

(Address given by the Reverend Theodore W. Hesburgh, C.S.C., President of the University of Notre Dame, at the conference banquet of the American Catholic Philosophical Association, Morris Inn, Notre Dame, Indiana, April 7, 1953)

It has been a distinct pleasure to have the annual meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association at the University of Notre Dame this year. While a word of welcome usually meets you as you arrive, I do trust that our pleasure in having you here has been manifested in more than philosophical ways since your arrival. To my tardy words of official greeting may be joined a sincere parting wish that all of you will feel ever welcome to come back soon and to be at home with us always.

It seems most fitting that your association should hold its annual meeting at a university, a place where all knowledge is taught. If anything has characterized philosophers, it has been the comprehensiveness of their thought, the range of subject matter to which they are committed, and the vast scope of the problems for which they seek definitive solutions. It is particularly fitting that American Catholic philosophers should meet at Notre Dame, for here you find an American Catholic University whose origin and growth is unexplainable except by reference to the abiding and providential care of Our Lady, the seat of wisdom. She indeed is truly the presiding officer here. Her Divine Son, Wisdom Incarnate, reigns here in twenty-nine chapels,

as once He was at home in her arms at Nazareth, and ever in her heart of hearts. Certainly, philosophers, lovers of wisdom, can feel eminently at home in such company.

Frankly, a more difficult problem for me at this moment is to feel at home with you. Presuming to address this group puts me in the position of the prisoner at the bar of justice, convicted on three counts. For the first, he was sentenced to serve fifty years in the penitentiary; for the second, forty years; for the third, thirty years. He looked weakly at the judge, after a bit of mental addition, and said, "Your Honor, I'm afraid I can't serve one hundred and twenty years." "Well now," answered the judge, "just do the best you can." That is all I can promise this eminent group tonight.

If I could be called a philosopher, it would probably be in the sense that all men are philosophers. And yet, I would like to muse a bit about philosophy, your philosophy, tonight, from my own present position in the field of education. My musings may be written off as the sort of practical considerations to be expected of a man immersed in variegated details of university administrations. However, even two philosophers as widely divergent

as Aristotle and Kant agreed in this: that all philosophy is divided into the speculative and practical, the study of what is, the nature and causes of things, and the study of what ought to be, objects of choice, ends and means, in the conduct of life and social institutions.

I think we can all agree here upon what is philosophically, although I will make a point for speculation that can emanate from a deeper understanding of what has been and is historically. This is the only valid point of departure for considering what ought to be in at least one social institution, the university.

I am not going to speak specifically about a philosophy of education - indeed, this is a subject that no great thinker ever thought to write about specifically, except in the rather recent past. But it does seem fundamental at this point to assume that there can be no valid philosophy of education apart from the more basic consideration of philosophy as a whole.

The whole history of man's varying educational endeavors is little more than a reflection of the intellectual history of man. This history has been an interesting, if strangely illogical, development.

At the time of Plato and Aristotle, philosophy was equated with all knowledge. Even in the practical order then, it was assumed that all would be well if philosophers were kings and all kings were philosophers. The coming of Christianity enlarged the field of knowledge. After the patristic period of speculation upon the data of revelation, we come to those middle ages when theology was preeminent and, to a great extent, overshadowed all other kinds of knowledge. Witness the repudiation of Aristotle before St. Thomas, and the alarm occasioned by Galileo.

We have all about us today the full flowering of a third age of knowledge that was born with Descartes and Auguste Comte. Metaphysics have been replaced by mathematics and physics; a recent writer changes age-old moral standards on the basis of statistical studies, and the greatest scientist of our times cannot be sure of the existence of God.

All this is history, not speculation, but we can speculate about it. Indeed, the philosopher must speculate about it, for he finds his particular kind of knowledge the furthest away in historical preeminence, and he finds himself in what may seem to be an impossible bargaining position in the field of education. As the colloquial phrase goes, he is indeed "caught in the middle."

The scientist today offers the promise and the increasing reality of material progress on earth. The theologian at least can promise the key to eternal salvation in the next world. The philosopher seems faced with the prospect of either mathematicising his philosophy after the pattern of the logical positivists, or merging with the theologians under the dubiously respectable title of handmaid. Even this latter alternative has its disadvantages, for theology, no less than philosophy, has ever less impact on the educational institutions of our day.

Should we not then roundly condemn what has taken place? Should we wish that the order of man's intellectual history had been different, so that he would have progressed in a more orderly, logical fashion, say from scientific empirical knowledge, to philosophical metaphysical knowledge, to the final acme of theological knowledge? No, I think our speculation should begin with what is, and attempt to find some value in the situation, some key to what ought to be.

Might we all be grateful at least for this: that today we are in a position to make what is after the fashion of what ought to be. Plato and Aristotle not only lacked the modern developments of scientific empirical

knowledge, but divine revelation as well. St. Thomas did the valiant work of reintegrating philosophy and theology in his day without losing the ~~true~~ ^{true} value of either discipline. Is not the challenge today an even greater one of ordering theology, philosophy, and science? We do little good in condemning the scientism of today when we have done so little to understand its true value in relation to philosophy and theology. We offer little hope for science and, indeed, the world, when we talk so much to each other about erudite and recondite refinements of peripheral metaphysical problems in a language that is as incomprehensible to the scientists as their mathematical formulae are to us.

Perhaps, our speculation about this state of affairs can even find some value in the fact that philosophers are in the middle, as the saying goes. After all, this was the very expression used by St. Thomas in discussing the priesthood of Christ. By being in the middle as the God-man, He joined the two separated extremes: the all-holy God and sinful mankind.

Perhaps, it is providential today that the philosophers are in the middle - between the two extremes of human knowledge, empirical and theological. Philosophy is in the perfect position of the mediator, reaching downward to science and upward to theology. But it must reach!

Again, I trust you excuse me if I refer to what is. For more than a hundred years, philosophy has been a requirement of our Catholic university training in this country. Following Leo XIII's famous Encyclical, scholastic philosophy has grown to preeminence. And yet, try to think of one truly outstanding philosopher produced by us, one who has had any appreciable contact, even directive, with the growth of science. Try to think of any philosopher produced by us who has worked effectively for the establishment of some realistic rapport between science and philosophy, to determine the ^{true} ~~true~~ value and range of each discipline, or even to find any mutually beneficial reason for establishing such a contact.

And, to suggest a field more amenable to influence, what influence has Catholic philosophy had upon the culture of our day by bringing into focus in the realm of social philosophy those clear values of theological wisdom which are also open to reason, though more easily and clearly when illumined by faith.

I think we must admit that the mediation of philosophy has been more possible than actual. This sad fact is reflected in American institutions of higher education generally, where science reigns, where empiricism

alone is the approach to all knowledge, while philosophy and theology either get in line or wither.

When we then think of what ought to be, I would hope to point at least to our Catholic institutions of higher learning, but here, too, the vision is still on a far distant horizon. We speak of integration by philosophy and theology, and dream of architectonic arrangements of the various fields of knowledge under theegis of Christian wisdom, but our scientists and philosophers and theologians speak to each other infrequently, and, then, I fear, mainly of matters like the weather, the outcome of the latest sporting event, or of faculty rank and salaries. Is there no hope in all of this, or is it perhaps the darkness before the dawn? The answer, ultimately, will have to come from you philosophers, for yours is the difficult, yet challenging, position of mediatorship. You are in the middle.