

## Moral Theology and the Human Sciences

### 1. A Distinction of Cases

Not all human sciences are equally developed in all their parts, and so we begin with a distinction of cases.

Case I. Both morally good and morally evil courses of action are possible in areas in which neither the science itself nor its possible applications are in doubt. Such, for example, is often the case in medical ethics.

Case II. The science is not sufficiently determinate to yield fully concrete applications. None of its proposals is morally objectionable. Which proposal would yield the best results cannot be determined a priori. There is advised a course of social experimentation in which social scientists, social philosophers, and moralists (1) collaborate, (2) are guided by feed-back from the implementation of their proposals, (3) gradually discover ever better policies, plans, procedures.

See Gibson Winter, Elements for a Social Ethic, The Role of Social Science in Public Policy, New York: Macmillan, London: Collier-Macmillan, 1966, Paperback 1968. Bernard Lonergan, Social Compass XVII/2 (1970) 280-282.

Case III. The human science is itself open to suspicion. Its representatives are divided ideologically. They advocate contrary courses of action, all of which have their respective good points, but none is without very serious defects. The notorious instance at the present time is economics.

In Case I neither the science nor its applications are in doubt. In Case II the applications are in doubt. In Case III the science itself is under suspicion.

If the three cases are distinct, the list by no means pretends to be exhaustive. Its purpose is simply to indicate something of the diversity of the issues involved, and thereby to reconcile the reader to that larger consideration that goes beyond simple conflict between natural law and technical possibility // <sup>and moves toward</sup> the enlargement of the attainable human good <sup>toward</sup> and // the critique of certain human sciences.

With this goal in mind it seemed appropriate to begin with a clarification of the notion of human science. First, we shall speak of human science as science, and so treat its empirical principle. Secondly, the topic will be human science as human, and so there is considered its dialectical principle. Thirdly, there is the concrete realization of both the empirical and the dialectical principle in the ongoing scientific community. So it is only in the fourth place that we come to Catholic Action, or under favorable circumstances, Christian Action, which operates beneficently both on the human community to which human sciences are applied and on the scientific community that develops and revises the human sciences.

## 2. The Empirical Principle

Human science as science is subject to an empirical principle. This principle is positive in its content but negative in its enunciation. It is that there are no true factual judgements without a foundation in relevant data.

~~This empirical principle is not opposed to the cognitive and ethical judgements founded in the a priori exigences of the human spirit, for these exigences are among the data of inner experience.~~

Relevant data include the data of consciousness as well as the data of sense. Hence the empirical principle does not imply the behaviorist principle, which would confine human psychology to the methods available in animal psychology. It does not imply the positivist principle, which overlooks the a priori contained in man's questions for intelligence, for reflection, for deliberation. It is not to be confused with the verification or falsification principle, which confines human knowledge to the world of experience. Finally, statements about factual judgements are not to be extended to moral judgements, to judgements of value, and the like, which are not factual but normative.

While the ultimate significance of data is their bearing on judgement, their proximate significance regards human understanding, which operates and develops with respect to data. This Aristotelian and Thomist principle becomes a dynamic principle in empirical science. There observations yield descriptions, contrasting descriptions yield <sup>problems,</sup> problems sooner or later lead to discoveries, discoveries are formulated in hypotheses, hypotheses are expanded in processes of experimentation, experiments yield new observations which either confirm the hypothesis or lead to new discovery, hypothesis, experiment, and so on indefinitely.

Hence, the modern notion of science differs profoundly from the ideal notion projected by Aristotle in his Posterior Analytics. Modern science is not certa rerum per causas cognitio. It is not knowledge but hypothesis, theory, system. It is not in terms of final, efficient, material, formal causes, but of whatever intelligibility is brought to light by scientific method.

While it may be certain in rejecting earlier views, its own positive contribution claims no more than probability. Hence a modern science offers, not demonstration, but the best available contemporary opinion; and so to object that it has not demonstrated is just ignoratio elenchi.

Finally, one may note that modern science implies a continuity of theory and practice: as developing human understanding mounts to its presuppositions, it becomes theory; as it descends to its applications, it becomes practice; and so theory and practice are distinct parts of a single reality.

### 3. The Dialectical Principle

Human science as human is subject to a dialectical principle. For the data on man are ambiguous: man's actions may be good or evil; his statements may be true or false; his development may be authentic or unauthentic.

This ambiguity is radical. It affects the very data on which an empirical science <sup>rises</sup> and rests. To cope with this radical ambiguity is the office of the dialectical principle. Its precise nature must be our immediate concern.

In general, mathematics and the sciences have to presuppose in their data (or quasi-data) an intelligibility to be discovered. In both fields there is the recurrence of the phenomenon that anticipated intelligibility does not exist so that anticipations have to be revised and fundamental categories modified. So surds are not fractions. Imaginary numbers cannot be approximated on a linear continuum. Uniform rectilinear motion continues indefinitely as long as no cause intervenes: Time is not a parameter but a fourth dimension. Etc., etc.

The peculiarity of the human sciences is that error, evil, unauthenticity may be not merely an absence of intelligibility but an unintelligible absence. The point was acknowledged by Aquinas: he granted that God indirectly willed the evil of natural defect and the evil of penalty because of a good with which that evil was connected; but he denied that God in any manner willed the evil of sin (Sum. theol., I, q. 19, a. 9 o.). He urged that God neither willed evils to occur nor willed evils not to occur but willed to permit evils to occur (Ibid., ad 3m.). He granted that, as the creature would slip into nothingness unless sustained by God, so it would fall into the non-good unless sustained by God; but he denied that it would tumble into sin unless sustained by divine grace (De malo, q. 16, a. 4 ad 22m.). He denied the existence in things of an ontological falsity, when things are referred to the divine intellect; but none the less made an exception for the evil of sin, which in scripture is accounted a falsity and a lie (Sum. theol., I, q. 17, a. 1 c.). Finally, for the relevance of the non-intelligibility of sin in a reconciliation of sin with divine providence, I refer to my Grace and Freedom in Aquinas, London and New York, 1971, pp. 109-115; Grazia e Libertà, Rome 1970, pp. 154-160; originally, Theological Studies 3 (1942) 547-552.

Now if the term, dialectic, is employed to refer to a concrete process involved in contradictions, it has a twofold application in human science. There is a first application to the object which falls short of intelligibility. There is a second application to the subject of human science who may or may not anticipate complete intelligibility in his object.

First, then, with regard to the object, a human group, reflecting on its situation, may reach a new insight; the insight leads to a new project; the new project to a new course of action; the new course of action to a change in the situation. In so far as the insight was relevant, the new situation will be an improvement on the old; but in so far as the insight was inadequate, the improvement will itself be incomplete; such incompleteness may lead to a new, further insight that complements the old; and its implementation may produce a further improvement that itself is incomplete. This process of gradual but ever incomplete improvements corresponds in the social order to the gradual but ever incomplete advances that characterize empirical science. It is a process that in some sense may be named progress, and it may be illustrated abundantly from Arnold Toynbee's account in his Study of History of the factor he names "Challenge and Response."

It remains that progress is not the sole possibility, for man is subject to bias. There is the latent bias of unconscious motivation. There is conspicuous bias of individual egoism that endeavors to circumvent public purpose for private gain. There are the shared delusions of group bias which considers its self-interest a contribution to the well-being of mankind. There is the general bias of all men of common sense, for common sense includes the common nonsense and so it of its omniscience / insists on palpable short-term benefits at the cost of long-term evils.

Bias begins by conferring an elemental vigor to every process of change provided, of course, that the change is in the right direction. The result is that changes are not

only incomplete but also distorted improvements. The further result is that every attempt to complete the incomplete and to rectify the distorted meets with resistance and succeeds only when mangled in the mill of compromise. The cumulative irrationality of decisions and actions brings about an ever more distorted, unintelligible, irrational social situation and, as the situation mounts in unintelligibility, its capacity to suggest intelligible courses of action keeps decreasing until in the limit stagnation sets in. Such is the minor dialectic of sin. It changes progress into decline and decline into disaster. But there is also a major dialectic.

For the unintelligibility of the situation is an objective fact that both mirrors and reinforces a subjective spirit of darkness. Men are not content to decide and to act out of bias. They want their bias justified. They provide a market for an ideology that would justify their ways in the eyes of faltering followers and envious opponents. Nor is this enough. The ideology has to meet a far deeper need. Intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility can yield cumulative development in virgin territory. But the situation produced by sustained decline is not virgin territory. Mere ideas no longer work. The creative minority becomes a dominant minority. It needs the power to compel, the power of technology, of economic pressures, of political discrimination, of passionate ideology. But the ideology of the oppressors evokes a contrary ideology of the oppressed. Ideologies themselves splinter, divide, conflict. In the resultant confusion men speculate on utopia, put their confidence in leaders, or sink into apathy and despair.

#### 4. The Conjunction of the Principles.

On the Aristotelian notion of science, science could be a habit in the mind of a man, and its principles could be logical premisses. On the modern notion, science is the cumulative product of a scientific community. Its members have to submit to an initiatory program in a university and a graduate school. They achieve standing by the significance of their contributions to the common endeavor. They themselves by their authenticity -- by their attentiveness, their intelligence, their reasonableness, their responsibility -- are the principles whence the ongoing science proceeds and in whom, accordingly, the norms of empirical and dialectical procedure have to be incarnated.

In an appendix added to the second printing of his The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962, 1970), Thomas S. Kuhn remarked that, were he to rewrite his work, it would "... open with a discussion of the community structure of science, a topic that has recently become a significant subject of sociological research and that historians of science are also beginning to take seriously" (p. 176). In fact, his work as written does center on the notion of the scientific community. It is the scientific community that shares the paradigms that came into existence or survived the last break-through. It is the scientific community that normally is engaged in "mopping up," that is, in resolving the host of puzzles that will extend the dominion of the last break-through over the whole field. It is this backward-looking concern that makes ~~make~~ most scientists spontaneously resist each new break-through and so gives



each new break-through the attributes of a revolution. Finally, it is the revolutionary character of the new that makes its acceptance a pragmatic affair, a matter of a gradual shift of the members of the scientific community from resistance to acceptance of the new view.

Now it is of major importance to our present inquiry that science is, not just an accidental form radicated in a possible intellect, but the ongoing occupation of a group and indeed a community of persons. For this implies that the moral theologian has to consider, not a single, but a double set of moral issues. On the one hand, there are the moral issues that arise in the object studied in the human science. On the other hand, there are the moral issues that arise in the subjects that do the studying of the object of the human science.

Moreover, just as sin and the justification of sin by ideology are to be found on the side of the object, so too they may infect the scientific subject. In particular, ideology is contagious. The sinner gains little from his justifying ideology, if the human scientist points out to all and sundry that the justification is merely ideology. Again, the warfare of conflicting ideologies is stultifying. It makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the scientist to have recourse to the philosopher or the theologian for a clarification of underlying issues. It makes it persuasive and even mandatory for scientists to eschew all theological and all philosophical issues and to pursue their proper tasks with complete autonomy and <sup>even</sup> contemptuous independence.

## 5. Functions of Moral Theology

Our concern is with issues in which the moral theologian is to operate not in isolation but in conjunction with others. But the measure of this collaboration varies in different cases. In what we named Case I, the human scientist presents an account of available techniques and of their relevant presuppositions and consequences; on the basis of this material the moral theologian passes a moral judgement. In Case II, however, the issue is not so much a matter of avoiding evil as of achieving the good; positive precepts rather than prohibitions are relevant; and the precepts regard the collaboration of all those involved in the experimental process -- the collaboration not only of moralists and scientists but also of all participants in the execution and the amelioration of the program. But it is in Case III that the full challenge comes to light; what is at stake is the renovation of society; and it may be that the renovation can succeed only by going beyond the local scene to the regional, beyond the regional to the national, beyond the national to the international.

Further, complicating all cases, but the later more than the earlier, there is a real measure of indeterminacy. There is the general measure consequent on human freedom: courses of action cannot be demonstrated (Sum. theol., I, q. 83, a. 1 c.). There is the specific measure consequent on the nature of empirical and especially human science: modern sciences do not demonstrate; they can offer men the best available opinion; but even that opinion can be distorted by ideology; and still more can the acceptance of that opinion be opposed and impeded.

To some it may seem that we have moved beyond the scope of moral theology and are engaged in the practical theology -- or the pastoral theology as practical theology -- that has been set forth by Arnold, Rahner, Schurr, Weber, Klostermann in Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie, Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1964, 1966, 1968, 1970. But if the latter already exists as an idea in many volumes, I am not aware that it is as yet an ongoing process conducted by a scientific community. Indeed, I suspect that in most countries and for some time to come we shall have to count on the already highly practical men engaged in moral theology. In any case my present terms of reference are to moral theology, and it is to them or, alternatively through them to others that I must address my more general and my more specific remarks.

My general remarks are addressed to Catholics and indeed, where ecumenical collaboration is operative, to Christians. In the first instance they are in terms of conversion: religious, moral, intellectual. Religious conversion is the basic precept of the Old Covenant and the New: "... love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength" and "... love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12, 31.33; cf. Deut 6, 4). Its fulfilment occurs basically when "... God's love has flooded our inmost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us" (Rom 5, 5). Its fruit is described in 1 Cor 13, and its harvest in Gal 5, 22. From religious conversion there follows moral conversion, when the criteria of our practical judgements shift from satisfactions to values. From religious and moral conversion there emerges in the course of time an

intellectual conversion: it adverts to the fact that the world apprehended by faith is a world mediated by meaning; it reflects that the world of every adult also is a world mediated by meaning; it concludes that the naive realism of childhood has to be replaced by a critical realism, a realism that knows the real because it knows what is true. On these topics a fuller account may be had in my Method in Theology (London and New York 1972), Chapter 11 on Foundations, Chapter 4 on Religion, Chapter 2 on The Human Good, and Chapter 1 on Method.

But if one is to "use good to defeat evil" (Rom 12, 21), conversion to God, to the good, to the true, has to be complemented with knowledge of evil and with the will to overcome it. To knowledge of evil I have already alluded in the section on the dialectical principle. I have treated the same matter from a particular viewpoint in Insight (London and New York 1957) pp. 191-206 on Dramatic Bias; pp. 214-242 on Tension, Dialectic, and Bias in Community; pp. 619-633 on Liberation from Moral impotence; pp. 696-703 on the role of faith, hope, and charity in overcoming social evil. On the similar role of Christian suffering, see Thesis XVII in my De Verbo Incarnato (Rome 1964) pp. 552-593. The relevance of the last chapter of Insight to an ecclesiology has been developed by Bishop B. C. Butler in a chapter "Lonergan and Ecclesiology" in Foundations of Theology, edited by P. McShane, Dublin: Gill, and Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971. Aquinas on moral impotence was set forth in Grace and Freedom, pp. 46-55; Grazia e Libertà, 90-99; Theological Studies 3 (1942) 74-82.

Very briefly, the perpetuation of social evils by the strict justice (adaequalitatem) of "an eye for an eye" is broken by Christian charity. The determinisms of the technology, the economy, the polity, the socio-cultural heritage can be withstood by Christian hope. The ineffectualness of truth in the midst of passionately competing ideologies is remedied by the power of faith.

The general procedure, finally, is a matter of developing positions and reversing counter-positions, where positions express religious, moral, and intellectual conversion, while counter-positions are opposed to any one or two or all three of these. Positions are developed ~~by finding~~ by finding ever more situations in which faith, hope, charity advance the cause of the good. Counter-positions are reversed inasmuch as Christian acceptance of suffering robs evil of its power to blind, to threaten, to endure.

Specific procedures may be divided by their greater relevance to Case I, Case II, or Case III.

Case I has long been familiar in moral theology and I at least can say no more than consulantur probati auctores.

Case II regards collaboration of moral theologians and scientists in an experimental process that brings about a development of social policy. Here everything depends on the competence of the persons involved, and no more than a few general suggestions occur to me.

The first I draw from Gibson Winter in the work already referred to. He adverted to the fact that sociologists were divided into approximately four schools with a right wing

of phenomenologists, a left wing of behaviorists, and a center of conflicting functionalists (Talcott Parsons) and voluntarists (C. Wright Mills). Confronted with such diversity, a person with no real apprehension of modern science, might attempt to reduce conclusions to their logical principles and then adjudicate between the principles. In contrast a modern scientist is aware that the truth of principles is revealed mainly in their consequences, and so Gibson Winter asked himself which type of sociological theory would be most likely to prove helpful in dealing with various types of problem. He found behaviorists most likely to be helpful in dealing with traffic problems, voluntarists in analysing revolutionary situations, functionalists in understanding ongoing processes, and phenomenologists in entering into the mentalities and aspirations that motivate and direct social continuity and change. In brief, as it is by their fruits that one knows men, so too it is by their fruits that one evaluates human sciences. While I do not consider this the whole story, anyone who wishes may find the complement I would add in my little book, Insight.

A second but allied suggestion is a distinction between external and internal criticism. The external critic draws, not on the science he is criticizing, but on some distinct source. So the obligation to pay a family wage may be concluded from evident moral principles. But the de facto operative economic theory may be that of a market economy, so that any employer that does pay a family wage sooner or later goes bankrupt because his wicked competitors do not pay a family wage. The de facto result is that a family wage is not paid and, indeed, cannot be paid until a modification of the market

economy is brought about either by recurrent legislation on minimum wages or by a more radical criticism of the market economy itself.

In contrast, the internal critic operates along the very lines of scientific development. His criticism consists either in advertng to data that have been overlooked, or in bringing to bear fresh insights, clarifications, distinctions, or both of these. So the notion of religion in the History of Religions has undergone a series of developments in virtue of internal criticism and in each case the developments have been effected by investigators in the field. Talcott Parsons has sketched the process from the speculations of anthropologists, such as Tylor who conceived religion as pseudo-science, through the shifts brought about by Pareto, Mainowski, Weber, and Durkheim ("The Theoretical Development of the Sociology of Religion," Essays in Sociological Theory, New York: The Free Press, 1949 and revised 1954, pp. 197-211) to the position of topmost control in the cybernetic analysis of social continuity (Talcott Parsons et al. editors, Theories of Society, Introduction to Part IV: Culture and the Social System, Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1961; cf. Robert N. Bellah, Beyond Belief, New York: Harper and Row, 1970, chapters I and II.). While the progress is only from contempt of religion to respect for it, it none the less is progress and involves an openness to further developments.

For radical internal criticism of a human science one has to turn from the practitioners of "normal" science to the independent minds that belong to a larger scientific community and so possess an independent base for criticism. Such was Paul Ricoeur who, after completing the first two volumes of his Philosophie de la volonté, did a five-hundred page study of Freud (De l'interprétation: essai sur Freud, Paris: Le Seuil, 1965; E. T. Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation, translated by Denis Savage, Yale University Press, 1970), and later was able to boast that hitherto Freud had confirmed the unbelief of many, but henceforth he could confirm the belief of many ("The Atheism of Freudian Psychoanalysis," Is God Dead? Concilium, volume XVI). His technique in this achievement was the application to dialectic of the program of developing positions and reversing counter-positions in the particularized form a twofold hermeneutic, a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of recovery.

In the opinion of the present writer the human science, economics, is in need of similar radical criticism. Its three principal variants, all operative to some extent, are the traditional market economy, the Marxist inspired socialist economy, and the new transactional economy constituted by the giant corporations which are not socialist and are not controlled by the market. In all three the influence of ideology is discernible and what, I believe, is needed in the first place is a pure economic analysis of the exchange process untainted by any ideology. Until it is achieved, of course, it will be confidently pronounced to be no more than a pipe dream.



For recent appraisals of the situation in the United States: John Kenneth Galbraith, Economics and the Public Purpose, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973; Richard N. Goodwin, "Reflections: The American Condition," The New Yorker, January 21st and 28th and February 4th, 1974; I, 35-60; II, 36-68; III, 48-91.

## 6. Conclusion

The conclusion to the present paper is simple enough. What can be done principally on the basis of moral theology, as in Case I, already seems to be being done. What calls for collaboration between moral theologians and those engaged in other fields, which in general are not theological, would seem to be extremely important. It is not, however, the type of work in which the Theological Commission up to the present has been engaged. It has seemed to me that it would be acting ultra vires for the organizer of the fourth section of a sub-committee to take the initiative in the matter without higher authorization.

Whether or not there exist cases distinct in a significant fashion from the three that have been considered, is an issue on which the views of others might profitably be sought. I am of the opinion that such further cases do exist, but that they are to be subsumed under some such rubric as Pastoral Theology or Practical as Pastoral Theology rather than under Moral Theology in its established sense and function.

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