces philosophy simply to a rather laborious and long-winded form of poetry or art. Philosophy, in its doctrinal phase, according to Gilson is the gathering of metaphors which induce the experience of metaphysical intuition for the reader. Both art and metaphysics:

> Both of these intuitions want to lead us to an immediate perception of the real and to suggest to us the direct vision of nature, and through the means of images and metaphors, make us united with the deep soul of things.[49]

Again it seems here that Gilson is tempted by the Nietzschean solution to the problem which holds that Socratic science and philosophy is really just another poorer and less effective form of art. Nietzsche thus concludes that tragedy is better than science and philosophy should just give way to the life-giving power of poetry and music. However, Gilson sees a more harmonious and complementary relationship between philosophy and art than Nietzsche. For they tend to the same goal but by different tracks and different levels of success with art being much more effective.[50]

On the one hand, according to Gilson, the artist approaches the real by an instinctive sympathy. As Gilson says,

> To lodge himself in the heart of reality, he relies on a kind of pre-established harmony which destined him to profoundly understand certain aspects of the universe where he senses this harmony and just like this kinship which unites him to things; an interior impetus carries him to them and holds him bound to their connection until he reaches their innermost essence and until he succeeds in expressing it.[51]

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[49] "l'un et l'autre de ces intuitions veut nous amener à une perception immédiate du réel, nous suggérer la vision directe de la nature, et par le moyen d'images et de métaphores, nous faire communier à l'âme profonde des choses." *AM*, 245.
[50] *AM*, 245.
[51] "Pour s'installer au coeur de la réalité, il se fie à une sorte d'harmonie préétablie qui le destinait à comprendre profondément certains aspects de l'univers où il pressent cet accord et comme cette parenté qui l'unit aux choses; un élan intérieur le porte vers elles et le retient attaché à leur contact jusqu'à ce qu'il soit parvenu au plus intime de leur essence et jusqu'à ce qu'il ait réussi à l'exprimer." *AM*, 245.

On the other hand, for Gilson, the metaphysician has a different approach where he does not begin with instinct but rather with common sense and science which is simply the purification of common sense. Then after ascending from there to the heights of metaphysical intuition he returns to common sense to confirm and verify this experience knowledge gained by metaphysical intuition. In a certain way, for Gilson common sense is both the runway and landing-strip for metaphysics, so to speak.

Gilson observes that if one wants to hold a *rapprochement* between art and philosophy (and this is the second way Gilson departs from Nietzsche), then, one would have to say that art can be seen as philosophy prior to analysis and critique. Art from this point of view is a kind of philosophy that is content to dream (*rêver*) without any verification.[52] In this way, metaphysical intuition serves art in the following way:

> And conversely the metaphysical intuition rises up out of an art which would impose as an absolute rule to conceive his dream in contact with science and to always ensure, through rigorous tests, that his dream merits to be presented as the expression bearing the closest resemblance to the most profound reality.[53]

Gilson, then, having established this distinction and the complementarity between art and metaphysics, goes on to argue against the classical interpretation of art as a kind of knowledge and argues that art is actually a real creation. What makes this possible is the notion of metaphysical intuition where the philosopher must use images to induce an experience of the real on the level of knowledge in the same way that the artist induces an experience of the real in the

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[52] *AM*, 245.
[53] "Et inversement l'intuition métaphysique relèverait d'un art qui se serait imposé comme règle absolue de concevoir son rêve au contact de la science et de s'assurer toujours, par des épreuves rigoureuses, que son rêve mérite d'être présenté comme l'expression aussi approchée que possible de la plus profonde réalité." *AM*, 245-6.

spectator on the level of feeling. The difference being that one imparts intuitive knowledge and the other changes and enriches the being of the spectator through feeling.[54]

Gilson presents philosophy as a non-scientific way of life in three ways here. First, Gilson, with the notion of metaphysical intuition, sees metaphysics or philosophy as kind of "trans-formal" and non-conceptual experiential knowledge of the real. In other words, philosophy is not a set of concepts whereby one deductively captures the real. Rather, philosophy consists of an experiential knowledge.

Second, Gilson sees the discovery phase just as much a part of philosophy as the doctrinal phase. For he talks about the difficulty of expressing in words a type of knowledge that is beyond words. Whereas science can easily impart concepts, metaphysics must turn to art and metaphors to help in preparing the person to have a similar trans-formal experience of the heart of the real. The goal of the doctrinal phase of philosophy is not simply the impartation of concepts, or even metaphors, but the impartation of an experience of the realities that lie beyond them, that is, an intuition of the real.

Third, this concern with the doctrinal phase of philosophy implies that there must be a change in being within the student of philosophy to experience metaphysical intuition. Just like the spectator of art, the student of philosophy must prepare himself with an inner silence and the words and images of the philosopher must prepare the reader inwardly for the truth of the metaphysical intuition to surge forth by its own power.

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[54] Much later Gilson explicitly departs from Bergson who holds that it is the same intuition differently utilized that makes philosopher and an artist. Gilson holds that although aesthetic intuition and metaphysical intuition are not the same intuition they do share a deep resemblance in their depth and should never be set in conflict with one another. *FSA*, 8-9. It is hard to say if Gilson sees metaphysical intuition and aesthetic intuition as the same intuition used differently in his early thought.

Fourth, philosophy, or metaphysics, has a complementary relationship with art. For on the one hand, art brings to philosophy its creative power of beauty and life which perfects the metaphysical knowledge. In other words, metaphysics is a powerless, lifeless and imperfect form of knowledge without the creative power of beauty found in art, as well as in love and religion. In this way, in a rapprochement with art, philosophy can reach beyond a mere knowledge of being to the level of life and an enrichment of being and the perfection of the philosopher. In this way, art, religion and love serve metaphysics. This is what it means for philosophy to be realized or perfected in beauty. On the other hand, metaphysics also serves art, religion and love by showing how their dreams and aesthetic intuitions are grounded in reality. A large part of the philosophical life for Gilson consists in philosophy demonstrating how the creative forms of the interior life are grounded in truth. In this way, Gilson had a multi-disciplinary approach to the philosophical way of life that demanded the arts. This multi-disciplinary, humanistic approach to the philosophical life became instantiated when years later he founded PIMS whose curriculum never isolated medieval philosophy from the art, literature, poetry, history and language of the medieval period.[55]

The Bergson Lectures (1918)

We should briefly mention the three (possibly two) lectures that Gilson gave on Bergson in the POW camps at Burg and Ströhlen just before the end of World War One.[56] These are unpublished handwritten lecture or conference notes that Gilson preserved and used in later

[55] In *AM*, 257 Gilson says that one of the elements necessary to prepare the person for an aesthetic experience is "une culture esthétique profonde".
[56] *EG*, 86-7; Yeung, 46-7.

lectures and can only be found in the Gilson Archive in Toronto.[57] The first lecture is on Bergson's views on the origins of human knowledge, the second lecture is on Bergson's philosophy of liberty, and the third lecture is on the overall significance of Bergsonian philosophy. In what stands as an introduction to the first two lectures, Gilson begins the first lecture by stating that his goal is not to study Bergsonian philosophy and all its problems but "to clarify (*dégager)* the spirit of Bergsonism."[58] It is important to note here that Gilson continues to use implicit references to war, prison and liberation in these lectures as he does in all of his wartime writings.[59]

Gilson seems to identify the spirit of Bergsonism with his concept of the origins of human knowledge that is characterized by an inner dynamic or tension between thought and life. In this regard, Gilson seems to employ a quite noticeable literary inclusion or even a chiasm to demonstrate the spirit of Bergsonism. For in the first lecture Gilson shows how for Bergson thought is ordered to life; and then in the second lecture, after looking at the nature of freedom as an immanent creative force that religion calls 'God', Gilson shows, at the very end, how life is ordered to thought. We will look each of these lectures more closely.

In his first lecture Gilson once again highlights Bergson's notion of the origins of human knowledge and moves through the familiar Bergsonian epistemological progression from common sense to science to philosophy also found in *Art et métaphysique.* As usual Gilson begins with common sense (*la connaissance vulgaire*) for he argues that when concerned with the origins of knowledge we must resist the temptation to first look at science as it exists now but

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[57] Gilson used these notes for a later much expanded lecture he gave in Rio de Janeiro in 1936. *EG*, 86.
[58] Étienne Gilson, Bergson Lectures, 1918, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. [Hereafter cited as *BL*].
[59] Cf. *EG*, 86-7.

rather begin by looking at the origins of knowledge in the common sense of a baby or an animal. From this evolutionary perspective knowledge then is seen as beginning with the need for action in an animal which discerns distinct objects in the "chaos of formidable sensations."[60] This discerning of objects involves a sort of creation of an idea and an object and this creation shows that knowledge is always rooted in practical action. As Gilson says, "The primitive man creates objects by acting."[61]

Although in a more systematic way than common sense, science still continues to discern, name and cut up objects from what is an initially encountered continuous reality. In this way, science then is simply a prolongation and perfection of common sense and still ordered to the same goals of human action. Because it is more theoretical, science is not less oriented to action but more so because it then has the capacity to make things. Gilson says, "All the work of science consists in fabricating new objects and studying their properties. It does so by arithmetic, geometry, algebra, physics, chemistry, etc."[62] Albeit its methods are rather new and science is a theoretical knowledge, science still "continues the work of primitive reason to illuminate and facilitate our actions on the universe."[63] In a more systematic way science still continues the *élan* of primitive knowledge. In this way, in both common sense and science,

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[60] "…et discerner des choses dans ce chaos formidable de sensations." *BL*.
[61] "Le primitif crée les objets en agissant." *BL*.
[62] "Toute l'oeuvre de la science consiste à fabriquer de nouveaux objets et à en etudier le proprietés. Elle le fait en arithmetique, en geometrie, en algebre, en physique, en chimie, etc." *BL*. [In these lecture notes written in a POW camp, Gilson, at times, leaves out the proper accent marks and we present the quotes from the document here as it is with no corrections.]
[63] "La methode est nouvelle mai c'est le meme mouvement qui continue. La science est une connaissance, mais elle continue l'oeuvre de la raison primitive: eclairer, faciliter notre action sure l'universe." *BL*.

reason shows itself primarily as an instrument that serves humanity for the sake of living (*vivre*).[64]

This leads to the problem of whether science can comprehend all that exists. For science can deal with the solid inorganic discontinuous aspect of the real, but the fluid continuous, organic aspect of the real completely escapes its vision.[65] Thus Gilson concludes, echoing Bergson: "Intelligence is characterized by a natural incomprehension of life."[66] Gilson here expresses the tension between thought and life.

Then Gilson moves to the question of "trans-scientific knowledge" and remarks that if it exists, then this form of knowledge of the real in its intimate depths will be by definition intuitive and the inverse of scientific conceptual knowledge that cuts up the real. To approach this trans-scientific knowledge Gilson first looks at art as his point of departure for inspiration. Gilson claims that "Art will be the first approximation of this superior knowledge."[67] For whereas scientific knowledge cuts up the real to reconstruct it; art, on the other hand, gives a kind of total vision of the reality of an indivisible object.[68]

In this way, when intuition is elevated to the level of a method then we have philosophical knowledge.[69] As a distinct method philosophy seeks to return to a knowledge of reality prior to science and seeks to, as he says, "break through the crust of conceptual

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[64] *BL*.
[65] "Donc pour chaque ordre de réalité la science a une valuer absolue par rapport à ce qui est étendu et discontinu. Mais dans la mesure en il y a dans le réel du fluide, du continu elle le laissera échapper." *BL*.
[66] "«L'intelligence et caractérise par une incomprehension naturelle de la vie»." *BL*.
[67] "L'art serait une première approximation de cette connaissance supérieure." *BL*.
[68] "L'art nous donne une vision une, totale de l'objet indivis." *BL*.
[69] "L'intuition, élevée à la hauteur l'une methode, c'est la connaissance philosophique." *BL*.

knowledge and recover a direct intuition of the real."[70] However, since philosophy is the inverse of science it also is the inverse of partition (*morcellement*) and discontinuity. Philosophy then is also the inverse of language and is guided by instinct.[71] Consequently, philosophy must express itself in metaphor. Philosophy does not so much "express" its truth but rather makes a suggestion in much the same manner that art does not express a reality as much as it suggests a personal encounter between its viewer and its intended object. However, the difference between art and philosophy is that philosophy will always systematically make "a critique of scientific knowledge and make a choice of problems which will invite us and induce us (*amène*) to make contact with the real."[72] In this way, therefore, philosophy, like art, rhetorically prepares the person for a personal intuition instead of an impartation of knowledge through concepts in the fashion of science.

Thus, Gilson shows how thought is ordered to life because common sense and science are both ordered to action for the preservation of life; and philosophy and art are a kind of intuitive/instinctual knowledge of the real and an intuition of the life that creates and animates the real. This life-animating aspect or creative aspect of the real is something that common sense and science cannot comprehend or attain any knowledge of.

The second lecture focuses on Bergson's philosophy of liberty which Gilson defines as "the creative power immanent in the world which is what religion calls God."[73] In this longer lecture Gilson eventually looks at evolution and shows how life or the *élan vital* finally leads to

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[70] "…revenir a une connaissance de ce qu'est la realité avant la science. Casser la croute de la connaissance conceptuelle et retrouver l'intuition directe du réel." *BL*.
[71] "La philosophie est donc un mouvement inverse de la science et de la connaissance vulgaire. Elle est donc en seul inverse de morcellement, du discontinue. elle est done en sense inverse du langage." *BL*.
[72] "…apres critique de la connaissance scientifique et choix des problemes, elle nous invite et nous amène à prendre contact avec le réel." *BL*.
[73] "…puissance creatrice immanente au monde et qui est ce que le religion nomme Dieu." *BL*.

the creation of thought in evolution. In a rather dramatic image, that could be either disturbing or opaque to those of us who have no personal experience with bombs, Gilson compares the development of life to a bombshell (*l'obus*). In order to follow Gilson's metaphor it is important to mention here that the shells of World War One would often explode in the air just over the trenches and then rain down deadly shrapnel and explosive force on the heads of the men. In this regard, Gilson relates in Shook's taped interviews the story of how on the third day of the Verdun offensive a shell burst in the air overtop of him implanting a piece of shrapnel in his helmet the size of a fist and burying him in the mud. Gilson was dug out by his friend only to find himself also taken captive by German soldiers who greeted him by saying, "Morgen, wir sind keine Barbaren."[74] Most, if not all of his interlocutors in these conferences on Bergson would have had personal first hand experience of these bombshells. Using this interesting image Gilson says,

> Evolutionary movement would be a simple thing if life, like a cannonball, delineated a single trajectory. But life is a bombshell that has exploded into fragments which explode into fragments in their turn.[75]

Gilson then goes on to describe life as a many faceted explosive force that does not produce just one thing but fragments itself into many and varied species. In this manner, life fragments into three major categories: plant life, animal life characterized by intelligence, and insect life characterized by instinct. Yet, the intelligence of animals and the instinct of insects can come together in the human intelligence.

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[74] Gilson Tapes, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. Cf. *EG*, 81.
[75] "De mouvement evolutif serait chose simple si la vie decrivait une trajectoire unique, comme un boulet. Mais c'est un obus qui a elate en fragments, lesquels le saul fragmentes à leur tour." *BL*.

Gilson again repeats the standard Bergsonian epistemological progression from common sense to scientific thought to philosophy and art repeating once again that science cannot comprehend life and fluidity. Hence there is a need for an intuition which we are capable of "thanks to instinct."[76] This instinct is a vital movement driven by the *élan vital* itself. This instinctual movement of intuition is like invisible arms (*bras*) which are life itself.[77] Since life escapes the vision of science, "silence is necessary and it is much more profound."[78] In this way, life leads to thought just as thought is made to lead to and comprehend life.

Gilson concludes his second lecture by asking whether the reflection on the spirit of Bergsonism he has presented is the definitive truth?[79] Gilson also asks whether intelligence itself is capable of knowing life or the source of life? Or is there a radical incompatibility between intelligence and life? Furthermore, Gilson also points out that this reflection on Bergsonism, because it presents new insightful discoveries, may impart the illusion that the "movement of life" can be grasped in its own formulas?[80] Gilson here seems to be pointing to a danger that the impact of a new insight from a brilliant system like Bergson's can give the impression that the whole of the truth is contained in its formulas. This impression of a new insight risks a reaction of the hearer simply to stop the philosophical pursuit of knowledge of the real or of life by replacing it with a study of the formulas of Bergson. In this way, Gilson wants to avoid the type of enthusiasm that flows from philosophical insight which risks converting philosophy from a study of reality into a study of philosophy or one system of philosophy. Philosophy due to its

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[76] "Nous le pouvais grace a l'instinct" *BL*.
[77] "Bras est invisible pour nous; de meme la vie." *BL*.
[78] "La tacite est necessaire, elle c'est par la plus profonde." *BL*.
[79] "Est-ce la vérité définitive?" *BL*.
[80] "Ne va-t-elle pas par des decouvertes nouvelles donner au nous l'illusion que le mouvement et la vie tiennent dans ses formules?" *BL*.

insight has the perpetual risk of becoming a mere study of words and systems instead of reality. Gilson here points to this danger even with Bergson's philosophy.

In answer to these ultimate questions, Gilson observes that the system of Bergson stands on a highpoint in the great oscillations of human thought between reason and a faculty beyond reason, like Bergson's intuition, that characterizes the history of philosophy.[81] Gilson observes,

> This is one of the grand oscillations of human thought. An effort to run away with the real; discouragement and the effort to attain the real beyond intelligence. This is Plotinus before Aristotle; Bonaventure at the same time as St. Thomas Aquinas; Pascal after Descartes; Bergson after Auguste Comte. Such is the place of human thought and in spite of its predictable eclipses it will conserve its place.[82]

Reason confidently tries to exhaust or run away with the real with its conceptual formulas yet when it does not attain the whole of the real this leads to discouragement. Then a reactionary effort commences which attempts to attain the real with something beyond intelligence, like mysticism in Plotinus, faith in Bonaventure, spiritual encounter with Pascal and metaphysical intuition in Bergson.[83] Gilson observes interestingly that this oscillation will continue and that this dynamic of oscillation is simply the lot of philosophy. Despite its predictable setbacks and eclipses, philosophy will always remain in this perpetual state of change and oscillation between intelligence and intuition or its equivalent. Human thought, according to Gilson's perspective, will never end with a formulaic system that will exhaust the real, nor, on the other hand, stop

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[81] *BL*.
[82] "C'est une des grandes oscillations de la pense humaine. Effort pour epuiser le réel; decouragement et effort pour atteindre le réel sans l'intelligence. C'est Plotin apres Aristotle; Bonaventure en meme temps que St Thomas d'Aquin; Pascal apres Descartes; Bergson aprés Auguste Comte. Telle est sa place et malgré les ecplises previsibles, il la conservera." *BL*.
[83] *BL*.

with a mystical experience or a type of trans-rational intuition that will demonstrate the fruitlessness of the attempt at the rational apprehension of the real.

Therefore, philosophy, according to Gilson, will endeavor to overcome Bergsonism and will succeed in doing so. Yet, Gilson observes that, for the present moment in history, "Bergsonism is a peak in human thought and perhaps the peak from which one perceives the grandest view of the universe."[84] Gilson, as always, is very sympathetic with and reverent to Bergson. It could be that the greatness of Bergson's philosophy consists precisely in clarifying the inner dynamic of the oscillation in the history of philosophy as deriving from an inner tension between thought and life. Or, it could be that Gilson is himself trying to overcome Bergson with this view of the history of philosophy as an on-going oscillation between intelligence and intuition. Either way, Gilson is presenting philosophy not as a definitive rational system that exhausts the real but as an on-going way of life seeking to comprehend the real and one that does not end.

Essai sur la vie intérieure (1920)

As we have seen the spirit of Bergsonism for Gilson hinges on seeing that intelligence has a natural incomprehension of life and therefore a fundamental tension between thought and life. As we have also seen the central problem in *Art et métaphysique* is that the essential life-giving, being-enriching, that is to say, the creative aspect of art is simply lost when aesthetic experience is viewed through the lens of science and thereby reduced to a kind of sub-par knowledge. In a certain way, one could say that analytical thought naturally kills the life in art,

[84] "La pensé humaine ne s'arrete pas. Ell va s'efforcer de surmounter le bergsonisme; elle y parviendra. Pour le moment il est une des cimes, peut-etre la cime dont ou peut apercevoir, de la vue la plus large, l'universe." *BL*.

just as it naturally misunderstands biological life because it is always tethered to the interests of practical order.

The problem of the tension between life and knowledge in the modern world, however, is not just a problem restricted to art, but also applies to the other life-giving functions of the human person like morality, love and religion. Gilson's war-time reflections on art seem to lead him to realize that the problem with art is also a problem within the human person in general. So in the *Essai sur la vie intérieure* Gilson looks at the problem of thought and life, or knowledge and creativity, not just in art, but in the human being in general by looking at the essential differences between art, morality, and religion, on the one hand, and common sense, science and philosophy, on the other hand.[85] In this way, the *Essai* is best understood as an expansion on the central theme of *Art et métaphysique* because it applies the problem of thought and knowledge to the whole human person and is a continuation of the theme of thought and life found in his P.O.W. lectures on Bergson.

The *Essai* is a fifty-five page *tour de force* of pure philosophy with very few erudite references and no scholarly notes, much like *Art et métaphysique.* Interestingly, very few Gilson scholars and biographers, even ones as outstanding as Shook or Murphy, have placed any special focus on the significance of the *Essai*. This is probably partly because the *Essai* is something of an anomaly in the Gilsonian corpus and that for several reasons. First, because it is a work of pure philosophy and departs from Gilson's usual style which is most often a mix of philology, history and philosophy. Second, it may be tempting to set this essay aside, because

[85] *Essai*.

Gilson later seems to depart from some of these early philosophical positions which are dependent on Bergsonian philosophy and evolutionary biology.

However, it is worth asking the question whether one can say that Gilson actually abandons these early philosophical positions, or if he just changes his language from Bergsonian metaphors to a more Thomistic way of speech. Once again, this question is hard to answer because Gilson never wrote another purely philosophical piece quite like the *Essai* again. Whatever the case may be, these early philosophical positions are interesting because they show the early thrust and spirit of Gilson's thought, in its seed form, so to speak, that matures in later years.

However, the work of Fr. Alex Yeung, L.C. is a remarkable exception to the general neglect of the *Essai* among contemporary Gilson scholars and should be given full credit for making the *Essai* popular again. Yeung makes a powerful synthesis of Gilson's thought centered on the *Essai* itself, claiming that the *Essai's* themes of submission and creativity in the human person are actually the spirit of Gilsonism.[86] Yeung also speculates that due to the *Essai* having a similar theme, style and tone to *Art et métaphysique* and *Du fondement des jugements esthétique* (1917) (a piece Gilson wrote at the German POW camp in Burg bei Magdeburg), Gilson may have written at least large sections of the *Essai* in the German POW camps during World War One, but with our present historical information on Gilson this is impossible to verify.[87]

Furthermore, Yeung also speculates, that because Gilson published the *Essai* when he was a professor at Strasbourg he may have published it in response to Bergson's personal challenge to him in a private meeting to write on religion. Gilson relates in his autobiography

[86] Yeung, 19.
[87] Yeung, 56.

that Bergson, in a private meeting after a lecture he gave at Strasbourg, challenged him to look into the philosophy of religion, a challenge which Gilson immediately responded to by turning the same challenge back to Bergson himself.[88] Nonetheless, Gilson does seem to have taken Bergson's challenge to heart in the *Essai* by making the specter of a tragic loss of religion in the twentieth century the culminating theme of the *Essai*.

Beside Yeung, Henri Gouhier, in a piece from 1949 in honor of Gilson on his sixty-fifth birthday, also gives some focus to the significance of the *Essai*. Gouhier's major thesis is that Gilson was not primarily a historian who later moved into philosophy as many think him to be, but that Gilson was a philosopher from the very beginning, starting with his personal encounter with Bergson.[89] As evidence that Gilson was a pure philosopher, Gouhier points to these three wartime essays: *Art et métaphysique* (1915), *Du fondement des jugements esthétique* (1917), and *Essai sur la vie intérieure* (1920). For none of these essays spends any significant time with the history of philosophy, nor do they give even a quick review of earlier views on their respective topics. Rather, as Gouhier points out, Gilson in these early essays, goes right to the place where his problems pose themselves, which is in the context of his very own life (at that time in the war), and not in the history of philosophy.[90]

Gouhier also argues that the progression of the three wartime essays shows that Gilson's philosophy springs from an inner necessity to know what makes a man an artist.[91] Nevertheless, as Gouhier argues, to fully answer the question of aesthetic experience, one must also investigate

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[88] Yeung, 58. *PT*, 166-7.
[89] *HPP*, 58-9.
[90] "Étienne Gilson va droit à sa question: il la prend là où elle se pose, et elle se pose dans sa vie et non dans l'histoire de la philosophie." *HPP*, 58.
[91] *HPP*, 58-9.

all the other functions of the mind. Therefore, one cannot really know the meaning of art without also knowing the meaning of science, metaphysics, morality and religion.[92] The *Essai*, according to Gouhier, then reveals to its readers that Gilson is a humanist-philosopher who is focused on the true nature of human dignity especially in the midst of war.[93] On this basis, Gouhier concludes his overall argument that Gilson did not naturally move from the discipline of history to philosophy, as many often suppose, but rather, Gilson first philosophizes in order, as he says, "to live with intelligence."[94] Gouhier here, in this final comment about Gilson, alludes to the underlying theme of the *Essai* itself which is that philosophy, and human thought in general, must be ultimately life-giving and ordered to enriching personal being and must also avoid destroying it.

Latter in his piece in honor of Gilson, Gouhier again discusses the *Essai* and this time he focuses on the content of the *Essai* by pointing out Gilson's interesting notion of religion as a producer of personalities, or as "literally a maker of men."[95] Gouhier observes that in the *Essai* Gilson sets himself in line with Comte and Nietzsche, both of whom raise civilization to the dignity of a philosophical problem because they simply cannot conceive of man outside of his history and culture.[96] Gilson indeed follows this line of thought with Comte and Nietzsche and like them deals directly with the consequences for humanity of a loss of religion in the modern soul. In the *Essai* Gilson observes that the extinction of religion would be the most dreadful

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[92] *HPP*, 59.
[93] *HPP*, 59.
[94] *HPP*, 59. "En même temps qu'il se classait comme historien de la philosophie, il philosophait pour vivre avec intelligence."
[95] "une faiseuse d'hommes." *HPP*, 64. Cf. *Essai*, 55. "Ce qui confère à la religion sa valeur et en assure la perpétuité, c'est qu'elle est essentiellement productrice de personnalités; elle est littéralement une faiseuse d'hommes."
[96] *HPP*, 64.

spiritual fall of the universe, for civilized man simply cannot fulfill his mission to enrich reality without a transcendent impulse.[97] Interestingly, Gouhier points out that Gilson's early idea of religion as the "maker of men" is the deep-seated origin of his later notion of Christian philosophy. For Gilson's notion of religion in the *Essai* is that it enriches and creates the person at the level of being. Thus if man is animated in his very being by the spirit of Christianity then all his activities will receive from Christianity a spiritual energy that strengthens them.[98]

Although it seems to be a passing comment, Gouhier is quite right to mention a possible parallel between Nietzsche and Gilson's *Essai*. For in the same way that we have seen that *Art et métaphysique* contains several parallels with *Geburt der Tragödie*, so too the *Essai* reveals even more striking parallels with Nietzsche's *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, especially in dealing with the theme of modern tension between thought and life.[99] There are also several parallels with the thought of the later Nietzsche in the *Essai*.[100]

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[97] *Essai*, 77-8.

[98] "Si l'homme civilisé est en quelque sorte animé dans son être par le souffle chrétien, il devient clair que toutes ses activités, sans perdre leur spécificité ni même leur caractère profane, doivent recevoir du christianisme une énergie spirituelle qui les fortifie." *HPP*, 65.

[99] Gilson comes close to quoting Nietzsche's *Vom Nutzen* when he talks about modern's trying to ground religion in "pure knowledge" and how religion gives up its proper place to the science of religions. *Essai*, 52-3. Nietzsche talks about history turning Christianity into 'pure knowledge' or just the knowledge of Christianity and evacuating from it all its power. *OTA*, 40. See also Nietzsche's idea that all action requires forgetting which is the inverse of Gilson's idea that in order to know one must cease to create. Cf. *Essai*, 25 and *OTA*, 10.

[100] Also Gilson seems to be influenced by the later Nietzsche as well for the penultimate paragraph in the *Essai* seems to be Gilson's response to Nietzsche's notion that God is dead. In addition Gilson uses the phrase 'will to liberation' (*volonté de liberté*) throughout the *Essai* that echoes Nietzsche's notion of the will to power. *Essai*, 34; 77-8. It is hard to say exactly why Gilson does not quote or refer to Nietzsche in these early essays, as he does Schopenhauer, but it was not very common for academic professional philosophers to quote Nietzsche or refer to him explicitly in their public writings prior to Heidegger's 1937 lectures on Nietzsche even though most all continental philosophers were reading Nietzsche during World War One and were heavily influenced by his work. Gilson shows his continued concern with the thought of Nietzsche in his later works where he engages him explicitly. See Étienne Gilson, "The Breakdown of Morals and Christian Education" p. 5, 1952, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto; Étienne Gilson, *The Terrors of the Year Two Thousand*, (Toronto: University of St. Michael's College, 1984); Étienne Gilson, "The Problem of the Non-Existence of God" 1968, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. Cf. *EG*, 378.

We will then look at the *Essai* through the lens of this early Nietzchean problem of the modern tension between thought and life. Among other things, this approach will show that the *Essai* is a cornerstone of Gilson's thought and will highlight Gilson's overriding concern with making thought and knowledge lead to life. Furthermore, a key part of Gilson's cultural project of seeking a unity of thought and life is to recover philosophy as a way of life. In this way, our present approach takes the suggestion of Gouhier to look at the *Essai* from the perspective of Nietzsche, as well as confirms Yeung's key insight that the *Essai* contains the spirit of Gilsonism.

Just like Nietzsche, and the Romantics before him, Gilson in the *Essai*, presents a portrait of modern critical reason as an element that dissolves life.[101] For the critical approach of reason tends to kill the life-giving and being-enriching functions of human life found in art, morality and religion by turning them into different forms of abstract knowledge.[102] Gilson systematically shows in the *Essai* how looking at art, morality and religion from the point of view of science inevitably turns them into different forms of inferior knowledge and robs their transformative power on the personal level. So, for example, the perspective of critical reason reduces art to a subjective representation of natural things and thus to a kind of mere game, with no end other than personal charm or fun. Morality, under the same treatment, becomes a series of sentimental feelings and preferences that illegitimately seek to present themselves as objective laws of

[101] Gilson uses different forms of the word 'dissolve' (*dissoudre*) seven times throughout the *Essai* to describe the destructive action of critical reason. *Essai*, 42, 51, 52, 56, 70. Gilson's primary metaphor for critical reason is comparing it to "a ferment of dissolution" (*un ferment de dissolution*) to describe its treatment of life, being and the creative human functions which produce them. *Essai*, 42.
[102] Cf. *OTA*, 40.

human action. Religion, finally, is reduced to a mere "dust-pile" of historically explainable facts which are interesting but no longer relevant to human life based on reason alone.[103]

However, this modern critical approach completely misunderstands the essence of these functions which, according to Gilson, is not to know nature but, quite the contrary, to surpass it and create a super-nature.[104] For instance, the whole point of religion, according to Gilson, is not to know or submit to nature but rather to transcend it.[105] If science views religion as an infantile or inferior way to know reality, then it completely misses its creative essence. For science deliberately limits its outlook to the material products which art, morality and religion create and therefore renders itself simply blind to their inner creative action. Since science does not have the eyes to see their creative aspects and processes it often decides to simply deny their existence.[106] Gilson even goes as far as to argue that these creative functions—through civilization, education, culture and history—literally create aesthetic sensibility, moral will and personalities on the level of formal cause.[107] These creative functions give birth to personal progress and generate new realities, and since for Gilson life is "progress and generation of new realities" by reducing these functions to knowledge, critical reason ends up dissolving life itself and the inward structure of the human person.[108] The overarching problem for Gilson in the *Essai*, then, is how to deal with the inherent tension between thought and life as it has manifested itself within the modern context.

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[103] *Essai*, 23.
[104] *Essai*, 25-6.
[105] *Essai*, 23.
[106] *Essai*, 24.
[107] *Essai*, 43-56.
[108] "la vie est progrès et génération de réalités nouvelles;" *Essai*, 26.

However, the present situation of dissolution has created an initial difficulty for Gilson. Which is how to present a proper solution to a problem that most of his readers, looking through the eyes of critical reason, do not even see as a problem. So if, for instance, Gilson, from the very beginning, would present a picture of an easy balance between the orders of creation and knowledge, then the revolutionary nature of this solution will still be lost on his modern audience, who would still habitually tend to see art, morality and religion through the lens of scientific reason. Gilson is up against a form of inertia in modern culture that tends to solve every problem by means of critical reason.

This difficulty of communicating that there is even a problem in the first place to his modern audience seems to be the reason Gilson departs from his usual mode of rhetoric where he usually begins his writing with a slower, more entertaining opening that alludes to the denser philosophical content that will appear later. Instead, Gilson begins the essay by jarring the modern reader with a stark philosophical distinction that sounds like a sharp separation between the orders of knowledge and creation as functions of the human mind.[109] Gilson begins the *Essai* in the following way:

> Among the functions of the human mind some are functions of knowledge while others are functions of creation. To the first group belongs common sense, the sciences, metaphysics and in general all the systems of thought which present themselves as expressions and translations of reality. From the latter proceeds art, morality, religion and in general all the systems of thought which do not propose to represent the real, but to enhance and transform reality by enriching it.[110]

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[109] *Essai*, 23.

[110] "Parmi les fonctions de l'esprit humain, les unes sont des fonctions de connaissance, les autres sont des fonctions de création. Des premières dépendent le sens commun, les sciences, la métaphysique, et généralement tous les systèmes de pensées en tant qu'ils se donnent comme des expressions et des traductions de la réalité. Des dernières

Gilson claims, then, that most of our present philosophical difficulties can be attributed to the common confusion of these two orders. These mistakes consist in either attributing the products of creation to the order of knowledge, or the products of knowledge to order of creation; and, either judging the order of creation from the point of view of knowledge, or judging the order of knowledge from the point of view of creation.[111] Although a few thinkers, like Nietzsche, tend to attribute the products of knowledge to the order of creation, most modern thinkers tend to instinctually judge the order of creation in terms of knowledge.

Gilson makes a very important point about the rhetorical necessity of his present analytical approach when he says,

> The more exact determination of the relations which bring them together will constitute without a doubt one of the capital tasks of the critical philosophy of tomorrow; but today it appears necessary to recognize the originality of each in themselves.[112]

Because the modern historical situation has created a strong tendency to confuse the two orders, the more urgent task for Gilson presently is to analytically separate them in order to see their true natures in their own integrity.

Gilson, here in so many words, and in other places in the *Essai* where he calls himself an "contemporary anti-rationalist," is acknowledging that the present historical situation has forced him to overplay his hand, so to speak, on the rhetorical level.[113] Hence, Gilson separates these two functions that in their formal structure look exactly the same. These spiritual functions are

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proviennent l'art, la morale et la religion et généralement tous les systèmes de pensées en tant qu'ils ne se proposent point de représenter le réel, mais de l'accroître et de le transformer en l'enrichissant." *Essai*, 23.

[111] *Essai*, 23.

[112] "La détermination plus exacte des rapports qui les unissent constituera sans doute l'une des tâches capitales de la philosophie critique de demain; mais il apparaît dès aujourd'hui nécessaire de recconaître l'originalité de chacun d'eux." *Essai*, 23.

[113] *Essai*, 56.

easily confused because, as Gilson argues later, they take place in the same person who knows and creates in the same manner of feeling, perceiving, abstracting, and reasoning.[114] This means in their structure the spiritual functions of an artist and a scientist have the same form and therefore from a purely formal perspective they look exactly alike. This is why people who approach the problem in a purely formal way will always miss the essential difference between them.

Nevertheless, Gilson argues that the functions of the interior life are better specified, not by their formal structure, but by their goals which from this perspective make them look completely different.[115] In other words, the two orders are really two different attitudes, one theoretical and the other more poetic, taken on by the same faculty of reason and so are easily confused when looked at in terms of their form and not their ends.[116] Therefore, before any synthesis can take place, the specificity of the two orders in terms of their ends, and not their form, must be seen in its own integrity. For most of the *Essai*, then, Gilson uses much of his rhetorical energy to extricate art, morality and religion from their deep entanglements with the order of knowledge and presents them as radically separate and much more valuable than science. Only at the end of the *Essai* does Gilson attempt a reconciliation of the two orders.[117]

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[114] *Essai*, 26.
[115] *Essai*, 26. We see here again Gilson's philosophical tendency to judge a things nature not primarily by its form but by its end or the results it produces. One could say that Gilson has a philosophical preference for final cause over formal cause or existential reality over form.
[116] *Essai*, 26.
[117] *Essai*, 73-6. It is clear that the later Gilson never jettisoned his early idea of the two orders of creation and knowledge. For in an unpublished lecture Gilson criticizes the *Imitation of Christ,* a work he read during the First World War, as he often does, for pitting faith and action against reason and contemplation in a false antimony because the author is as Gilson says, "comparing two incommensurable orders of reality." "On Moral Progress", Lecture Given in West Hall at University College, March 17, 1964, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. Étienne Gilson, "Thomism Today" p. 6, Lecture Given At Assumption University, November 27, 1966, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's Library, Toronto. Cf. Étienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 88-92.

To demonstrate the problem of the confusion of knowledge and creation Gilson presents an interesting, and admittedly rather poetic, history of the relations between the two orders in such a way that highlights the superiority of the creative order. Gilson observes that the reason religion and art developed so magnificently during the whole period of human history, before the advent of science, is not because they were preparing for the era of more exact modes of knowledge, as many scientist would suppose, but rather because, as Gilson says, "it is less natural for the human mind to know than to create."[118]

According to Gilson, it is indeed quite natural for the human mind to be primarily focused on creation because it is moved to continue the work of the "fecund forces" or the é*lan vital* which created, and continues to create, the universe.[119] (Here we see once again the mystery of creation, especially under its immanent aspect, as the basis of Gilson's philosophy.) The human mind participates in the cosmic act of creation not by accepting nature as it is, like science does, but by seeking to bring about a new universe of a superior order.[120] As evidence of the natural human preference for creation over knowledge, Gilson points out that it has always been the natural inclination of both children and primitive man to construct imaginary worlds rather than to study the real world.[121] This is because knowledge requires a renunciation of the essence of the mind which is not to know but to create. As Gilson says,

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[118] "Si, pendant toute la période de l'histoire humaine qui précède l'avènement de la science, l'art et la religion se sont magnifiquement développés, ce n'est point qu'ils préparaient librement l'ère des connaissances exactes, mais parce qu'il est moins naturel à l'esprit de connaître que de créer." *Essai*, 25.
[119] "forces fécondes." *Essai*, 25.
[120] *Essai*, 25.
[121] *Essai*, 25.

> knowledge was only able to be born in later epochs because it presupposes a temporary renunciation of the mind in its more profound essence: man is only able to know if he refrains from creation.[122]

Given this history, the question arises how science and philosophy even came about if they require a renunciation of the deepest essence of the human mind? To answer this Gilson brings his rather poetic genealogy up to the modern-day situation in the following way. Knowledge, much like an ambitious but neglected little brother, being aware of its tremendous power and utility, tended to stake its claim by making all the products of human thought into problems that it alone could resolve.[123] Then after having established the monopoly over solving all problems, knowledge finally claimed the absolute right to pose all real problems.[124] Thus art, religion and morality were stripped of the right to even pose a single problem about reality and life much less provide a solution to one. However, according to Gilson, now that science has thoroughly established itself, the time has come for it to relent on its monopoly on all human problems, and let art, morality and religion live in peace because science now has nothing to fear from them.[125]

Yet, Gilson points out that this new era of peace between science and the creative order can only take place if knowledge changes its dominating attitude rooted in the fear of being marginalized. This is only possible, according to Gilson, by means a deeper self-understanding by the order of knowledge of its own nature and its limits. For this to arise there must be a clear

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[122] "…la connaissance ne pouvait naître qu'à des époques tardives parce qu'elle suppose une renonciation temporaire de l'esprit à son essence la plus profonde: l'homme ne peut connaître que s'il se retient de créer." *Essai*, 25.
[123] *Essai*, 25.
[124] This passage is very close to the thought of Henry Adams who speaks of science promising to solve the problem of unity but then when it cannot solve it it simply denies that it is a problem as all and so monopolizes the right to pose all problems. *EHA*, 1113-7; 1130-41. Adams was also was influenced by Bergson and was even acquainted with him personally like Gilson. Samuels, 456; 275; 417.
[125] *Essai*, 25.

perception that knowledge remains situated in a totally different order than creation. What science needs to clearly come to understand is that the distinctive aspect of the order of knowledge is that it accepts the real and submits to it in order to domesticate it.[126] Additionally, science must also realize that knowledge does not seek primarily to change nature nor work to institute a supernatural order like art, religion and morality primarily do.[127]

As a side note, it seems that practical action here, for Gilson, to which science is always tethered in the Bergsonian framework, is not considered creation; or it could be that knowing an object for the sake of practical action has two phases and in its first moment is still simply an act of submitting to the real prior to any action upon it.

After a rich genealogical introduction to his major distinction in section I which we have just discussed,[128] Gilson describes his notion of the interior life by looking at its form, means and effects in sections II-IV.[129] Then in sections V-VI Gilson first provides a rather sympathetic description of the modern scientific notion of the interior life that is based on the 'will to liberation,' and then presents his critique of it and then his more aesthetic and holistic alternative to it.[130] Next, in sections VII-IX, Gilson goes into greater detail on art, morality and religion and shows how they are the primary means for the transformation of the interior life. Gilson

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[126] *Essai*, 25-6. "Elle le pourrait surtout si elle s'apercevait clairement, située dans un autre ordre, acceptant le réel, s'y soumettant pour le domestiquer, mais sans le changer de nature, et non point travaillant à l'instauration d'une surnature."

[127] The deeper rhetorical problem for Gilson is that he is employing the order of knowledge to advocate for the superiority of the order of creation. In other words, in a certain way Gilson is using philosophy to advocate for a return to poetry. This tends to keep the reader attached to seeing poetry from the perspective of philosophy and thereby never making the move from the order of knowledge to the order of creation which Gilson wants to effect in his readers. In a certain way, the real problem is that Gilson is employing the order of knowledge to bring about a personal and cultural change that only the order of creation is capable of carrying out. Yet, on the other hand, the order of creation cannot take on this task without first understanding its true nature. This seems to be one of the reasons why Gilson uses a poetic-philosophical approach in the *Essai* and in all his writings.

[128] *Essai*, 23-6.

[129] *Essai*, 26-34.

[130] *Essai*, 34-43.

describes art as the hygiene and source of sensibility; morality as the hygiene and maker of the will; and religion as the hygiene and creator the personality.[131] Then in an extended section X, Gilson gives an explanation of the role of reason in the interior life from the perspective of common sense, science and then philosophy in the usual Bergsonian epistemological progression.[132] Finally, in section XI, Gilson concludes with a very insightful reflection on the metaphysical foundation and justification of the interior life employing an analogy that sketches a comparison between the principles of the interior life and the principles of the universe.[133] For just as the interior life cannot be reduced to either creativity or knowledge, but is based on a balance between the two; so too the real is neither the creative *élan* (pure potency) nor the determined form (actuality) but their combination.

Forgoing a more comprehensive analysis of the *Essai* for another time, we will focus in on the ways Gilson presents philosophy as a way of life in the *Essai* and more specifically on how he distinguishes the philosophical life as a special form of interior life. Then we will make some final observation on how this relates the order of interior life to the metaphysical order.

In section II Gilson begins the body of the work with another less historical and more cosmological genealogy of the interior life. Gilson observes that one must not look to science, or even philosophy, to properly understand the interior life but to the inner principle of life itself which is an immanent metaphysical principle that creates the world. Gilson says, "…for life is progress and generation of new realities; life marches on and does not return itself willingly to

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[131] *Essai*, 43-56. Gilson's use of the term *hygiène* is very close to Nietzsche's "hygiene of life" or "*Gesundheitslehre des Lebens"* [italics original] that must help science be properly ordered to fostering the life that it presupposes and help a culture suffering from its "historical sickness" due to too much history. *Vom Nutzen,* 145.
[132] *Essai*, 56-76.
[133] *Essai*, 76-8

regard the trace of its path."[134] Once again, Gilson presents life as having both a natural resistance to being known as well as a lack of interest in knowing or reflecting on itself.

Gilson presents his genealogy of life in the following way. The metaphysical principle of life, according to Gilson, at the level of being creates a hierarchy of increasing complexity and indeterminacy that culminates in animals and finally in man as the "free and thinking animal."[135] Man is given the highest spiritual powers for his activity which are not treasures to be buried, or merely contemplated, but riches to invest and forces to put to work for his own perfection.[136] In this way, Gilson presents the human being in the ancient Stoic tradition, much like Hadot, as being set apart from animals, whose activities are predetermined by nature, by having an indeterminate nature consisting of an ensemble of tendencies and powers that often end up in conflict with one another.[137]

There arises then a natural human need to form and coordinate these spiritual forces. This is done first in children through education which shapes them according the moral ideal of a society. For many people, according to Gilson, constituting the self according to this social ideal of normalcy is quite enough to organize the ensemble of tendencies in the interior life. For these conventional men, then, the highest aspiration is to be the following: in matters of art, a man of good taste; in moral matters, to be called an honest man; and in matters of religion, to be a man of good thinking or orthodoxy.[138] Duty to this societal-conventional ideal is the highest

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[134] "…car la vie est progrès et génération de réalités nouvelles; elle marche et ne se retourne point volontiers pour regarder la trace de ses pas." *Essai*, 26.
[135] "L'homme, animal pensant et libre, constitute la réussite la plus complète de l'évolution naturelle." *Essai*, 26.
[136] *Essai*, 27.
[137] *Essai*, 27.
[138] Essai, 27.

aspiration for conventional men regardless of culture. For Gilson this is merely a preliminary stage of the interior life.

Yet, according to Gilson there is a second higher stage of the interior life which moves beyond stage of duty to the conventional ideal. The mind becomes dissatisfied with the structure it has received from society often from an incongruity between the conventional ideal and the real. The mind wanting to correct this incongruity, then decides to raise itself up to the level of a "psychic organism" that is capable of contributing to the greater perfection of the universe itself.[139] Gilson says,

> To the initial scattering of states of conscience or to their partial coordination, it [the interior life] substitutes its hierarchical organization according to the plan which it has assigned to oneself.[140]

The interior life begins an effort that brings about a second birth of a new self, the perfection of which depends on three elements: the richness of the powers of sense and sensibility; the degree of organization of these powers; and the plasticity to assimilate any new riches it may receive and hence modify its organization according to them.[141]

However, this second stage of the interior life as described here is still not the philosophical life for Gilson. Whereas this second stage may be roughly equivalent to popular Stoic understanding of the 'cultivation of the self' which is the care of the self rising to a popular

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[139] *Essai*, 27.

[140] " A un éparpillement initial des états de conscience ou à leur coordination partielle, elle substitue leur organisation hiérarchique selon le plan qu'elle s'est à soi-même assigné." *Essai*, 27.

[141] *Essai*, 28. Gilson notion of human beings forming second births or spiritual nativities in themselves is very close to Nietzsche's notion in the final section of *Vom Nutzen* man must organize the chaos within his soul according to his deeper needs. Nietzsche admires the Greeks because they understood the human need for a new and improved nature and that culture provides this new an improved nature. The virtue of the Greeks was that they assimilated all the other aspects of the cultures around them and did not succumb under their weight but forged out of them a new culture. *Vom Nutzen*, 148. This is very close to Gilson's view of human nature assimilating a new nature out of the givens of its time.

level, this is not the case for Gilson, who actually sees this second stage as having a natural conflict or rivalry with the philosophical life.[142] From Gilson's perspective the interior life does not adhere to only one moral ideal nor is it simply science nor philosophy.[143] For as Gilson points out, the interior life can develop in a mind that is "extremely poor" or weak and this shows that reflection on the self is not a necessary condition for the interior life.[144] In fact, philosophy is oftentimes taken as dangerous, or at least inferior, to the interior life especially by a true mystic who, as Gilson says, "would not exchange the least of his interior progress for broader or deeper knowledge because he cannot apply a common measure to knowledge and to life."[145] It should be noted that in this latter statement Gilson explicitly admits here of a tension between knowledge and life much like the early Nietzsche speaks of the "contradiction between life and knowledge" and the notion that culture can only grow and bloom out of life and not out of knowledge.[146]

Despite admitting a tension between knowledge and life, and the superiority of life to knowledge, Gilson does not go so far as to present an irreconcilable contradiction or incompatibility between the two as Nietzsche does in *Vom Nutzen*. Although Gilson's purpose in this early section is just to sketch the contours of the interior life itself, he actually seems to foresee a kind of third stage in the process of development of interior life where philosophy steps in as an auxiliary to the primary means of the interior life which are art, morality and religion.

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[142] *CS*, 39-54.
[143] *Essai*, 28.
[144] *Essai*, 28. "Elle peut se développer avec une intensité et une fécondité admirables dans un esprit d'une extrême pauvreté et la réflexion qu'elle peut exercer sur soi-même n'est pas une condition nécessaire de son existence."
[145] "Tout au contraire, le mystique véritable n'échangerait pas le moindre de ses progrès intérieurs pour les connaissances les plus étendues ou les plus profondes parce qu'il ne saurait appliquer une commune mesure à connaissance et à la vie." *Essai*, 28.
[146] "Widerspruch von Leben und Wissen." *Vom Nutzen*, 141.

The ideal of the philosophical life, then for Gilson, is not one that begins by an implicit or explicit renunciation of the religious life of a mystic—as it is for Strauss, and the later Hadot—and then replacing religion with the intellectual life of philosophy. For Gilson, rather, the philosophical life brings knowledge in as a tool to complement the interior life created by religion, art and morality. In fact, it would be quite contrary to the philosophical life to renounce the functions of religion, art, and morality within the culture. Based on this model, the philosophical life then would be a balanced perfection of the interior life, which ideally would be, as he says, "to mix the ardor of the simple in mind with the depth of speculation and the breadth of science."[147]

Although the interior life itself need not become a speculative philosophical life, it must not go to the extreme, as Gilson points out, of enclosing itself within the limits of a voluntary ignorance which would be deliberately small-minded.[148] On the other end of the spectrum, Gilson points out that the philosophical or scientific life must not immerse itself so profoundly into the contemplation of things that one loses the desire to enhance one's life.[149] It seems that Gilson here is trying to avoid the two pitfalls of either the willful ignorance called for at times, in the *Imitation of Christ,* which he references in the *Essai;* or the action-killing ponderous contemplation of a Hamlet. However, due to the inherent tension between thought and life, it is often a challenge for mystics and scientists to recognize these two extremes as pitfalls for their interior life which Gilson is highlighting here.

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[147] "L'idéal serait d'allier l'ardeur qu'apporte souvent le simple en esprit dans la poursuite du progrès intérieur, à la profondeur de la spéculation et à l'étendue de la science." *Essai*, 28.
[148] *Essai*, 28.
[149] "Du moins convient-il de ne pas enfermer dans les limites d'une ignorance volontaire, la portée d'un effort délibérément mesquin, et de ne pas s'abîmer si profondément dans la contemplation des choses qu'on en perde le goût de les améliorer." *Essai*, 28.

Having acknowledged the natural difficulty between the mystic and the philosopher, Gilson roots it in the metaphysical tension between life and thought itself and then attempts to harmonize these two orders which he readily acknowledges is a very difficult task.[150] For it is not without good reason, Gilson observes, that "interior people" have always shown a manifest mistrust with regard to rational speculation.[151] For especially in a scientific age, but also in the Middle Ages, Gilson points out that science always carries within it a tendency to puff itself up and intellectual curiosity tends to captivate all the activities of the mind and thereby snuff out any desire for interior progress.[152] In this way, philosophy and science are seen as the enemies of the interior life instead of its servants.

For example, Gilson observes that some theologians, enamored with knowledge, put faith above mores, and modern intellectuals often speak of the artist and the good man as being something of the past that will eventually be replaced by the scientist or savant.[153] Gilson observes that while we must not slight any of the joys and beauties of knowledge, we must not also forget that it is chiefly by the creative functions of art, morality and religion that we are elevated, enriched and brought to the perfection of our human essence.[154] Gilson here reminds us that it is important to always remember that we realize our human essence more in the least bit of creation than in attaining a whole science of things.[155] Knowing on its own cannot perfect our essence, according to Gilson, nor, for that matter, can it build a culture.

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[150] *Essai*, 29.
[151] *Essai*, 29.
[152] *Essai*, 29.
[153] *Essai*, 29.
[154] *Essai*, 30.
[155] *Essai*, 30.

Yet, what then is the good of philosophy and knowledge if it does not bring about perfection in the human person? Due to the present dominance of science, Gilson can only answer this question after having firmly established the necessity and superiority of the order of creation with regard to the growth of the human person and culture. This is where most of Gilson's rhetorical energy is directed in sections I-IX. In other words, in the first and larger part of the *Essai*, Gilson shows that the interior life consists in living the moral, aesthetic and religious life and not in merely thinking about them. Only then does Gilson start to talk about philosophy offering an important service to the interior life by analyzing the nature, activity and effects of the creative forces of art, morality and religion.[156] Gilson also states that this service of philosophy to art, morality and religion is precisely how the functions of knowledge and creation come into accord with one another.[157] In other words, for Gilson, it is the special vocation of philosophy, so to speak, to harmonize thought and life. In this way, philosophy is never just mere contemplation but always ordered to sustaining and helping organize the interior life. Philosophy serves morality, art and religion by grounding them in the real. Once philosophy gets cut off from life, and becomes a mere contemplative knowing, then it loses its true nature as a way of life. By connecting philosophy back with art, morality and religion, Gilson is restoring philosophy to its true vocation as a way of life.

Gilson then lays out the criterion that an interior discipline like philosophy will only be considered fruitful to the extent that it creates in us an enrichment, or a change in personal being

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[156] Here we see Gilson in 1920, thirty years before his so called 'turn to theology' arguing that philosophy in its very nature is supposed to be the service of religion and therefore any good philosopher must also be, to some degree, first a good theologian in order to analyzing the nature of religion.
[157] *Essai*, 31.

for the better.[158] This is much like Nietzsche's 'Goethean principle' in *Vom Nutzen* covered above, where he rejects all forms of knowledge that do not quicken or increase his activity.[159]

At first glance, it could seem here that since Gilson presents philosophy as primarily a knowing that his point is exactly the opposite of Hadot. In other words, it may seem that Gilson does not want philosophy, which is in the order of knowledge, to fall into the misunderstanding that it falls in the order of life. However, this is to miss the larger point Gilson wants to make here in the *Essai* which is that philosophy must always be ordered to life just as all knowledge must be ordered to and serve life. Philosophy viewed in an abstract way may be in a different order than life, but concretely lived, philosophy must always serve human perfection and never be a mere knowledge that does not also enrich the person who knows and creates culture.

By giving the order of creation a primacy over the order of knowledge, both on the temporal and ontological level, Gilson here seems to be siding with the Romantics, Nietzsche and Henry Adams in choosing faith, art and poetry as the primary basis of human life and culture over against reason and science. Gilson's approach on precisely this point contrasts with Strauss and Hadot who see the philosophical life as a replacement for religion or an alternative way of life that is primarily based on reason. For Gilson does not see reason as the point of departure for the interior life, or for that matter the philosophical life, both of which begin in a pre-rational choice, which would make him a "decisionist." According to Gilson the human being chooses an "ideal type" like that of an ascetic like St. Bernard, or that of a Renaissance intellectual like

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[158] *Essai*, 30.
[159] "«Übrigens ist mir alles verhaßt, was mich bloß belehrt, ohne meine Tätigkeit zu vermehren oder unmittelbar zu beleben.«" *Vom Nutzen*, 75.

Campanella or Erasmus.[160] From the very moment of this decision, Gilson says, "an interior force goes to work in the manner of a vital power which works on a vegetable seed or embryo."[161] This force of life flowing from this choice drives a work of assimilation whereby it takes in or feeds on all that enlarges this image and it rejects and eliminates all that impedes its accomplishment.[162]

It is only at this point, after this choice of an ideal type—that would be provided either by culture, society, art, poetry, religion, or revelation—does reason come in to play, not as the foundation of the ideal, but as an auxiliary in helping the process of assimilation and equilibrium especially when it makes contact with the real. Thus in a statement that purposely sounds rather abrasive to the modern ear, Gilson says: "The normal state of the personality is not therefore freedom but servitude to itself, the submission to its constitutive law; the acceptance of the form which makes it be."[163] Reason then submits to this law and serves it as a system of principles and consequences that creates a hierarchy. This hierarchy in turn traces an interior circle within which is the truth, which is anything that is compatible with the law of the personality, and outside of which is error, which is anything inimical to the personality.[164]

Again, in a manner rather abrasive to the modern ear, Gilson concludes that "the normal and healthy state of reason is dogmatism."[165] However, dogmatism here for Gilson is not a blind doctrinal stubbornness, but a series of necessary relations flowing from an inner law that bind

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[160] *Essai*, 33.
[161] *Essai*, 33.
[162] *Essai*, 33-4.
[163] "L'état normal de la personalité n'est donc pas l'affranchissement, mais la servitude de soi-même, la soumission à sa loi constitutive; l'acceptation de la forme qui fait être." *Essai*, 43. This submission to a constitutive law seems to show some influence of Durkheim's sociology which sees social laws as independent realities.
[164] *Essai*, 43.
[165] *Essai*, 43.

our assent. It is the job of reason, then, to manage a rational equilibrium of the relations between the law of the personality and the external world to which it must assimilate itself. Reason submits to the law.[166] Reason's job sometimes involves a time of doubt that leads to a violent change in the personality, but this still moves to another new state of dogmatism or equilibrium in the manner of all biological entities. For Gilson, there is never a purely rational state free from dogmatism and the purposeful maintenance of such a violent state in perpetuity, in the Straussian manner, would be undesirable.[167] Gilson here departs from any position akin to that of Strauss who, as discussed above, more than anyone else sees the philosophical life as remaining in a precarious state of flux between dogmatism, on the one hand, and total skepticism, on the other.

What this position implies is that pure scientific truth is not the ultimate goal or object of reason. Rather reason's primary concern is the life of the psychological organism which it serves and its primary duty is to help it organize its powers and assimilate to its environment. In a word, reason is less concerned with truth than with life. As Gilson says later in the *Essai*:

> First of all reason wants to live, that is to say, it wants to differentiate itself and to organize itself according to its own laws; but it is only able to do this in frequently abandoning the plane of knowledge, which is that of discipline and constraint, in order to pass over into that of creation.[168]

This is why, for Gilson, when one looks at the breadth of the two domains, and the level of interest reason has in both, one rapidly concludes that reason, as he says, "knows very little and

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[166] This could reflect an influence by his teacher Durkheim who saw social laws as determining human life.
[167] *Essai*, 43.
[168] "C'est que d'abord la raison veut vivre, c'est-à-dire se différencier et s'organiser selon ses propres lois; mais elle ne peut le faire qu'en abandonnant fréquemment le plan de la connaissance qui est celui de la création." *Essai*, 60.

only loves knowledge a little."[169] Reason is thus directed more by what Gilson calls the "principle of organic assimilation" than by the "principle of non-contradiction."[170] The interest of reason for Gilson then is not so much to coincide with reality in an absolute way, but to coincide with reality to the degree that it is necessary for the sake of life. Reason, in other words, is not interested in knowledge alone but the knowledge that leads to life.

Gilson, at this point, in the *Essai* indeed sounds like an anti-rationalist and it may seem like he is on his way to giving up on the philosophical life and moving on to poetry or mysticism. On the contrary, however, Gilson's anti-rationalism here is actually necessary for defending the true life-giving nature of the philosophical life within the modern context where science dominates. Gilson indeed admits that his strong anti-rationalist rhetoric is necessary when dealing with the modern conception of reason which has attempted to make reason the whole of the human mind thereby actually dissolving the mind itself.[171] Gilson says, "The true cause of all today's efforts to contain reason in its proper limits lies in the efforts of yesterday to contain all things in the limits of reason."[172] From Gilson's perspective the present anti-rationalism is actually quite justified due to the excesses of reason. According to Gilson anti-rationalism is really just another form of realism that, like Kierkegaard, chooses being over knowledge. Gilson goes a step further than Kierkegaard, however, and wants to institute a similar form of realism on the level of the interior life where there is a decisive choice for the spiritual disciplines that lead to life over the science. In other words, there is a conscious choice for the order of creation over

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[169] "…qu'elle connaît peu de choses et qu'elle n'aime guère connaître." *Essai*, 60.
[170] *Essai*, 66-7.
[171] *Essai*, 56.
[172] La véritable cause de tous les efforts actuels pour renfermer la raison dans ses propres limites se trouve dans les efforts tentés hier pour renfermer toutes choses dans les limites de la raison. L'antirationalisme contemporain est avant tout un réalisme." *Essai*, 56.

the order of knowledge. Gilson's form of interior realism is driven by the fundamental fact that, as he says, "man refuses to be only what he knows…"[173]

With Gilson's hyperbolic separation of the two orders of creation and knowledge, he attempts to successfully show how reason and philosophy are both made to serve life and the creative functions. And although Gilson does at first give some vague intimations of his image of the philosophical life in the first part, he has still not offered a clear portrait of the philosophical life that specifies it from just a highly intellectual form of interior life. The question remains, what makes a philosopher different from just a well read mystic for Gilson? Or, what makes a philosopher different from a man of letters for Gilson? Gilson finally specifies how he understands the philosophical life in section X.[174] According to Gilson, most people are guided by reason in the form of common sense that is highly poetic and only theoretical to the degree that it must be for its life. However, there are other men on a second level whose reason tends toward a more organized or coherent interior life and then this leads to a third level which is achieved by a "final effort" which conducts a man's reason to philosophy itself.[175]

Gilson's early vision of the philosophical life

Gilson clearly specifies the philosophical life in section X of the *Essai* in the following way. First, just like in *Art et métaphysique* he begins by showing that philosophy is primarily knowledge and not creation like art. Although philosophy needs to be organized and can be beautiful, its worth as a philosophy stands or falls on the degree to which it is an accurate

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[173] "L'homme se refuse à n'être que ce qu'il connaît…" *Essai*, 56.
[174] See esp. *Essai*, 70-6.
[175] *Essai*, 66.

interpretation of reality.[176] Otherwise, Gilson observes that such a philosophy would just be an abstract poem.[177] Thus, philosophy in its primary intention is a knowledge. Philosophy is also even more a knowledge than science because it rises to the level of the highest principles or generalizations and because it uses the work of knowledge for what Gilson calls "the greater perfection of being."[178]

Thus, based on this preliminary reflection, Gilson asks a central question of what exactly are the conditions that make such a philosophical representation of the universe that interprets reality even possible in the first place? This is the point where Gilson moves from the abstract level of the idea of philosophy itself to the concrete level of the experience of the philosopher himself. First, Gilson observes that a philosophy is never created *ex nihilo*.[179] According to Gilson, a particular philosopher always begins with an initial conception of the world that is a combination of common sense, the science of his day, and the philosophical systems of his time. Some conventional men simply accept the conventional world view as is; other scientist types will explore and push for deeper and deeper riches all of their lives; while a third group of what he calls, "extraordinarily vigorous reasons" are philosophers who simply have no inner peace until they completely reform all these various systems of knowledge, "according to the exigencies of the real and their own personal needs."[180] Note here that the incongruence between

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[176] Gilson felt that it was not clearly established that something beautiful had to be connected to something true necessarily.
[177] *Essai*, 70.
[178] *Essai*, 71.
[179] *Essai*, 71.
[180] "pour quelques raisons extraordinairement vigoureuses enfin il n'y aura de paix intérieure et d'équilibre que dans une réforme complète de ces systèmes de connaissances selon les exigences du réel et de leurs propres besoins." *Essai*, 71-2.

the philosophy of the day and the real also becomes a deeply personal problem for the philosopher.

According to Gilson, every given philosophical system has deep causes that call for it being reformed. First, there are internal problems like contradictions and incongruences. For instance, there is the body-soul problem in Descartes, or the relations of sensible reality and the ideas in Plato. Second, there are external insufficiencies because every system attempts to accomplish what is basically impossible: embrace the totality of the real. The first reason this is impossible is the inherent limited perspective of the philosopher. Gilson notes that, due to the problem of limited perspective, what actually ends up happening is that each philosopher ends up articulating one aspect of reality better than the others. Also owing to the inherent limits of personal perspective philosophers will often draw upon another spiritual discipline that plays the role of a director, such as science, sociology, art or religion. These other points of view, then, help complete the naturally limited view of the philosopher.[181]

The second, and even more serious external problem for philosophy is that the reality it is attempting to embrace in its totality is itself in a perpetual state of becoming.[182] As an example of reality changing Gilson points out that religious reality was the highest reality in the Middle Ages but in the 19th century the highest reality was science. Also neither religion nor science are in static states. For example, the religion of Augustine is simply not the same as that of Thomas Aquinas, just as in the same way science is not the same for Descartes as it is for Darwin.[183] In the same way, art for Plato is simply different from contemporary art. Thus

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[181] *Essai*, 72.
[182] *Essai*, 72.
[183] *Essai*, 72.

philosophical systems are constantly changing and adjusting themselves to the constant change of reality itself. Furthermore, according to the Bergsonian philosophy of evolution, on the physical level reality is also constantly changing due to the constant impulsion of the *élan vital*.

Gilson then moves to the subjective level considering the personal needs of the philosopher himself that is part of what drives philosophy. For Gilson it is not just on the abstract level that the tension between a given conventional philosophical conception of the world and reality itself is felt. Rather, this tension is only felt in a concrete reason. Gilson says, "it also primarily the deficiency of adaptation of a concrete reason to his milieu and this same reason experiences an impossibility that it cannot continue to live without adapting itself."[184] In other words, for the philosopher the reform of philosophy to the exigencies of the real becomes deeply personal to the point that the philosopher's personal survival seems to depend on achieving this reform. The philosopher cannot live without reforming conventional wisdom according to truth, at least, within himself. So, for instance, for Thomas Aquinas it became a vital necessity for him personally, even a "biological" necessity, to organize the Catholic faith and Aristotle into a coherent doctrine.[185] Thus philosophers are not just particularly smart or intellectual people but people who seek truth for the sake of a fuller way of life and devote their whole life to truth. Gilson says that all philosophers "…are surely avid minds for knowing, but for whom knowledge is before all else a means of a more perfect and higher interior life. Their thirst for truth is only their thirst for being."[186] In this way, what starts out as a theoretical

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[184] "…c'est aussi et d'abord le manque d'adaptation d'une raison concrète à son milieu et l'impossibilité qu'elle éprouve de continuer à vivre sans s'y adapter." *Essai*, 73.
[185] *Essai*, 73.
[186] "…tous sont assurément des esprits avides de connaître, mais pour qui la connaissance est avant tout le moyen d'une vie intérieure plus parfaite et plus haute. Leur soif de vérité n'est que leur soif d'être;" *Essai*, 74.

function of reason to know truth in philosophy becomes, what Gilson calls, "poetic" in the sense that philosophers do philosophy not just to know more, but to *be more.* Philosophers tend to identify the perfection of their very being with the reform of conventional philosophy to the exigencies of the real. Thus reason moves from the theoretical to the poetic in the philosophical life and thereby brings the reconciliation between reason and the interior life. This reconciliation shows that the fight between science and the other creative disciplines is indeed not rooted in knowledge itself, as Nietzsche would hold, but in a disordered interior life that is doomed to perish.[187] In this way, philosophy properly understood indeed reconciles the orders of creation and knowledge in the thought of Gilson. In other words, philosophy as a way of life, as both a theoretical and poetic enterprise, reconciles the tension between thought and life in the thought of Gilson.

We see an example of this personal necessity in Gilson's own philosophical life. In a letter to professor John N. Deely, after reflecting that he sees no continuous thread from Aristotle and Thomas through Cajetan to contemporary epistemology, Gilson says,

> I simply have no philosophical use for what is not the plain realism and empirical method of Aristotle. I am not writing in order to convince others, but to achieve a clear awareness of what I think. I am not too successful even in doing that, and I very much admire the friends who, like Jacques Maritain and yourself, are trying to convert the Gentiles, but that kind of work is not for me. I have been educated by the Gentiles and I am always afraid to be reconverted by them to gentility.[188]

Gilson here talks about doing philosophy into order to achieve a clear awareness of what he thinks. This is in accord with his notion of philosophy in the *Essai* as coming from an inner exigence to perfect one's own being.

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[187] *Essai*, 75-6.
[188] Étienne Gilson to John N. Deely, 18 April 1973, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.

In the final section XI Gilson then makes a helpful analogy between the objective metaphysical level and the subjective level of the interior life and shows his realism on both levels.[189] Gilson argues that the real cannot be philosophically reduced to either the original *élan*, which is many and pure potency, that carries it along; nor to the form in which the *élan* gets fixed; but rather the fixing of this *élan* within this form.[190] In other words, the real, for Gilson, cannot be reduced to the potency of a raw creative energy nor can the whole of the real be reduced to the terminal act that is a determined unity. Rather, the real is the initial energy that realizes itself by determining itself, that is, the real is a two-fold reality of both potency and act. So in the heart of being itself there is a balance between creativity or pure potency and knowledge which is act. This seems to be a kind of early version in seed form of Gilson's notion of the real distinction between *esse* and essence with a thing not just being reduced to its form, nor to its act of being, but the combination of both.[191]

So too this metaphysical balance extends to the level of interior being or interior life. Interior being is not properly reduced to the original creative energy that drives it and enriches it. Nor can it be reduced to the specific form this energy takes in the person. Rather, the being or true reality is, as Gilson says, "the fixation of this *élan* in this form."[192] So, for example, Gilson argues that the artistic genius needs the work of art, just as much as the art needs the artistic

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[189] *Essai*, 78.
[190] *Essai*, 78.
[191] "Le réel total n'est ni l'élan originaire qui n'est plusieurs qu'en puissance, ni l'acte terminal qui est unité déterminée, il est dans cette énergie initiale qui se réalise soi-même en se déterminant. Le génie de l'artiste a besoin de sa l'oeuvre comme l'oeuvre a besoin du génie; la pensée du philosophe a besoin du système comme le système a besoin de sa pensée; dans la genèse du réel, aucun des deux éléments ne doit être envisagé sans l'autre. De même dans la genèse de l'être intérieur. Il n'est ni l'élan originel qui l'entraîne, ni la forme dans laquelle il se fixe, mais la fixation de cet élan dans cette forme." *Essai*, 78.
[192] *Essai*, 78.

genius.[193] So too, the thought of the philosopher needs the system just as much as the system needs his thought. Thus, for Gilson both elements need to be considered when looking at reality but also at art and even philosophy.

For philosophy then, in Gilson's eyes, the reality is both the energy that creates the system and the system itself. So a philosophy cannot be reduced to its words and arguments but also must be considered from the perspective of the personal needs and energy of the thinker himself whose apprehension of truth fixated itself in these words and arguments. For Gilson, then, philosophy can only be properly considered both in its genesis and in its final form. This is a fundamental distinction for Gilson's view of philosophy as a way of life. For Gilson refuses to reduce philosophy to its doctrinal phase or to its generative phase and therefore sees philosophy as a way of life. For the philosopher does philosophy for the perfection of his own being and the energy of this inner personal drive directs him to life the philosophical life. Also, for this reason, for Gilson, philosophy only exists in the philosopher himself living the philosophical life.

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[193] *Essai*, 78.

CHAPTER IX

Gilson's School of Philosophy

The Founding of the Institute of Mediaeval Studies (1929)

At the very same time that he published his reflections in the *Essai* on the restoration of philosophy as a means for fostering the interior life, Gilson also began to dream about an institute that would actually implement the ideas of the *Essai* in a concrete way.[1] This makes the *Essai* one of the foundational theoretical documents for Gilson's original vision of the Institute for Mediaeval Studies [IMS] in Toronto. Furthermore, the founding of his institute is also one of the main things that sets Gilson apart from the other life-philosophers we have covered. For he actually created a school intended to revive philosophy as a way of life and thereby renew Western culture whereas the other thinkers only spoke of it. Looking at IMS—or what later became known at PIMS after receiving pontifical status in 1939—from the perspective of the *Essai* also reveals how IMS was, in a certain way, Gilson's crowning achievement and his very own school of philosophy.

In this regard, for Gilson IMS was two things. First, it was a school of philosophy to foster an intellectual way of life much like Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, Justin Martyr's philosophical school in Rome, St. Clement's and Origen's Catechetical School of Alexandria, and Augustine's monastic school of philosophy.

Second—and maybe more importantly due to the wars and cultural breakdown that occurred in the twentieth century—IMS for Gilson was also a place dedicated to preserving

[1] *EG*, 95. Shook calls this Gilson's "dream" also in Laurence K. Shook, *Etienne Henry Gilson*, Gilson Collection, PIMS Library, Toronto, p. 4. Gilson calls the institute his dream in a letter to Perry: "My Institute of mediaeval studies is **no longer a mere dream**…[emphasis added] Formal opening: 29th September 1936. I am a happy man; more than happy: contented." 2 November 1935, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.

Western culture or a *translatio studii* much like the Northumbrian monastery of Bede the Venerable and the Palatine court of Charlemagne headed by Alcuin of York.[2]

So, in the same way that these great philosophers like Plato or Aristotle cannot be separated from the schools which they founded, so also Gilson cannot be separated from IMS. In other words, one cannot properly understand Gilson's view of philosophy as a way of life and the spirit of Gilsonism without also obtaining a clear understanding IMS as his school of philosophy and its goal of preserving Western culture.

Hence in the following chapter we will not focus so much on the details of the long history of IMS itself after 1929, but fix our attention on the development of Gilson's *original vision* of an institute for medieval studies between 1919 and 1929 when Gilson first conceived the dream of an institute and then made its foundation.

University of Strasbourg (1919-1921)

Not long after the World War One, Gilson became a professor of philosophy at the University of Strasbourg, teaching there from 1919 to1921. It was during this time, as mentioned above, that Gilson both published the *Essai* and also began to conceive of his dream of a philosophical institute intended to renew Western culture.[3] It is a difficult to pinpoint when exactly Gilson began to think about an actual institute but he certainly was thinking about how to

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[2] As proof that Gilson understood PIMS to be a translatio studii one need only look at an unpublished lecture he gave in the Fall of 1939 entitled: "The Classical Tradition from Cicero to Erasmus." Because war was in the air Gilson changed his lecture subject and focused on the transmission of classical humanism from Greece to Rome to England to France and now presumably farther west to North America to PIMS. In this lecture Gilson focused less on Augustine and Aquinas and more on the concrete founders of physical centers of learning that preserved Western classical culture like Aldhelm, Bede, Boniface, Alcuin, Abelard, John of Salisbury, Roger Bacon, Petrarch,and Coluccio Salutati and Erasmus. See *EGB*, 790-1.

[3] *EG*, 95.

renew Western culture through art, philosophy and medievalism in the trenches and as a prisoner in the German camps of World War One. However, it is most likely that after the restoration of peace, Gilson's dreams of the beginning a renewal of Western culture began to take concrete shape in the notion of an institute between 1919-1921 at the University of Strasbourg.

Whereas Shook sees Strasbourg as the origin of Gilson's dream of an institute, Michel is less certain about this and locates the origin of Gilson's dream later in his conversations with Théry and Chenu in November of 1924 about creating a medieval institute with the help of the French Dominicans possibly in Paris.[4]

Two important influences at Strasbourg seemed to have helped shape Gilson's idea of a institute of medieval culture. First, Gilson was one of the Lille professors sent on what was labeled "the Strasbourg mission."[5] After the treaty of Versailles, the Alsace region, along with its relatively new and beautiful German university founded by the German government in 1882, was awarded to France. Gilson and others were sent on a 'cultural mission' to change the German way of life into French way of life. Gilson himself as a philosopher was in charge of negotiating all the difficulties of moving the first two introductory years of philosophy back into the Lycées according to the traditional French model.[6]

Shook observes that Gilson thoroughly enjoyed this kind of challenge.[7] What is interesting to note about the Strasbourg mission for our present purposes is the fact that Gilson was directly involved in a mission of attempting to change culture through new forms of

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[4] *LPC*, 47.
[5] *EG*, 89.
[6] *EG*, 92.
[7] *EG*, 92.

education. In a word, Gilson was not just thinking about changing culture but actually doing it. Gilson also learned the concrete inward workings of the university system. This strongly practical aspect of the cultural mission seems to have influenced Gilson's decision to not just talk about the renewal of philosophy and culture but confidently found a school of philosophy that aimed at changing and renewing culture.

The second major influence on Gilson during his time at Strasbourg that helped conceive his ideal of an institute were the economic historians Lucien Febrve and Marc Bloch, who were Gilson's colleagues at Strasbourg. Bloch, who was closer to him in age, especially influenced Gilson in two important ways. First, Gilson at this point was a professionally trained historian of Cartesian philosophy who had a personal love for medieval thought. However, Gilson had no formal training in medieval studies and knew this was a large lacuna in his own education. According to Shook, Gilson basically received an informal training as a professional medievalist from Bloch during his two years at Strasbourg.[8] Part of the way Bloch trained Gilson was by regularly attending Gilson's classes on medieval philosophy where he criticized and corrected his methods often openly in front of Gilson's students.[9]

The second way Bloch influenced Gilson was his distinctively cultural approach to medieval history. Bloch saw himself not as a recorder of facts but as a historian of civilization who looked at the past in order to see how the facts of history have directly produced the situation of modern man.[10] Bloch, more specifically, looked at how the development of technology formed modern civilization and so focused his work on the details of water-mills,

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[8] *EG*, 94.
[9] *EG*, 94.
[10] *EG*, 94.

stirrups, harnesses, coins, and farming techniques to gain a perspective on the development of modern civilization and culture.[11] This no doubt strengthened Gilson's deep respect and personal taste for the importance of the minute details of history. Gilson, however, also shifted the focus of Bloch's method from an archeology of technology to an archeology of ideas found in the cultural nexus of medieval philosophy, theology, law, history, art, and literature. Gilson looked at how these medieval ideas had produced modern man. He also believed that reconnecting to these medieval systems of thought could also restore desirable aspects of medieval culture to modern man. In this way, it was partially Bloch who influenced Gilson to take an integrated approach to medieval studies instead of focusing just on the philosophy of one thinker. For Gilson knew that to understand a philosophy one must understand the whole culture. Gilson implemented this integrated approach to medieval culture at IMS with an multidisciplinary integrative approach. In 1929 at the founding of IMS Gilson says:

> The publicly avowed purpose of the Academy is that of encouraging the study of all phases of mediaeval civilization; and the official publication, *Speculum*, is one of best-known examples of how to do it. With a distinctively stronger emphasis on the history of ideas, the Institute of Toronto will simply try to carry on the program set forth by the Mediaeval Academy of America.[12]

It seems that Gilson originally learned the more integrated approach from Bloch, and not from Rand and Haskins at Harvard who founded the Mediaeval Academy of America. However, what is important to note here in this comment is that Gilson distinguishes himself from both Bloch and these Harvard professors by choosing to take the philosophy, theology, religion and literature of the time much more seriously than both Bloch and Haskins. In this regard, Gilson here is much more like another Harvard medievalist who also had an integrated approach to

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[11] *EG*, 94.
[12] Étienne Gilson, "Mediaevalism in Toronto," *The Commonweal*, 1929, 739. [Hereafter cited as *Mediaevalism*].

medievalism named Henry Adams. Adams not only had an integrated approach but also focused on the importance of the ideas that produced the great unity of medieval culture and especially its beautiful works of art in the Gothic churches.

Harvard (1926-1929)

Gilson made his decision to start his institute at St. Michael's College in Toronto while he was a visiting professor at Harvard in the late fall of 1927. The context of this decision, and the deep anguish Gilson experienced when making it, reveals how important Gilson's dream of an institute was to him personally. Indeed, Gilson's experience at Harvard, and his letters to his professor friends there, give an invaluable inside perspective on the Gilson's personal vision for IMS.

Gilson first came to Harvard in the fall of 1926 to participate in the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy and then teach courses at Harvard in the fall semester. Gilson, at this time, and many more times afterward, was offered a full professorship at Harvard which he turned down. Gilson, however, agreed to be a visiting professor in the fall of 1927 and 1928.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Gilson fell in love with Harvard and Harvard fell in love with him from the moment he got there in 1926. Gilson loved the simple style of American life[13] and became close with many professors like Alfred North Whitehead and especially Ralph Barton Perry whom he knew since 1921 when he met him at Oxford.[14] Gilson also became a

[13] *EG*, 156.
[14] *EG*, 155-8.

Harvard football enthusiast and would never miss a game if he could help it.[15] We can see Gilson's deep love for Harvard in a letter to his life long friend Ralph Barton Perry:

> Dear Perry,
> If I had three lives to spend on earth, I certainly would give one of them to Harvard. As it happens, I have got but one and am trying to make it to be two. The scheme does not work out well already: too much action, too little contemplation. Anyhow, you cannot doubt my deep feeling of gratitude for your new invitation to join again the Harvard Department of philosophy. Of course, I feel it as an honour, but as something much more intimate and rare: the warmth of a friendship and affection that give me more pleasure than anything else ever did during the course of an already long career. I hope you will tell all my friends of the Department how grateful I feel for their invitation; you will do it much better than I can, but be sure that the stronger your expressions, the nearer they will be to my own feelings. Yours very friendly, Et. Gilson.[16]

Similarly, Gilson also says in another letter to Perry:

> Above all, I wish to assure you that I have never forgotten the marvelous friend you have always been to me. Harvard, I suppose, has become rather different from what it used to be in our times, but there is a corner for it in my heart. In point of fact, the corner is a rather large one; it includes all the road from Harvard Square to Concord.[17]

Harvard also loved Gilson from his first arrival in the fall of 1926. They especially loved Gilson's popular teaching style and wanted him to train the other teachers at Harvard how to teach.[18] Whitehead started to attend his classes on a regular basis.[19] As seen in the letter above, Harvard also repeatedly offered Gilson a full professorship and would not take no for an answer even after he became director of IMS. The great love and esteem that Harvard had for Gilson can be heard in this gracious introduction by Perry:

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[15] *EG*, 152.
[16] Étienne Gilson to Ralph Barton Perry, 18 December 1933, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.
[17] Étienne Gilson to Ralph Barton Perry, 25 March 1952, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.
[18] *EG*, 149-50.
[19] *EG*, 149.

> We want to say that we welcome Professor Gilson here as a brother whom we love and whom we have sorely missed. We want to say that we shall always welcome him here, keep a place for him at our firesides and feel that he belongs among us. We want to say that his influence here is still potent and will never cease to be felt. He taught us that voluminous and meticulous learning is consistent with insight and critical vigor, and that erudition need not dull the edge of wit, or the intellect still the voice of conscience. He has excited or confirmed our love of France, of whose genius he is so distinguished an embodiment. I cannot reduce him to a formula,—but this much I know that he can somehow unite depth with clearness, culture with faith, humanity with moral indignation, and loyalty to his nation and his creed with universality and historical perspective. We love and esteem him for what he is, and he endears to us the nation which he represents.[20]

This mutual love between Harvard and Gilson seen in these letters helps to put into proper context Gilson's momentous decision to start his Institute at Toronto instead of Harvard. These letters also put Gilson's devotion to accomplishing his own personal vision of the institute into stark relief. After making his decision to go to Toronto and start IMS in December 1927, Gilson says,

> I need not tell you that my decision is not free from sadness, and even from remorse; I know, too, that Harvard is Harvard, but this is to me a unique occasion to realize my ideal of mediaeval studies and I feel it hardly possible to decline such an invitation.[21]

Here we see with his comment "Harvard is Harvard" that despite his love for the place and people Gilson realizes that he will have to conform to Harvard if he stays there. However, Toronto gives him a rare opportunity to realize his dream of an institute exactly in the manner he personally conceives it. This is why Shook aptly says: "Lowell [President of Harvard at the time] wanted to make Gilson part of Harvard's world; St. Michael's wanted Gilson to introduce

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[20] Ralph Barton Perry, "Introducing Gilson", Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.
[21] Étienne Gilson to Professor Woods, 28 January 1928, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.

it to his."[22] These letters reveal that the primary reason Gilson started his institute at St. Michael's and not at Strasbourg, Paris, or in Cambridge was because he felt he could only do it according to his own conception in Toronto, although he never says this publicly.[23]

Perry, along with all of Harvard, was greatly alarmed and quite distressed at this decision by Gilson. They were surprised at Gilson's decision seeing it as foolhardy and almost a form of career suicide considering the relatively lowly status of St. Michael's College in comparison to Harvard. It seems that Perry and others made a tangible offer that Gilson could start his medieval institute at Harvard along with the help of professors Charles Homer Haskins and Edward Kennard Rand the founders of the Mediaeval Academy of America. In reply to this generous offer Gilson says to Perry:

> I have not the slightest doubts as to the future of mediaeval studies in Harvard. Students are very good there, and I know of no other place in the world where mediaeval history or archeology […] represented by such professors as Prof. Haskins, Rand and many others. All that you say concerning the strategic advantages of Harvard is equally true, and you could add, because it is the bare truth, that with all its excellent renown, the University of Toronto is not on the same rank as Harvard. The decisive factor, in my mind, is the unique opportunity which is now at my disposal, to organize in Toronto a teaching of mediaeval philosophy—and ideas at large—which has never been organized before. This, of course, might as well prove to be […] a failure; but I have good hope that it will be a success and my personal feeling is that I must try."[24]

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[22] *EG*, 180.

[23] Maurer mentions that Gilson tried in vain to set up an institute of medieval studies in Paris. *LEG,* 30. Shook does not mention this in his biography of Gilson. Shook does not cover the founding of IMS in great detail as one would expect since he served as the President of PIMS (1961-73). Fr. Shook indeed acknowledges that he cut out much of his original material on the founding of IMS. Shook says, "Notable among these reductions [of his autobiography on Gilson] is the account of the founding and development of a research institute in medieval studies which Gilson set up in 1929." Laurence K. Shook, "Maritain and Gilson: Early Relations," In *Thomistic Papers II*, ed. Leonard A. Kennedy, and Jack C. Marler, 7-27, (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1986), 7. This lacuna on the founding of IMS has lead to many scholars not seeing the importance of IMS in the life and thought of Gilson and and has also lead to the presentation of him as primarily a historian and not primarily a philosopher already mentioned above.

[24] Étienne Gilson to Ralph Barton Perry, 3 March 1928, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.

Furthermore, Gilson also shows in these letters that he feels that this offer at Toronto is part of a divine call to realize his personal dream. He writes to President Lowell:

> I have been invited by the University of Toronto to organize an "institute of mediaeval studies" and to give there a regular teaching from 1929 on. I feel it a duty to accept that call and to go there in order to realize in a concrete institution my own views of what studies in that field ought to be. … My call to Harvard has been and always will remain to me the greatest honour I have ever received in my academic career and I feel personally indebted to you for it, as well as for the most hearty welcome I have received there.[25]

The fact that Gilson sacrificed so much professionally and personally by turning down Harvard in this way shows how deeply he believed in his own idea of a medieval institute. Michel reflects that his time at Harvard was pivotal for Gilson. He says, "in the story of Gilson, Harvard remains the road not taken, functioning as the temptation to glory which Gilson resisted—and of which he had no need."[26] Michel also says that, if Gilson believed Harvard was "a body without a soul" then Harvard was indeed, "a body of which Gilson was not able to be the soul."[27]

The question then becomes for us what exactly was Gilson's personal conception of a medieval institute that he felt called to accomplish? And what was it about St. Michael's College in Toronto that made Gilson believe that this would be the best place to accomplish his own personal dream?

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[25] Étienne Gilson to Abbott Lawrence Lowell, 3 March 1928, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.
[26] *LPC*, 55.
[27] *LPC*, 55.

St. Michael's College, Toronto

Even before Gilson got to Harvard in 1926 it seems that Toronto aimed at getting Gilson to start an institute there. Fr. Henry Carr, who was the real "will to power," so to speak, behind the institute, wanted to respond to Pope Leo XIII's call to renew Catholic philosophy in *Aeterni Patris* and started recruiting good Catholic philosophers like Fr. Gerald Phelan and Sir Betram Windle to St. Michael's.[28] It seems that Carr came to know about Gilson from his *Le Thomisme*.[29] It is clear that Carr had his eyes set on Gilson even before he arrived in Harvard in 1926 because even before Gilson gave his first lecture there Fr. Joseph T. Muckle, who was at the time studying with E.K. Rand, was already recruiting Gilson to come to Toronto. Gilson says of Muckle: "One of these strangers wanted, or so it seemed to me, to march me right back to Toronto with him."[30]

Gilson went to Toronto in January 1927 at the end of his first stay at Harvard. When he left St. Michael's he says he asked the question: "Why not establish an Institute of Mediaeval Studies at the University of Toronto?"[31] Gilson returned to St. Michael's a second time in November 1927 and had a very important all day Saturday discussion on how it could be accomplished.[32] Then in December 1927 Gilson seems to have decided and announced his decision in an article in the *University of Toronto Monthly*. There Gilson says:

> These are the reasons why, **after having nurtured this idea during many long years**[emphasis added], and having kept it to myself in more than one illustrious university of both the old and the new, I declared, as soon as I grasped the spirit

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[28] *EG*, 167.
[29] James K. Farge, "The Gilson Collection in the Library of the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies," The Gilson Collection, PIMS Library, Toronto. [Hereafter cited as *GCE*].
[30] *EG*, 145.
[31] Étienne Gilson, "St. Michael's Establishes Institute of Mediaeval Studies," *The University of Toronto Monthly* 28, (1927): 119. [Hereafter cited as *St. Michael's*].
[32] *EG*, 175-6.

> of St. Michael's, "There is the spot! The Institute will be there or it will be nowhere!"[33]

This quote proves definitively that Gilson had been thinking about a concrete institute for many years in many other places like Strasbourg, Paris, and Harvard. Furthermore, other than his inner intuition of the spirit of St. Michael's, Gilson gives here two more explicit reasons. First, St. Michael's is in North America where there is less bureaucracy than Europe, and America is a place where, as Gilson says, "two or three men of goodwill are all that is required, provided they grasp the importance of the undertaking and make up their minds to see it through."[34] Although Gilson does not say it here, it is clear that he also chose North America because he tended to see it as the key to the survival of Western culture considering the rising atheism in Europe. In an undelivered address to Catholic University Gilson says:

> During the 45 years since my first American experience in Virginia to the last one in Berkeley Cal., the inner conviction has grown in me that the whole of Western Culture, in both Europe and America, is now bound to stand or fall together.[35]

It is clear that Gilson tended to see the need for a continued Western movement of the *translatio studii* from Europe to North America and IMS as a key part in this translation. Michel also points out that Gilson was an "*américanophile*" since 1920 and often quotes a letter to Gouhier to the effect that "we have to serve this gigantic work [American civilization] for Western civilization will be in large measure what it will become in the United States."[36] Michel presents

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[33] *St. Michael's*, 120.
[34] *St. Michael's*, 119.
[35] See Appendix I.
[36] *LPC*, 42-3.

a portrait of Gilson as rescuing wisdom and civilization from the absolute victory of barbarism based on the power of the medieval imagination and as a modern-day Alcuin.[37]

The second reason Gilson explicitly mentions above is the highly qualified group of philosophers at St. Michael's. This would include Fr. Gerald Phelan, Sir Betram Windle and Fr. Henry Carr. However, both of these explicit reasons he gives would still argue for Gilson to start his institute at Harvard. Hence, two deeper reasons, as we have seen from his Harvard letters, underly Gilson's public rhetoric. First, because Toronto was willing to follow Gilson's own conception and program of mediaeval studies as a multidisciplinary integrative cultural approach. Second, St. Michael's was a Catholic school and Gilson felt that an institute aimed at reviving Catholic culture must be placed in a Catholic setting because what is of merely human interest to men like Haskins at Harvard is of "vital interest" to the Catholics of St. Michael's.[38] It seems the spirit of St. Michael's that made it the only place for the institute in Gilson's mind was precisely the Catholic spirit of the place.

Gilson's Own Conception Medieval Studies

Yet, the most important question remains: what exactly is Gilson's ideal of medieval studies and of an institute that could only be found at St. Michael's not at Strasbourg, Paris, or even Harvard? To answer this question we will first look at the goal of the institute and then the means to attain this goal. The goal for Gilson's institute is to recover medieval civilization primarily by means of its thought and interior life so that the modern world can share in this

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[37] *LPC*, 43; 97-103. Michel sees Gilson less as a philosopher and a historian and more of a founder of an institute to save Western culture much like Alcuin who went from England to France and so Gilson goes from France to North America.
[38] *Mediaevalism,* 739.

culture again. As Gilson says, "The Institute of Mediaeval Studies is essentially a concentrated effort to recover a civilization and culture which have been, to a great extent, lost."[39] Again he says, "Were it possible to gain a full understanding of these great works, we should share in the civilization of the Middle Ages through the deepest sources of their interior life; we should reach the very heart of mediaeval civilization."[40] In other words, Gilson believed that by connecting precisely to the thought and interior life of mediaeval culture through art, morality, religion, philosophy and theology that we could share in this interior life and thereby reproduce mediaeval culture. As mentioned above, Gilson, in contrast to Bloch and Haskins, who were focused more on technology and political events, was more focused on the thought of the time, especially as that thought is found in the *Summas*. However, Gilson also knew that the thought in the *Summas* could not be properly understood without also understanding the art, literature, religion and culture of the time. Fr. Farge, says, "Philosophy for Gilson was like an intellectual prism that was best studied in the whole spectrum of medieval culture."[41] This is why Gilson wanted to access not only the thought but also the essence of medieval interior life by means of an integrated multidisciplinary approach and not just a focus on philosophy or theology as such in the manner, for example, of Louvain.

However, Gilson was not just focused on merely understanding the thought of the Middle Ages but he wanted medieval thought to lead to a deeper interior life in the modern world. Gilson lays out his vision of the value of medievalism especially its presenting rationally

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[39] *Mediaevalism,* 738.
[40] *St. Michael's*, 119. It is notable Gilson mentions the interior life of the medievals which confirms that he has the ideas of the *Essai* in mind as the theoretical backdrop of his institute.
[41] *GCE.*

accessible universal truth in a radio address he gave from Harvard in 1936.[42] As we also saw in the *Essai* this project would give people a new law or ideal they could give to themselves to inspire their life and around which to organize their reason. As Gilson says,

> Through the work of the Institute of Mediaeval Studies we shall be able to reach back to the sources of our spiritual traditions, to drink more deeply of their waters and to draw from them full life-giving strength.[43]

To put it in terms of the *Essai,* Gilson wanted both the order of knowledge and the order of creation in his curriculum so it would be able to create culture through tapping into creative power of the order of creation found in Medieval religion, morality and art. Gilson did not just want to focus on the order of knowledge like philosophy and theology because the order of knowledge severed from the order of creation cannot create personalities, aesthetic sensibilities and wills and therefore cannot create culture. Gilson wanted an institute that would produce a real interior life and culture and not just knowledge which without these things lacks power.

The goal of the institute, then, is to "go back" to the rich interior life of the medieval culture and bring its riches forward in to the present. In other words, Gilson wants medieval thought to help and enhance and form modern-day life. Yet, the question remains is it really possible to actually go back and tap into the interior life of the medieval culture in the deep way Gilson desired? How is this done?

Gilson thought this was indeed possible but he was not unaware of its great challenges. He says "Our understanding of the Middle Ages will require an understanding of the minds of men of those ages. We must enter their soul's and look around and then look out upon the world

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[42] Étienne Gilson, "Mediaeval Universalism and Its Present Value," In *Freedom, Its Meaning*, 152-170, (New York: n.p., 1940).
[43] *St. Michael's*, 121.

and other men, seeing as they saw."[44] This of course is an expression of what we have been calling Gilson's 'principle of sympathy' that he learned from Bergson and Lévy-Bruhl where a philosopher or historian seeks to go beyond the systems, arguments, words and external forms of a thinker and attempts to come into contact with or see the reality or truth these thinkers are trying to convey with their various symbols. Gilson says again:

> A Catholic thinker should be, as it were, so wholly permeated with mediaeval thought that anything he says or does, even though it looks, or is new, should be but a natural, immediate and spontaneous expression of that everlasting tradition itself. This, for Catholics, is the only possible way to be at one and the same time conservative and creative.[45]

Gilson's concept of "seeing as they saw" and being so permeated with the medieval tradition that it comes forth spontaneously is a very high bar indeed. In fact, what we may call Gilson's "ideal of medieval permeation" seems so difficult that it may border on the impossible.

Yet, Gilson really believed that an intimate sharing of the interior life of the medievals was possible by apprehending the principles of a thinker so thoroughly that they truly become part of the student. For example, Gilson compliments Perry for being permeated with the thought of William James:

> I have at last found the time to read your book *The Sprit of W. James.* It is an excellent book, and, as I wrote to the Yale Press, the best introduction I know to the innermost spirit of James' philosophy. Your knowledge of James is a clear case of what Thomas Aquinas would call *cognitio per connaturalitatem* (one grade deeper than «by acquaintance»). This, I think, accounts for the fact, that while talking about James you manage to make your own voice to be constantly heard to the greatest delight of those who love you, and most eminently to my

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[44] *Mediaevalism,* 740.
[45] *Mediaevalism,* 739.

> own. Thank you for the delightful hours I have spent in your company. Concerning all that you say about James, my only reaction is: amen."[46]

Now Perry personally knew William James and was his pupil and both were Americans so it was not as difficult to move from a knowledge of acquaintance to a deep connatural knowledge. Yet, the question remains how is it possible to move beyond the words of a thinker that one does not personally know separated by centuries of culture, tradition, and prejudice such that these principles become so internalized they become one's own? (It should be noted what is rather paradoxical about Gilson's concept of connatural knowledge is that the more one comes to know a thinker from the inside the more others can hear one's own voice in explaining him.)

This extremely high bar of developing a connatural knowledge of thinkers from medieval culture is why Gilson was so strict with historical erudition and why he took a cross-cultural approach to medieval studies. This is why Gilson conceived of his institute as:

> a regular laboratory for mediaeval research a place where beginners will find a general initiation into mediaeval thought and life, while advanced students or even young masters will be initiated into personal research work.[47]

In another place Gilson expounds on this idea of a laboratory:

> It is a question of organizing a model laboratory of the history of mediaeval civilization, wither future men of learning and future professors will come to receive a training that no existing university can give them. This laboratory will consist of a central library, surrounded by smaller offices for the researchers and classrooms where the teaching can be given.[48]

Gilson's use of the image of a laboratory and a place of intense training invokes two things. First, that it would primarily be a place of seeking or an intellectual adventure where the student

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[46] Étienne Gilson to Ralph Barton Perry, 5 July 1938, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.
[47] *Mediaevalism,* 738.
[48] *St. Michael's*, 120.

would not come just to study the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas (a one-sided focus on Aquinas was frowned upon at IMS) but to encounter the whole of medieval culture and be imbued with a personal romantic wonder that drives a search for truth. Gilson wanted it to be a place of wonder and research and not oriented to granting degrees.[49] Also Gilson's idea of IMS as a place of training or *ascesis* emphasizes the further aspect that the experimental research would be extremely hard work and require high levels of discipline which would finally lead to a total permeation with medieval thought to the point of connatural knowledge. Gilson also saw IMS as a place where Catholic teachers would come and be impressed with medieval principles of culture and then go and revive the Church throughout North America and then the world. This is why in the curriculum every student had to learn not only philosophy and theology but also Latin, vernacular literature, history, law, liturgy, art, archeology and paleography. Farge says that IMS would be a success if it produced people "who could intelligently read Dante's Divine Comedy, because many aspects of medieval culture are present there."[50]

Gilson's Curriculum at PIMS

These public comments by Gilson show it to be a serious research institution with a high level of erudition with a multidisciplinary approach to medieval culture for the sake of reviving desirable aspects of medieval culture and life in the present age. In order to get a sense of the high level of erudition expected by Gilson in this training ground for scholars let us take a brief look at the curriculum itself that Gilson himself wrote up in very short order.[51] The Licentiate in

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[49] *ABE*, 6.
[50] *GCE*.
[51] *LPC*, 62-72.

Medieval Studies which is a Pontifical degree took three years of intensive study. All the students were expected to have mastery of Latin, French and German by the end of the third year. In the first year all the PIMS students were required to take four courses listed below. The first two courses were, for lack of a better word, "mega-courses," which were each broken up into four parts which had their own lectures. These two first year courses [MST 9002 and MST 9004] were focused on Gilson's own personal vision of a historical and interdisciplinary approach to the Middle Ages. The third course was Latin paleography and was the beginning of an intensive and challenging two year sequence. To even enter Latin paleography the PIMS student had to pass a qualifying exam of Latin on the M.A. level. Moreover, this challenging set of Latin paleography courses was taught for many years by Fr. Reginald O'Donnell, who was succeeded by Fr. Leonard E. Boyle, O.P. and Dr. Virginia Brown; all of them were very demanding Latinists, and each of their courses involved the sight-reading of original texts within the context of oral exams.[52] The fourth course in the first year came from the elective research courses which were most often seminars on different specialized areas of Medieval study. Here is the first year introductory curriculum as devised by Gilson and only slightly modified over fifty years:

First Year

(1) MST 9002: INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS AND DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN MIDDLE AGES.

(a) *History* — INTRODUCTION TO MEDIEVAL EUROPE. A survey of the formation and development of the medieval institutions, with an approach to historiography and the historical method.

(b) *Law* — INTRODUCTION TO MEDIEVAL LAW. The formation and transmission of canon and civil law in the Middle Ages.

[52] As related by Dr. Timothy B. Noone.

(c) *Philosophy* — INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT OF THE MIDDLE AGES. A survey of the writings and the principal themes of the Christian, and of some Muslim, philosophers in medieval times.

(d) *Theology* — INTRODUCTION TO PATRISTIC AND MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY. A survey of the main theological developments from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourteenth century.

(2) MST 9004: ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS OF MEDIEVAL SOCIETY.

(a) *Archeology* — INTRODUCTION TO CHRISITIAN ARCHEOLOGY. A survey of the beginnings and of the developments of Christian archeology in both the Eastern and the Western Churches of the Middle Ages.

(b) *Art and Architecture* — INTRODUCTION TO MEDIEVAL ART AND ARCHITECTURE. A survey of art and architecture in Medieval Europe.

(c) *Liturgy* — INTRODUCTION TO MEDIEVAL LITURGY. A survey of the developments of Christian worship in the Western Middle Ages.

(d) *Vernacular Literature* — INTRODUCTION TO MEDIEVAL VENACULAR LITERATURE. A survey of the vernacular languages and literatures of medieval Europe.

(3) MST 9112: LATIN PALAEOGRAPHY. An introduction, with practical exercises, to Latin Palaeography from the beginnings of Latin writing, both literary and documentary, to 1500 A.D.

(4) The fourth course in the first year is selected from the advanced courses for the second and third year students which is usually a seminar.[53]

The second and third years consisted of more of these advanced courses that were more specialized studies in all the different areas of medieval studies. Gilson wrote this quite challenging curriculum in very short order which indicates that he was thinking about it for quite a while since Strasbourg.[54] Gilson himself taught almost every fall both a lecture course and a seminar for over forty years with the exception of the years during the Second World War. Gilson would usually prepare these lectures and seminar from July to September after his lectures at the *Collège de France* were over.[55]

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[53] *Syllabus*, 1980, Pontifical Institute of Medieaval Studies, Toronto.
[54] *LPC*, 62-72.
[55] *EGB*, 791.

PIMS as Gilson's School of Philosophy

However, this does not, at first glance, seem to quite raise IMS to the level of a philosophical school under the ancient model which is focused on personal spiritual transformation so emphasized by Hadot. As seen above in the *Essai* the philosophical life for Gilson had an objective but also a personal necessity to reconcile the reality and the thoughts of the mind. Gilson emphasizes this personal aspect at PIMS in the following way. Gilson did not just want PIMS to be a place where one encountered medieval thought objectively but where one internalized the whole interior life of the medieval masters such that one gained a personal mastery of their principles. In this way, Gilson wanted thought to move from objective information to subjective transformation. The total permeation with medieval culture and mastery of its principles involves a personal transformation by the power of truth and implies the philosophical way of life.

Also if we dig a little deeper behind the images Gilson uses to describe PIMS we see it more as a philosophical school for personal transformation. For Gilson defines the school as an intersection of two aspects: a research laboratory and a training ground which leads to a connatural knowledge of principles beyond mere acquaintance. These two ideas present an interesting parallel to Whitehead's three stages of education: Gilson's idea of on-going research and its image of an experimental laboratory corresponds directly to Whitehead's first romantic stage of education where an initial experience of wonder or *eros* impels the student in search of

the truth.[56] The passion and energy of this first stage of romance makes the student willing to submit to the discipline of the second stage of precision.

Thus the image of a training ground corresponds to Greek philosophical ascesis. Gilson the linguist would have been very aware that the English word 'training' corresponds directly to Greek ascesis and thereby implicitly presenting IMS on the model of Greek philosophical school. Gilson's notion of PIMS as an arduous and erudite training ground also corresponds to Whitehead's second stage of 'precision' where deep knowledge of facts is imparted after the initial stage of romance.[57] Finally, the concept of achieving connatural knowledge, or the concept of the permeation of medieval principles and sharing in medieval interior life, corresponds to Whitehead's third stage of 'generalization' and mastery in education where it becomes personal and therefore returns to the romantic stage of eros again.[58] In this way, Gilson sees PIMS and the philosophical life much like Whitehead as an on-going process of back and forth between *eros* and *ascesis.*

This two-fold idea of a research laboratory (*eros*) and training ground (*ascesis*) where one gains a connatural knowledge of medieval principles is the fullness of Gilson's image of a philosophical school. This combination was Gilson's dream. So many often emphasize, like Shook and Maurer, that it was the multidisciplinary holistic cultural approach that was the aspect of Gilson's idea of medieval studies that he would not have been able to achieve at Harvard. This may be true on the objective level.

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[56] Whitehead, 17.
[57] Whitehead, 18.
[58] Whitehead, 19.

However, it seems a deeper reason Gilson wanted to go to St. Michael's is that there he could better implement not just a multidisciplinary approach objectively but also on the subjective level this approach could be made so intensive and personal that the institute could truly become a place for personal transformation by medieval principles and not just an academic institute but truly a philosophical school on the Greek and Early Christian model.

Indeed, Gilson brings out this more subjective aspect of IMS as a philosophical school in an informal address he was asked to give to a study hall at IMS in 1932. In talking about the spirit of PIMS Gilson observes that he purposely made the curriculum a research institution with less lectures and more personal time for reflection and individualized research because he believes the student learns better by doing than by listening. He says,

> The professor is not a man who can learn something for you. He is a man who can lay facts before you, who can state ideas, put them before you, and then let you do the work. You proceed to work, and to try to assimilate those facts and ideas. And the real teaching begins when you are beginning to teach yourself, that is to say, to realize the meaning of what you have been taught.[59]

Then Gilson expands on this idea, saying that PIMS is less about objective information and more about the transformation of the intelligence and the person and a training for life. He says,

> You are rational beings. You have an intelligence. You have by nature gifts of your own. Those gifts may be, and certainly are, different. But in any case the work of education, the educational work will have proved to be successful if it can help you in fully developing those natural gifts you have received from God. It is, therefore, the culture of your own intelligence that you are asked to carry on here and not at all to carry actually in your intelligence a more or less large amount of notional knowledge. For if you succeed in cultivating your intelligence then you are prepared for any task whatsoever in life and you can handle it.[60]

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[59] "Professor Gilson's Lecture to the Students in the Study Hall", 13 December 1932, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. [Hereafter cited as *Study Hall*].
[60] *Study Hall,* 2.

Thus, Gilson saw PIMS as a place not only for notional or historical knowledge but also for the cultivation of the person and cultivation of thought for the sake of life.

Gilson observes that IMS cultivates intelligence in two important ways. First, by teaching languages which is the key to developing one's own intelligence. Gilson says,

> For you do not think what you cannot say. And when you succeed in saying something you succeed in thinking it, so that you cannot separate the work of your intelligence from your own language.[61]

The second important thing the IMS students learn according to Gilson is to cultivate their intelligence by the principles of the Catholic faith and religion. Gilson observes that these are not medieval principles alone but universal principles. The reason we study them in the Middle Ages is because they appeared at that time in an especially "striking way."[62] Gilson sees IMS as focused on the cultivation of the intelligence and the heart. He says at the very end:

> I hope you realize the meaning of our work here, that it is not useless but practical with a view to the only end which really counts. This end is the achieving of the highest aim of the Catholic life.[63]

In this way, Gilson's vision of IMS was not just a research institute of academic erudition but truly a philosophical school upon the ancient model that by balancing *eros* and *ascesis* cultivates the whole human person and properly orders philosophy and thought to the purposes of life. Gilson's life-long devotion to IMS as its director until his death in 1978 and his dedication to his dream of a philosophical school that reconciles thought and life, more than any of his writings, clearly demonstrates that Gilson was primarily a philosopher. It also shows that Gilson saw philosophy as a primarily a way of life, and most importantly, and more than any of our other

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[61] *Study Hall,* 3.
[62] *Study Hall*, 4.
[63] *Study Hall,* 10.

thinkers, was focused on the revival of philosophy as a way of life in the modern world. For as Emerson says, "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man."[64]

[64] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, http://www.emersoncentral.com/selfreliance.htm.

CHAPTER X

The Later Gilson

Introduction: Gilson's Four Phases

After its founding Gilson showed his lifelong commitment to PIMS by teaching both a lecture and a seminar there consistently almost every fall for the next forty years from 1931-1971. Gilson's dedication to PIMS over time, despite many other more illustrious and promising opportunities at Harvard and elsewhere, is another important piece of evidence that shows that the founding of PIMS as a school of philosophy devoted to restoring Medieval culture was Gilson's dream and what he considered one of his most important personal achievements. One notable exception to Gilson's consistent presence at PIMS was the five years he spent in Paris during World War Two.[1] Despite his great dedication to PIMS, Gilson never made Toronto his home and from his election to the *Collège de France* in 1932 till 1951 when he retired from the *Collège de France* Paris always remained the center of his intellectual activity and personal life.[2] As mentioned above, Gilson's typical rhythm of life was to give lectures at the *Collège de France* in the spring and then in the summer prepare his lectures for PIMS in the fall.[3]

As is well known, from his founding of IMS to the beginning of World War Two (1929-1940) Gilson produced a huge amount of work on the history of Medieval thought and the history of philosophy. Notable among these works are *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin* (1929), *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale* (Gifford Lectures 1931-1932), *The Unity of*

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[1] *EG*, 238-52.
[2] James K. Farge, *An Abbreviated Biography of Étienne Gilson's Intellectual Life,* The Gilson Collection, PIMS Library, Toronto. [Hereafter cited as *AAB*].
[3] From 1951-1957 Gilson spent the majority of his time in Toronto. This was made possible by the death of Therese in 1949 who did not speak English and never wanted to live in Toronto. But due to Canadian tax laws and an increasing sense of loneliness partially due to his positions on Thomas' metaphysics of *esse* and the close relations of philosophy and theology, in 1957 Gilson decided to return to his former schedule of three months in Toronto and nine months in France. Gilson kept this schedule till his last set of lectures in Toronto in 1972. *EG*, 338-9.

Philosophical Experience (William James Lectures at Harvard 1936). Gilson, at this time, also engaged in the famous debate over Christian Philosophy (1931) and he defended this term in a historical way in his Gifford Lectures (1931-1932) and then in a more doctrinal way in *Christianisme et philosophie* (1936).

As mentioned above from 1940-1946 Gilson was secluded in Paris. His country house in Vermenton (two-hundred kilometers outside Paris) and his house in Paris were both occupied by German soldiers. Yet Gilson was still allowed to lecture at the *Collège de France* and use the libraries in Paris.[4] Gilson took advantage of this time of seclusion to revise many of his major works like *Le thomisme* both in 1942 and then again 1944 in light of an increased understanding of the *esse*/*essentia* distinction in St. Thomas. This discovery of *esse* eventually lead him to write his own personal philosophy of existentialism in *L'être et l'essence* (1948) and then again in *Being and Some Philosophers* (1949).[5] During the occupation, Gilson also revised *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin* (1943) *La philosophie de saint Bonaventure* (1943) and *La philosophie du moyen âge des origines patristiques à la fin du XIVe siècle* (1944).

It is a well-known tendency of Gilson to revise his older works again and again (Gilson revised *Le Thomisme* six times between 1913-1965 as we have seen) and return to older themes. As mentioned above this makes it very hard to discern in Gilson's thought a linear trajectory that would indicate what he would call a logical or 'dialectical unity' in his thought.[6] It is also hard

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[4] *EG*, 243-4.

[5] These are are not French and English versions of the same text but each is its own work of philosophy on the same theme adapted to the French and English speaking worlds. *EG*, 275.

[6] As quoted above Gilson says in a letter to McKeon: "I have always been aware of the unity of inspiration which pervades all your essays. This kind of **organic unity** seems to me more real than the merely **dialectical unity** which looks so impressive to our own contemporaries; only it is less visible and I think you will simply do justice to your own thought in collection some of your essays. [emphases added]. Étienne Gilson to Richard McKeon, 18 October

to discern a linear trajectory in his thought because, as noted above, he always wrote on such a diverse set of topics and wrote on these various topics under such different modes of explication like philology, history and philosophy. Gilson's thought is much more cyclical in the sense that he goes back and deepens earlier themes and circles back to his earlier works revising them in terms of his new discoveries in the history of philosophy and personal experiences. Gilson's thought then indeed has a less visible, yet possibly stronger 'organic unity" more in terms of what he would call a 'unity of inspiration' than in terms of a logical or systematic unity.

Another interesting example of Gilson's cyclical tendency, and maybe the most important, is his well-known legacy of work on the philosophy of art that he dealt with during World War I, then returned to again in *L'école des muses* (1951) and then again in 1955 when he gave the Mellon Lectures on art at the National Gallery in Washington DC, which later published as *Painting and Reality* (1957); and then again with *Matières et formes: poiétiques particulières des arts majeurs* (1964) which is his last major monograph. In a certain sense one could easily say that Gilson's philosophical career begins and ends with the philosophy of art and his work on art is not a Thomistic view of art but Gilson's original philosophical thought.

Due to the cyclical nature of Gilson's thought, as mentioned above, it is very difficult to clearly demarcate distinct phases in his intellectual development according to formal themes that would help those interested in the development of his thought like Adams, Hadot or Nietzsche. Therefore, it seems best to divide Gilson's intellectual life not thematically but historically in terms of significant events in his life. The first phase which we would like to call the "early Gilson" begins with his entrance into the Sorbonne and his encounter with Bergson in 1904 and

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1953, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto. Gilson also mentions organic unity in a philosopher's thought in *HPE*, 37.

ends with his release from the POW camps of World War One in 1918. Then, the second phase of Gilson's intellectual life is what we would call the "early middle Gilson" beginning from 1918 with his appointment as a professor of the history of philosophy at the University of Strasbourg and ending with his founding of IMS in 1929.

Then, the third phase which we would call "late middle Gilson" begins with his founding of PIMS in 1929 and ends with his election to the *Académie Française* in 1946. One could also easily choose 1951 as the end of this third phase when he retired from the *Collège de France* and began a remarkably long but very active retirement at age sixty-seven. After 1946 Gilson became more engaged in politics especially in France accepting a two year appointment as a senator in the French upper chamber (1947-1949). Gilson around this time also became centrally involved in the writing of the U.N. charter (1945) and also with the founding of UNESCO the U.N.'s cultural wing (1946).[7] Also, as noted by Shook, from 1940 onward Gilson became a much more spiritual man who longed for a contemplative life and became more explicit about his interest in theology.[8] Gilson's spirituality deepened even more in the early 1950s after the death of his wife due to leukemia (1949) after which he experienced a bout with depression.[9] This deepened interest in the spiritual life is also reflected in the interesting correspondence Gilson had with Thomas Merton.[10] It was also at the beginning of this more spiritual phase (*circa* 1942 with the fourth revision of *Le thomisme*) that Gilson discovered the existential metaphysics of *esse* of Aquinas. At this time in his later phase Gilson also started to emphasize the need for contemplation in the life of the philosopher and the teacher of philosophy as we will see.

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[7] *EG*, 253-63.
[8] *EG*, 245-6.
[9] *EG*, 290.
[10] *EG*, 309.

The fourth phase that we would like to call the "later Gilson" begins in 1946 and ends in the spring of 1972 when he gave his last set of lectures at PIMS at the age of eighty-seven and his last time in North America before his death in Auxerre in 1978.[11]

With this schema in mind, we hope we to have thus far in this dissertation sufficiently shown that Gilson saw philosophy as a way of life in the first two phases of his life beginning with his encounter with Bergson in Paris in 1904 and culminating in his founding of IMS as his school of philosophy in 1929. However, it still remains to show that Gilson continued to see philosophy as a way of life in the third and fourth phases of his intellectual career. This is a key part of demonstrating that philosophy as a way of life is the spirit of Gilsonism. In the following we will attempt to demonstrate that Gilson saw philosophy as a way of life in his late-middle phase and then in a more extensive way we will show how Gilson saw philosophy as a way of life in his later phase. The reason why we are here choosing to focus more on his later fourth phase than the third phase is because between 1946-1972 Gilson started to talk more explicitly about his views on philosophy as a way of life and the need for teachers of philosophy to seek truth for its own sake and have time for contemplation.

Furthermore, the reason we chose to focus most of our energy on the first two phases of Gilson's life from 1904-1929 is because they show how from his encounter with Bergson and then in the trenches of Verdun onward Gilson developed his notion of philosophy as a way of life that culminated in the founding of IMS as a school of philosophy aimed at reviving Medieval culture and promoting world peace. As we have seen the founding of IMS embodies Gilson's philosophical vision and is the key to truly understanding the spirit of Gilsonism. The third and

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[11] *AAB*.

fourth phases of Gilson's life, which also happen to be the ones most people are familiar with, are simply the continued development of the themes in the first two phases especially that of philosophy as a way of life. Although these later phases are the best known of Gilson's work they often remain somewhat misunderstood because they are not seen from the perspective of the first two phases that lead to the foundation of IMS and his vision of the revival of Medieval culture. Gilson's third and fourth phases can only be fully understood from the perspective of the movement of thought beginning with Bergson and culminating in the founding of IMS and how this movement was guided by a notion of philosophy as a way of life. In other words, the late middle Gilson and the later Gilson, which most people tend to be more familiar with, can only be fully understood from the perspective of the two early phases of Gilson's life which culminate in his foundation of PIMS. By focusing on these first two phases of Gilson's life and by sconnecting them to the later two phases with the concept of philosophy as a way of life this dissertation hopes to give a fuller understanding of the significance of Gilson's important philosophical work and cultural vision.

Late Middle Gilson (1929-1946)

In his third phase (1929-1946) Gilson consistently treated philosophy as primarily the existential act of a philosopher and only secondarily a systematic body of doctrine. We can see this especially in his famous defense of Christian philosophy which we will examine briefly. In laying out the different sides in the debate on Christian philosophy Gilson says that the problem is that both the positivists and the neo-scholastics are looking at philosophy as a rational body of doctrines or a system alone. By doing this they are disregarding the genesis of that system and

the historical and cultural conditions of the philosopher's life that gave rise to the system. In this way, both the positivists and neo-scholastics are being overly deductive in their approach and neglecting a more inductive or concrete approach to the problem. Gilson says,

> Some [parties in the debate over Christian philosophy] are considering philosophy in itself, in its formal essence as philosophy, abstraction being made from the conditions which rule either its constitution or its intelligibility.[12]

Thus philosophy considered in the abstract taken as a systematic body of rational doctrines cannot be considered Christian in any meaningful way because the Christian faith as such is not a constitutive element in it. Yet, Christian faith can be constitutive or intrinsic to a philosophy, like that of Thomas Aquinas, for instance, if one also considers the order of the construction of the philosophy. Gilson sees the conditions that cause, rule and influence the genesis of a philosophy as an essential part of the philosophy itself and not something incidental to it. In other words, the way in which the philosopher lives and discovers his philosophy is an essential part of the philosophy. Gilson says,

> A philosophy open to the supernatural would certainly be compatible with Christianity, but it would not necessarily be a Christian philosophy. If it is to deserve that name the supernatural must descend as a constitutive element not, of course, into its texture which would be a contradiction but into the work of its construction.[13]

In this way, Gilson considered philosophy not just on the level of an abstract doctrine but on the existential level of how this doctrine is generated. From the perspective of the conditions of the genesis of the philosophy faith is then taken as key to giving philosophical insights to the philosopher. This makes faith an essential part of how the philosophy is constructed. So the way

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[12] *SMP*, 36.
[13] *SMP*, 37.

of life of the philosopher who is guided by faith, according to Gilson, is an essential part of the philosophy and not an accidental aspect.

Gilson's view of philosophy as primarily a way of life then is what underlies his take on the problem of Christian philosophy. Gilson then defines Christian philosophy as follows:

> Thus I call Christian, every philosophy which, although keeping the two orders formally distinct, nevertheless considers the Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason. For whoever understands it thus, the concept does not correspond to any simple essence susceptible of abstract definition; but corresponds much rather to a concrete historical reality as something calling for description.[14]

This concrete historical reality is a philosophy that has been generated and undergirded by a certain way of life that has been particularly influenced by faith in a substantial way. Gilson comes to this conclusion because he has always approached philosophy as primarily a way of life and only secondarily a body of abstract doctrines.

The Later Gilson (1946-1972)

Gilson does not make his view of philosophy as a way of life more explicit until his later period (1946-1972). We will look at one work from this fourth phase in this intellectual life where Gilson explicitly reflects on philosophy as a way of life. This will serve to show that Gilson's view of philosophy as a way of life stayed a consistent central theme throughout his life and help provide evidence for the claim that philosophy as a way of life is the spirit of Gilsonism.

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[14] *SMP*, 37.

The Aquinas Lecture (1947)

Gilson's 1947 Aquinas Lecture *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education* stands as a kind of manifesto on philosophy not as a scientific body of rational doctrine but primarily as a way of life that is deeply connected to the history of philosophy. Gilson delivered this lecture on November 23, 1947 at Marquette in the midst of an impressive tour of philosophical lecturing during the month of November. Gilson went to Montreal, Windsor, Notre Dame, Marquette Montreal again and then finally to Laval. Six days before his lecture at Marquette in a letter to Pegis, to whom he dedicated the lecture, Gilson says: "I have become a philosopher again and hope to be able to remain so."[15] Gilson here is referring to all the political work that he got himself involved in around his election to the *Académie Française* in 1946 especially when he agreed to become an appointed senator in the *Conseil de la République*. Gilson accepted this two year appointment out a sense of duty especially to help with the future of the Catholic schools in an increasingly secular France but found that he was not effective in politics and the whole venture quite disappointing.[16]

We will attempt to summarize this lecture and highlight how Gilson approaches philosophy as a way of life. First, it is noteworthy that Gilson uses the term "philosophic life" nine times throughout this lecture. The focus of the lecture is on the nature of the philosophical life itself and the problem of how philosophy professors can to lead undergraduate students into

[15] Étienne Gilson to Anton Pegis, 11 November 1947, Gilson Letters, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.
[16] *EG*, 272-3.

the philosophical life in the context of all the obstacles in the modern philosophical education due to its textbook approach to philosophy.[17]

Gilson begins the lecture by arguing that philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom through a consistent effort of reflection that itself demands certain moral requirements to be achieved. In other words, there are certain ways of life that would inhibit philosophical reflection. He also points out that wisdom is the knowledge of first principles and first causes through which many other things and eventually all things are known. Every time the intellect discovers new principles and causes through which more things can be known, it makes progress on its way to wisdom and in a sense already has wisdom. Yet the intellect is still awaiting the day when the ultimate first principles are apprehended through which all things are known. Because philosophy has this inherent sense of a constant pursuit of higher principles, and requires a continual effort of reflection that demands certain ethical requirements, Gilson says: "Philosophy is less a knowledge than a life dedicated to the pursuit of a definite type of knowledge, namely wisdom."[18] By saying that philosophy is more of a life and less a knowledge, Gilson here is not denying the doctrinal or theoretical aspect of philosophy but is choosing to emphasize the essence of philosophy as primarily in his view a way of life in pursuit of a type of knowledge that has not yet been attained. That philosophy is primarily a way of life in pursuit of a knowledge not yet attained is his fundamental premise in the lecture.

Gilson notes that many men more or less spontaneously reflect on their own lives and formulate some general conclusions they call their 'philosophy.'[19] Nevertheless, the

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[17] *HPE*, 13; 14; 19; 20; 39.
[18] *HPE*, 3.
[19] *HPE*, 3.

'philosophical life' is one completely dedicated or consecrated to the conquest of wisdom understood as the knowledge of first principles and causes.[20] If then one is truly a philosopher he can do nothing other than philosophize, or if he does something else, he will do it with a view to securing the things necessary for the act of philosophizing.[21] Gilson here presents philosophy as primarily a contemplative act and distinguishes it from the act of teaching philosophy which for Gilson is *contemplata aliis tradere* or the overflow the contemplative life. Some philosophy teachers may be philosophers but they are primarily philosophers while meditating in solitude outside the classroom.[22] Teaching philosophy will help a philosopher to the degree that it helps him think aloud with his students but it will hinder his doing authentic philosophy if he falls into the habit of repeating the same philosophic formulas over and over again for twenty years as is common.[23] In fact, this will hinder authentic philosophy by replacing it with a counterfeit form of it.

After asserting this marked difference between living philosophy and teaching philosophy the problem for Gilson in his lecture becomes how to effectively teach the philosophical life. Gilson is asking about what is the best introduction to philosophy understood as a contemplative life. If the philosophical life is the occupation of a lifetime, then how can it effectively be taught in the context of the four years of undergraduate education?

Gilson begins to answer this interesting question by concluding with Augustine that actually no one can teach anyone anything at all let alone teach philosophy.[24] Gilson's

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[20] *HPE*, 3-4.
[21] *HPE*, 4.
[22] *HPE*, 7.
[23] *HPE*, 4.
[24] *HPE*, 8-9.

interpretation of the inner meaning of Augustine's conclusion is that just because a teacher knows the truth and tells a student what it is in certain formulas this does not mean that the student who has heard and can repeat these formulas knows the meaning or truth they contain. The student only learns something when he apprehends the meaning or truth of the teachers words. One needs to come to the meaning of those words in his own way and through his own intellect. Thus each man is his own teacher in a certain way. Aquinas completes or nuances Augustine's point by arguing that while teachers cannot think for their students they can help them think for themselves through teaching.

Here Gilson, following Augustine and Aquinas, is pointing out that knowing a set of words and understanding them like a philosophical system is not enough for apprehending the truth. The teacher provides carefully selected words that symbolize his concepts and judgments which can give rise to similar concepts and judgements in his students.[25] The words alone are not enough and the student must move from the words, which are signs of meaning and truth, to the inner meaning of those words and make his own experience of truth. The judgement of the teacher cannot be substituted in the student. In other words, truth can only be known through one's own intellect. Gilson is here pointing out the limits of philosophical discourse and language in general and that there is always an existential level in philosophy of personal discovery that theory cannot substitute for.

Having established that a teacher can only indirectly teach through leading his student to his own judgements of truth, Gilson then asks again what is the best approach to teach philosophy? Surprisingly, Gilson agrees with Descartes' rather unexpected recommendation that

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[25] *HPE*, 9-10.

his son be introduced to philosophy through Jesuit textbooks. This is surprising both because Descartes hated scholastic philosophy and Gilson hated the textbooks of neo-scholastic philosophy. Gilson holds that the textbook scholastic introduction to philosophy is like being introduced to a country by showing a map. A map is, of course, not the best final answer but it is at least the best initial answer and so too the textbooks of the scholastics.[26]

Gilson holds that despite its many benefits the problem with this textbook approach is that for those who want to deepen their engagement in philosophy end up being given more and more specialized introductions into philosophy and so no matter how technical they get they never move on from the introductory level to philosophy itself. To follow Gilson's image people get to know a country by more and more refined study of more and more detailed maps instead of actually going to the country itself after an initial glance at a map. In this way, by staying at the level of introduction to philosophy the would be student of philosophy despite his desire for the philosophical life never actually experiences philosophy but only a superficial map-like introduction of it.[27]

For Gilson, this method of teaching philosophy through textbook introductions implies a certain notion of philosophy as a science similar to the other sciences. The underlying assumption to the conventional approach is that philosophy, like science, is a body of cognitions related to the same object, rationally demonstrable and therefore able to be communicated by means of teaching.[28] This holds science and philosophy to be made up of a series of "already acquired results." The problem with this approach is that it does not even apply to the hard

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[26] *HPE*, 13.
[27] *HPE*, 16.
[28] *HPE*, 17.

sciences. For even this way of teaching physics or chemistry does not make the student a physicist or a chemist but only a man of science conversant in physics or chemistry.[29] Thus just as an introduction to physics ends when a creative search in physics begins, so too philosophy begins when an introduction to philosophy ends and the life of philosophy begins.[30]

Philosophy begins, for Gilson, with a radically new experience not through newly acquired learning or new knowledge but is much more like, "falling in love, answering a call for a vocation or the transformation of a conversion."[31] For Gilson this new transformative experience of first entering into philosophy beyond its introduction is not indeed necessarily the birth of a great philosopher but of a new way of life which is not defined by a certain genius or quality of mind but by an inner longing or "desire to achieve a personal and active appropriation of philosophical truth."[32] Gilson then says,

> In the mind of a man born to the philosophical life, ideas do not merely follow one another, be it in logical sequence, as they do when we read them for the first time in a book; they are not simply associated by the process of reasoning and of demonstration; they do not merely fall in place as so many pieces of a cleverly contrived puzzle, but one would rather say that they blend into an organic whole quickened from within by a single life and able spontaneously to assimilate or reject the spiritual food offered to it, according to the laws of its own inner development.[33]

Gilson is here is returning to the same ideas he presented in the *Essai* twenty-six years before using a Bergsonian biological analogy. That is, Gilson holds in the *Essai* that the interior life of man begins or is "born" by choosing an ideal type like that of the conventional man of good taste, mystic, humanist, philosopher, poet. This ideal type becomes the inner constitutive

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[29] *HPE*, 18-9.
[30] *HPE*, 18.
[31] *HPE*, 19.
[32] *HPE*, 20.
[33] *HPE*, 20-1.

law of his personality to which reason submits and according to which his own reason organizes the human rational powers of knowledge, willing and emotion and assimilates or rejects certain external realities like "spiritual food."[34] The choice of this law of the personality sets in motion a kind of explosive organic process of life or a birth, so to speak, that carries its own energy or an *élan vital.* Reason does not determine or outline but submits to this process. This is why Gilson argues that the "law of organic assimilation" is more fundamental for reason than the "law of non-contradiction."[35] From Gilson's perspective, the thirst for truth is really just a thirst for being and this is why man refuses to be only what he knows. This form or law that the person accepts gives him his being. In other words, for Gilson reason is more interested in life and being than truth or knowledge. Gilson is also employing his concept of an inner organic unity or inspiration and life as opposed to a more visible deductive or logical unity. Gilson adapts these ideas on the interior life to the philosophical life and shows how it is not a life determined by acquired knowledge in a doctrinal fashion but is truly a way of life with a more organic than logical unity.

In the Aquinas Lecture, the problem that Gilson faces after the philosopher is born is that he still needs to grow once he has made a choice for the philosophical life as the inner law of his personality. To grow he needs companions to help live this life and this means that he must turn to the history of philosophy as a source for these companions. Some see the history of philosophy as leading to skepticism due to all the errors and disagreement it contains. Yet, this conclusion is due to what Gilson believes to be a false premise that philosophy is a "ready-made

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[34] *Essai*, 43.
[35] *Essai*, 66-7.

science whose results can readily be taught."[36] Gilson here wants to advocate for turning to the history of philosophy but not just to any random reading of great texts but to a great philosopher who is the best because he has himself discovered and assimilated the philosophical truth. Gilson mentions that Dante could not find anyone to teach him poetry so he simply turned to Vergil.[37] Similarly, we do well to turn to Thomas Aquinas for a great companion in the history of philosophy to life the philosophical life.

Thus, according to Gilson, in the philosophical life we must turn to history to encounter the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Yet, precisely here is the place where Gilson sees that people have misunderstandings about how to approach philosophy. For because they see philosophy as a ready-made science and results, and also leave out the mode of its discovery as a constitutive element, they think they can be true Thomists, and know the mind of Thomas Aquinas, not by actually reading his texts but by reading an interpretation of him by another thinker. Gilson points out that this ready-made scientific approach to philosophy results in many Thomists claiming to be followers of Aquinas but end up in actuality being followers of someone else.[38] To really be a true Thomist Gilson argues that one must not be someone who can repeat a reformulation of his thought but actually must be a historian who read his texts on their own and in their proper cultural context.[39]

The general avoidance of history and the tendency to substitute a book on Aquinas for the thought of Aquinas himself, Gilson argues, comes from a false understanding of philosophy

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[36] *HPE*, 26.
[37] *HPE*, 26-7.
[38] *HPE*, 28-9.
[39] *HPE*, 30.

itself that has its source in the modern tendency to be taught philosophy from textbooks.[40] Gilson points out that the books of philosophers are almost never systematic like textbooks with the exception of Aristotle.[41] Gilson here argues that there is an inner organic unity in the thought of all truly great philosophers that cannot be remodeled, corrected and brought up to date for the purposes of a modern classroom or a the modern textbook. For the textbook approach is composed of a logical and deductive unity and lacks this organic unity. Gilson points out that all genius philosophers, like genius musicians, have a "golden thread" running throughout their work that sets them apart from mere talented musicians or erudite textbook philosophy.[42] Gilson expresses this important difference by saying: "textbooks are composed, philosophies are born."[43]

Gilson wants philosophical education to introduce the student to this inner organic unity of a philosopher or his 'golden thread' that simply cannot be passed on by a text-book or formal approach that sees philosophy a series of ready-made answers. He says this encounter with the 'golden thread' of a philosopher's thought can only happen through a personal experience and that through an engagement in history which leads to a personal and intimate engagement in contact with great philosophers.[44] Gilson then concludes: "Of all those who have learned philosophy only in schools or from books written only for schools I am sorry to say that they have not the slightest idea of what the philosophical life really is."[45] Gilson compares this situation to students who study Latin all their life but never read Vergil. So too students of

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[40] *HPE*, 35-6.
[41] *HPE*, 35-6.
[42] *HPE*, 38.
[43] *HPE*, 39.
[44] *HPE*, 39.
[45] *HPE*, 39.

philosophy who remain at the level of the textbook approach of philosophy that ignores original texts and history never enter the philosophical life.[46]

Gilson then wants philosophy professors not to teach in a text book fashion the thought of Aquinas but introduce his students to Aquinas himself so that they can assimilate his method of scientific objectivity so that a time will come when for such students:

> The whole body of his doctrine will appear to them shot through with the light of its first principles. This comes after many years of study but when it comes then philosophy will appear to students in the purity of its essence and they will be able to share the life of wisdom that Aquinas offers to his readers.[47]

In this way, approaching the philosophical life through the history of philosophy can make "full-fledged philosophers."[48] Gilson wants to be clear that the many abstract introductions to the life of wisdom simply do not contain the "golden thread of true philosophical thinking."[49] Gilson wants to introduce his students to Aquinas as a living philosopher through history and attain a connatural knowledge of his principles so that they can see the world as he saw it. As we saw above this was his vision of the IMS which shows that IMS was ultimately not a place to merely do history but to live the philosophical life through history.

After his argument for history as the key to leading people to the philosophical life, Gilson then concludes his lecture by going on to what he sees as the heart of the misunderstanding of the scientific approach to philosophy that sees it as a ready made set of answers that simply needs to be taught. He says,

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[46] *HPE*, 39.
[47] *HPE*, 41.
[48] *HPE*, 42.
[49] *HPE*, 43.

> By a curious illusion, we like to imagine that there is somewhere in this world a philosophy subsisting in itself and for itself, of which all philosophers are equally invited to partake and in which they freely share.[50]

This then leads to the further fantasy that this pure philosophy can be laid down in a textbook which contains philosophy pure and simple and not the philosophy of just Plato or Aquinas.[51]

According to Gilson, philosophy is a pure and simple essence and not a being.[52] He says, "If *ens* is *habens esse*, then a philosopher is a being whereas philosophy is not."[53] The only real being that philosophy has is in the philosopher himself. This lack of a doctrinal essence of philosophy may seem to call into question its universal nature, but perennial philosophy for Gilson is a not a ready-made series of formulas but each intellect's personal experience of the same universal truth again in his own intellect. Perennial philosophy for Gilson is:

> not a perennial cloud floating through the ages in some metaphysical stratosphere, but the permanent possibility for each and every human being to actualize an essence though his own existence, that is to experience again the same truth in the light of his own intellect.[54]

Here Gilson seems to end with what he began with in his reflections on Augustine who claims that each person is his own teacher.

Gilson takes another interesting step in the argument that reflects his more spiritual orientation in the later fourth phase in his thought. Gilson then argues that the truth that every intellect can experience in a personal way is not an idea but a concrete person with a name who is God himself. He says, "And that truth itself is not an anonymous one. Even taken in its

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[50] *HPE*, 44.
[51] *HPE*, 45.
[52] *HPE*, 45.
[53] *HPE*, 45.
[54] *HPE*, 46.

absolute and self-subsisting form, truth in itself bears a name, Its name is God."[55] In some way, Gilson sees the philosophical life as leading to an encounter with the truth as a person.

Thus once the illusion that philosophy is a ready made doctrine has been dispelled, and one turns to the history of philosophy then one seeks there not a doctrine but the golden thread or inner core that animates his philosophical life and this philosophical life then enkindles another or the student's own birth to the philosophical life. This is where a philosophical life gives birth to another and we experience a grand transformation.[56] Here, Gilson clearly sees philosophy not as a doctrine or knowledge at all but as only a life in search of a personal encounter with truth who is God himself through the writings of history. This may be Gilson's most complete and explicit expression of philosophy as primarily a way of life and only secondarily a knowledge.

Amicus Amicis (1957)

In 1957 Gilson again takes up this theme of the modern tension between teaching philosophy, on the one hand, and living a contemplative philosophical life on the other hand, in his heartfelt response to a *festschriff* given to him by his students entitled *An Etienne Gilson Tribute* (1959).[57] In a certain way, this short piece is the most complete concrete map or practical set of instructions that Gilson gives for how a professor of philosophy can live the philosophical life despite all the difficulties and distortions that come from both the nature of philosophy *per se* and due to the difficulties inherent in the modern educational system.

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[55] *HPE*, 46.
[56] *HPE*, 48.
[57] Étienne Gilson, "Amicus Amicis," In *An Etienne Gilson Tribute*, ed. Charles J. O'Neil, 339-347, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1959). [Hereafter cited as *AA*].

Gilson begins by reflecting on his youthful choice to be a teacher of philosophy. In a certain way, a teacher of philosophy was Gilson's ideal type that became the law of his personality around which his whole life was formed. He says: "His best excuse for such youthful audacity was a burning love for wisdom and a fervent desire to impart it to others."[58] In a certain way, one might say that Gilson in his later phase retrospectively saw Thomas' definition of teaching, *contemplata aliis tradere,* as the inner law of his own personality. This assertion is also confirmed by his comments in his acceptance speech for an honorary degree at The Catholic University of America in 1971 where he sees the inner dynamic of his life as a man who both lived a solitary contemplative life in the pursuit of knowledge and then passing on his acquired discoveries to others because as he says "the truth comes out" or overflows.[59]

Gilson in *AA* then points out that philosophy indeed is not wisdom itself but only the love of wisdom.[60] Gilson points out that only if the philosophy teacher keeps the love of wisdom alive in his heart will he ever have something of worth to teach because what the philosophy teacher teaches is not wisdom but the love of wisdom or the life of philosophy. Gilson says, "There always remains in wisdom a residue that cannot properly be taught and the love of which

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[58] *AA*, 339.

[59] "Now I have never been anything more than a professor blessed with the necessary leisure to prepare his lectures. I intentionally say "blessed," which I know to be a strong expression, because such a life consists of two parts, of which I never have been able to decide which one is more pleasant: the solitary pursuit of knowledge willed for its own sake or the pleasure to pass it along to others after acquiring it? Nor is it possible to make a choice, for to teach what one does not know is a miserable life, so miserable indeed that I cannot think of a worse one. Just look at the poor man talking and talking in the vain hope of finding something to say! On the other hand, not to teach what one does [know] looks like a natural impossibility. Truth will [come] out. This is why, always apt at definitions, Thomas Aquinas has defined the life of teaching as the passing on to others what of knowledge one has uncovered: *contemplata aliis tradere*. Thus understood teaching happily combines the human pleasures of active life with the quasi divine beatitude of contemplation. And that, I believe, is what you have intended to honor in the person of a superannuated teacher." Étienne Gilson, *An Undelivered Address for Catholic University of America* (1971). See Appendix I.

[60] *AA*, 339.

it yet remains the teacher's noblest business to impart to his students."[61] Gilson argues that this difficulty with regard to wisdom is because of the inherent shortcomings of the external word always remaining inadequate for expressing the interior word especially in the matters of metaphysics.[62]

The teacher of philosophy, according to Gilson, then finds himself divided between two desires. On the one hand, his desire for silent contemplation continues to grow, yet so does his desire to talk and lead others to: "this learned unlearning in which the greatest philosophers have situated the apex of wisdom."[63] Here, as in the 1971 CUA address, Gilson now tends to see teaching understood as the overflow of contemplation as an essential part of the philosophical life, yet also part of its inner tension. Here we see again Gilson articulating his belief in the inherent weakness of words and concepts to express the inner realities of existential truth which is discovered in the philosophical pursuit of knowledge. Gilson's emphasis on the weakness of external word is one of the key elements that make him inherently non-doctrinal or systematic in his approach to philosophy.

Besides these difficulties intrinsic to teaching philosophy there also are the difficulties of teaching philosophy in the context of modern education system that Plato and Aristotle did not encounter. Gilson points out that most present-day philosophy professors most likely did not choose to become philosophy teachers due to an overwhelming desire to teach logic, ethics and metaphysics and prepare students for standardized exams. Rather it is much more likely that most philosophy teachers had a burning love of wisdom to which they decided to devote their

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[61] *AA*, 339-41.
[62] *AA*, 340.
[63] *AA*, 340.

lives. Yet, due to financial considerations, they cannot just go live the contemplative life, so they choose to teach philosophy and to stay close to the philosophical life. While they think they have chosen the life of a philosopher, due to the exigencies of the modern educational system, they end up living the life of a professor of philosophy, which, according to Gilson, is not the same thing.[64] According to Gilson, one of the main modern obstacles to living the philosophical life is the obligation to teach students twelve to twenty hours a week and prepare them for exams for subjects that often carry little interest for the philosopher himself.[65]

This is a problem in the nature of teaching itself which, according to Thomas, is the overflowing of contemplation. Gilson uses an analogy of water to demonstrate his point:

> But before it overflows, water must first accumulate. What too often happens is that, because there is a drought of contemplated truth, there is an overflowing of words, and, while he is busy keeping the stream of words flowing, the teacher makes it impossible for wisdom to accumulate.[66]

This inherent problem becomes exasperated with the excessive teaching demands of the modern educational system so that the primary concern of the teacher when reading philosophy is not whether it is true but how he can teach it to others.[67]

The question then becomes for Gilson how to change the modern educational system that holds philosophy captive, so to speak. Gilson here refers to the wisdom of Emerson—a philosopher he had been following since his undergraduate years at the Sorbonne—who recommends for teachers of philosophy to take a 'philosophical' approach, so to speak, to this modern problem. Emerson recommends against outright rebellion but advocates changing the

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[64] *AA*, 340.
[65] *AA*, 340.
[66] *AA*, 341.
[67] *AA*, 341.

modern educational system or any system from within.[68] The problem for Gilson is how teachers of philosophy can stay within the established system of philosophical education yet still be better than it and be able to advocate for the philosophical life.[69]

Gilson then invokes Plato's similar concern with sophistry as a solution to this modern problem. Gilson, like Plato, recommends emphasizing or putting more stress on the education of the intellect than on the training of reason as in the fashion of the sophists. Gilson makes the distinction between intellect understood as a cognitive power that apprehends truth or principles absolutely and reason understood as the cognitive power that moves from one intellection to another. Intellect is rest for Gilson and reason is movement which makes intellect of a higher dignity. Gilson thinks there is a danger in over emphasizing the training of reason in dialectic at the expense of a "patient and slow introduction to the practice of intellectual meditation and contemplation."[70] While advocating intellection and the study of the highest principles of metaphysics as opposed to logic, Gilson says,

> A truly philosophical formation should not consist in training young minds in the art of running away from principles in order to see how they apply to reality, but, first and foremost, in training young minds to investigate, from the reality known by science, the intelligible content of the first principles.[71]

The modern overemphasis on reasoning then leads to making students metaphysical cripples, argues Gilson. This seems to be another expression of Gilson's modern anti-rationalism that he mentions in the *Essai*.[72] Thus, although a modern professor of philosophy cannot reform the

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[68] *AA*, 342.
[69] *AA*, 342.
[70] *AA*, 345.
[71] *AA*, 345.
[72] *Essai*, 56.

educational system with all its difficulties on his own, he can emphasize the overarching importance of intellectual insight over rational virtuosity.[73]

Gilson ends his address by exhorting his former students, who are now professors of philosophy, to remain "the true lovers of wisdom we must have been at the time when we first undertook to lead other men toward it."[74] Gilson is here advocating that philosophy professors must keep alive the pursuit of truth for its own sake and not let teaching philosophy completely replace the philosophical life.[75] As Gilson says, "The true dignity of those whose social function is to teach philosophy is measured exactly by their success in keeping alive within themselves the love of sapiential truth pursued for its own sake."[76]

Gilson concludes his address by reflecting on the *translatio studii* function of the teachers of philosophy who in Europe and especially in America have the duty to pass on the love of saptiential truth. This, for Gilson, is important for the perpetuation of the sapiential truth in the Western world. Gilson even seems to give North America pride of place as the future of this philosophical wisdom when he says:

> The truly heroic courage of so many young men and women, who, year after year, freely decided to dedicate themselves to the pursuit and teaching of sapiential truth **on the very continent where, for the good of mankind, it is most urgent that the survival of wisdom should be insured**, [emphasis added] is an inspiring example for those who have witnessed it.[77]

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[73] *AA*, 345.
[74] *AA*, 346.
[75] *AA*, 346.
[76] *AA*, 347.
[77] *AA*, 347.

This passing on of the philosophical life, or love of sapiential truth, for its own sake like Plato is according to Gilson indeed the most noble undertaking and the greatest honor of a philosopher's life.[78]

Gilson says the same thing in his address for C.U.A. in 1971 by emphasizing how important it is that C.U.A. is in America because North America is the key to the future of sapiential truth within history of the world. Gilson says:

> During the 45 years since my first American experience in Virginia to the last one in Berkeley Cal., the inner conviction has grown in me that the whole of Western Culture, in both Europe and America, is now bound to stand or fall together. When I think of the immense part this university has played, is now playing and still will play in the defence and spreading of that culture, a prayer fervently forms in my heart: Deign God maintain and prosper the Catholic University of America, *ad multos annos*![79]

Putting the comments together leads to the conclusion that Gilson saw America as central in passing on the traditions of Western culture and that a central part of these traditions is not just doctrines but more importantly love for sapiential truth or the philosophic life.

Two Other Works On Philosophy as a Way of Life in the Later Gilson

Some other places Gilson presents philosophy as a way of life in his later thought are the following. In his introduction to *Recent Philosophy: Hegel to the Present* Gilson presents the important role that the history of philosophy plays in the philosophical life. Gilson argues that if one really wants to be a philosopher he must enter into the history of philosophy. For knowledge about philosophy or facts about philosophy is less important than learning how to philosophize

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[78] *AA*, 347.
[79] Étienne Gilson, *An Undelivered Address for Catholic University of America* (1971). See Appendix I.

which, for Gilson, is the substance and lesson of the history of philosophy.[80] The best way to learn how to philosophize for Gilson is to learn from familiarity with the methods and approaches and principles of the greatest philosophers. Also, for Gilson, the history of philosophy is necessary because philosophy is the chain of a continuous conversation among great philosophers in the West for twenty-five centuries about reality and man's place in the universe and the meaning of human knowledge and human life.[81] One must learn how to carry on the technique of philosophical conversation in order to enter this conversation.[82] Gilson wants students of philosophy to not focus so much on just the conclusions of philosophy but his principles and his approach to reality in order to better learn his philosophy and how to truly philosophize. Gilson says:

> One will never regret the time and care dedicated to a detailed examination of what a philosopher calls philosophy, of the method he advocates and uses in discussion of its problems, and, more important still, of his own personal way of understanding these principles.[83]

Gilson then defines philosophy from this historical perspective:

> Hopefully, this history will convey to its readers a positive notion of philosophical wisdom, conceived as a never-ceasing effort to deepen the understanding of the first principles of human knowledge.[84]

Another place Gilson presents philosophy as a way of life in his later thought is an unpublished lecture possibly from 1962 entitled: *The Origins and Meaning of Neo-*

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[80] *RP,* v.
[81] *RP*, v.
[82] *RP*, vi.
[83] *RP*, vii.
[84] *RP*, vii.

Scholasticm.[85] In this lecture Gilson gives a detailed history of the neo-scholastic revival from which he tries to define its inner meaning which he interprets as a non-systematic perennial philosophy of metaphysical principles discovered with the help of Christianity. Gilson sees the origins of neo-scholasticism as a reaction to the anti-rationalist spirit of Romanticism that dominated Catholicism in the first half of the nineteenth century due to the broad influence of Chateubriand.[86] Chateubriand and other Romantics gave rise to the philosophy of traditionalism as a form of fideism. According to Gilson, the Romantics mistakenly accepted the Cartesian and Kantian reduction of natural reason to scientific reason alone and so developed a traditionalism that presents reason and religion as opposed to one another. Romanticism then leads to a form of faith that is based on a philosophical skepticism.

Then certain members of the Catholic Church, namely the Jesuit professors Sordi and Cornoldi, in the mid-nineteenth century in a Jesuit college in Northern Italy returned to the teaching of Thomas Aquinas and his way of doing philosophy.[87] This movement that was very radical at the time and went against the accepted Jesuit philosophy was eventually "sanctioned" by Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* which Gilson sees as presenting not a system of Thomistic philosophy but rather a Christian way of doing philosophy according to Aquinas' principles.[88]

Gilson presents what he calls the "new scholasticism" then as not as a system of philosophy like Descartes of Kant but as a philosophy centered on perennial metaphysical principles that one applies to contemporary reality. In this regard, Gilson appeals to the example

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[85] *EG*, 363. Gilson gave a seminar on the history of neo-scholasticism at PIMS in the Winter of 1962 and this lecture may be from that time. *The Origins and Meaning of Neo-Scholasticism*, Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's Library Archives, Toronto. [Hereafter cited as *Origins*].
[86] *Origins*, 5.
[87] *Origins*, 9.
[88] *Origins*, 10.

of Maritain who applies the principles of Aquinas to modern philosophical and scientific problems.[89] Gilson says,

> Rather than a particular system of philosophy, like those of Descartes, of Kant and of Hegel, which, if you accept one of them, excluded the other ones, scholasticism is a sort of perennial philosophy, or, better still a perennial way of philosophizing. In more technical terns, it is a wisdom, that is to say a perennial criticism of the changing data of experience in the light of unchanging principles.[90]

Gilson says that because these principles are seen in the light of natural reason it is considered a real philosophy; but because it is way of doing philosophy in cooperation with revelation this makes it a Christian way of philosophizing.[91] Gilson's description of the new scholasticism here is much more proscriptive than descriptive and is really him laying out his own personal views of philosophy, not as a system of ready-made answers, but as primarily a philosophical way of life influenced by Christian revelation.

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[89] *Origins*, 12.
[90] *Origins*, 16.
[91] *Origins*, 16.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have shown that philosophy as a way of life is indeed the spirit of Gilson in the following way. In part one we rooted the post-modern return to philosophy as a way of life in Romanticism's critique of the Enlightenment's attempt to base human life on scientific reason and its desire to return to more life-giving ways of thought. We also showed how Nietzsche digested this Romantic critique of modernity and returned to the ancient Greek model of the philosophical life found in the 'musical Socrates' and Diogenes the Cynic.

Then, in part two we presented three paradigmatic models of the post-modern return to the philosophical with Adams returning to the medieval model of faith and reason or passion and thought, Strauss returning to the Socratic model based on knowledge of ignorance and Hadot returning to the Stoic/Epicurean model of spiritual exercises. Part two also accomplished two important things. First, it helped to contextualize Gilson within a post-modern movement of a return to philosophy as a way of life rooted in the thought of Nietzsche. Second, it also helped to bring out Hadot's notion of philosophy as a way of life as a helpful criterion to apply to the thought and life of Gilson.

Finally, in part three we applied Hadot's notion of philosophy as a way of life to the thought and life of Gilson and made three salient points. First, we showed how Gilson was inspired to live the philosophical life by Bergson in 1904 and was inspired especially after the death of his friends in World War One to pass on a life-giving Catholic philosophical life. Second, we showed how Gilson consistently saw philosophy as a way of life in both his philosophical and historical works in all four phases of his intellectual career from 1904-1972. Third, we also highlighted the paramount importance of PIMS in the life of Gilson as the concrete expression of his view of philosophy as a way of life and part of his personal vocation

to preserve and pass on the riches of Medieval culture and its philosophical life based on faith and reason and thereby pass on the western culture.

Finally, we can confidently say that because the notion of philosophy as a way of life both explains the underlying thrust of Gilson's thought and also explains his foundation of PIMS as the accomplishment of his personal dream and vocation we have shown that philosophy as a way of life is indeed the spirit of Gilson.

Furthermore, it seems worth speculating here that due to the paramount importance of passing on the philosophical life and the Western tradition in the midst of an age where it is threatened, and due to its rigorous curriculum, illustrious history and influential students, PIMS may have been one of the most important schools founded in the twentieth century or any century for that matter. Also due to his unmatched scholarship that successfully revived the thought of all of the most important Medieval Catholic thinkers, and due to his successful retrieval of the Catholic philosophical life including his founding of PIMS, Gilson may be the most important and possibly greatest Catholic philosopher of the twentieth century.

Thoughts on Further Research on Gilson

A further point of research would first be to apply the notion of philosophy as a way of life to Gilson's middle-later period (1929-1946) especially to his debate on Christian philosophy. Second, a major research project could be to look more closely at the influence of Henry Adams on Gilson especially on his distinctive approach to Medieval studies. A third project could be to look at the influence of Bergson on Gilson and how Gilson adapted Bergson's notion of life and intuition to a Christian philosophical paradigm. Finally, extensive work remains to be done on

Gilson's highly refined philosophy of art that compares his early more Bergsonian approach to art and his later more Thomistic approach to art. In this context, one could also look at the influence of art on Gilson himself who spent hours as a youth in the Louvre and once said that he listened to more music in his lifetime than he read philosophy.[1]

[1] As related by Dr. Richard Fafara.

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APPENDIX I

An Undelivered Address for Catholic University of America
by Étienne Gilson

Invited to say a few words on this solemn occasion, I only can avail myself of the opportunity to express my gratitude to the Catholic University of America for the high honor conferred upon me on the occasion of this solemn meeting.

Perhaps I also should say the reason why, being offered that honor I have wanted to come from so far in order personally to receive it.

One friend in the old country observed to me that, at my age, one should be above those kind of noble vanities. The reproach delighted me because it provided me with the now too rare opportunity to deliver one more lecture on Thomas Aquinas. For indeed I remember the remark, typical of his own unshakable common sense, that honors do not go to persons, but to functions.

So indeed with professors at large and in particular with Doctors. Now I have never been anything more than a professor blessed with the necessary leisure to prepare his lectures. I intentionally say "blessed," which I know to be a strong expression, because such a life consists of two parts, of which I never have been able to decide which one is more pleasant: the solitary pursuit of knowledge willed for its own sake or the pleasure to pass it along to others after acquiring it? Nor is it possible to make a choice, for to teach what one does not know is a miserable life, so miserable indeed that I cannot think of a worse one. Just look at the poor man talking and talking in the vain hope of finding something to say! On the other hand, not to teach what one does [know] looks like a natural impossibility. Truth will [come] out. This is why, always apt at definitions, Thomas Aquinas has defined the life of teaching as the passing on to others what of knowledge one has uncovered: *contemplata aliis tradere*. Thus understood teaching happily combines the human pleasures of active life with the quasi divine beatitude of contemplation. And that, I believe, is what you have intended to honor in the person of a superannuated teacher. Not he himself, for one cannot reward someone for having been happy, but the very kind of life that has made him happy. So happy indeed that he cannot think of any other choice he could make if, after so many years, he had to make it again.

My presence among you still means something else. I once was asked to quote the book to which I felt most deeply indebted of all those I had to read at school. I had never thought of the question, but the answer came out at once as I thought I had been waiting for it: the catechism. I exactly mean: the little catechism for the use of children in the of the diocese of Paris. What the parish priests taught me so many years ago, first the introductory catechisms, then the so called "catechism of perseverance," or advanced catechism, has provided me with the religious knowledge in which my whole life, including my academic life, has found its inspiration.

Nothing could repay such an indebtedness, but I wish at least to say that my gratitude goes to this great Catholic university precisely qua Catholic because, as such, it embodies and keeps alive the high notion of learning I always have entertained: each and every particular branch of science taught for its own sake, and all of them, taken together, in their due relation to the Sacred Sciences, of which Theology is the queen.

Lastly, let my gratitude specifically go the the Catholic University of America, that great country to which my own personal life owes so much ever since my first lectures at the beautiful University of Virginia (that was, I believe, in 1926), when I taught history of philosophy to about fifteen summer students, including a colossal dog who never raised the slightest objection, except one big wailing howl on the day I said I was going to speak of the Skeptics. During the 45 years since my first American experience in Virginia to the last one in Berkeley Cal., the inner conviction has grown in me that the whole of Western Culture, in both Europe and America, is now bound to stand or fall together. When I think of the immense part this university has played, is now playing and still will play in the defence and spreading of that culture, a prayer fervently forms in my heart: Deign God maintain and prosper the Catholic University of America, ad multos annos!

Vermenton, 20 April 1971[1]

Context of this Undelivered Address:

Jude P. Dougherty Dean of the School of Philosophy invited Gilson to receive an honorary degree as Doctor of Human letters from The Catholic University of America on May 15, 1971. Gilson was age 87 years old. This address seems to be what Gilson wrote after receiving the degree but was unable to give. Dean Dougherty was not able to get Gilson approved to give the convocation address (Lonergan gave the address) so instead he had Gilson give a "post-commencement" address in a very packed Keane Auditorium: entitled "Evolution: From Aristotle to Darwin and Back."[2] Doughtery also organized a special dinner in honor of Gilson that night at the Madison Hotel which included Paul Weiss, Leo Sweeney, SJ, Kenneth Schmitz, Cécile Gilson, Antonio Cua and Allan B. Wolter. Each gave speeches in honor of Gilson with Gilson's reply. Gilson was especially proud to receive this degree from CUA.[3]

[1] Gilson Papers, University of St. Michael's College Library, Toronto.
[2] *An Abbreviated Biography of Étienne Gilson's Intellectual Life*, Gilson Room, PIMS Library, Toronto.
[3] *EG*, 386-7.