

PHILOSOPHY WITH A HARMONY

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O the system of Descartes properly belongs the denial of the truth that constitutes the very essence of the harmony in the universe. It is strange indeed that that thinker whose argument for God's existence is so like a child's confident assertion of something that must be true should destroy for his disciples the evident likeness to His divine essence that the Heavenly Father has given us in the order of the universe.

Descartes, who could by intuition know his existence prior to any self-evident first principle of speculation, destroyed for himself and his disciples the place his existence filled in the harmony of the universe. "Cogito ergo sum," "I think—I am." But *where* in the order of God's creation "am I,"—that order, a consideration of which is sufficient of itself to force man's reason to conclude the existence of a first and perfect architect?

Since Descartes understood man to be a creature composed of body and soul, above the brutes and "a little less than the angels," it might be difficult at first sight to understand just how he denied man his place in the universe. Yet he has done so as truly as if he placed man on a level with the brute.

It is not so much, then, a question of the denial of man's location in the harmony of things as it is of the denial of the true function which man fulfills in that place.

The root, of course, of Descartes' doctrine in this as in other fields is his theory of Exaggerated Dualism. Spirit and matter, although both exist in man, are antithetical. They can never be so interwoven as to form one nature and one principle of action. In some strange manner bodily movement accompanies the operation of the soul. The prince of rationalists here, as elsewhere, parts company with the rational and embraces the fanciful. He himself never followed his theory to its logical conclusion. It was left to Geulincx and Malebranche to develop the Occasionalism and Ontologism to which Descartes' doctrine naturally led.

In order to point out the true beauty of the harmony which Descartes' system would destroy, that harmony must be seen as a whole.

Matter and spirit which are antithetical in Descartes' system must be reconciled in the true and perfect harmony of the universe.

In its lowest state matter is non-living; in a more perfect state it has the perfection of life. Living matter is found to be either vegetable or animal. To the lowest form of life, i. e. vegetable life, belong growth by a vital process and reproduction.

To these proper operations of vegetable life the animal adds his proper operations, viz. sensation and locomotion. He does not, however, add these as things merely superimposed. In the animal the vegetable functions themselves, the process of growth and the power of reproduction, become sensitive.

Thus far the purely material order has been considered. In the realm of animated material substance two classes have been distinguished, the vegetable and the animal.

The perfection of order will be better brought out by leaving for a moment the material and turning to the supreme in the spiritual order. This perfect spirit, pure act, is God. In the descending order, the next place is held by the angels, pure spirits, free entirely of any composition with matter.

How, then, are the two orders to be reconciled? Descartes would answer that they can not be. They exist truly side by side in man. But there is no true union of the matter with the spirit. The soul acts and in some mysterious way the body acts with it.

If ever a rationalist, led on by preconceived notions of how things should be to conform to his theory, passed over the obvious and gave imagination free rein, Descartes did it here. He admitted matter; he admitted spirit; he admitted the existence of both in man and then denied the obvious conclusion that their union is perfect and complete, that their union constitutes a single principle of operation.

This conclusion, the perfect harmony of the universe demands. Animate matter, found in its lowest form in vegetable life, is perfected in animal life. Spiritual creation, perfect in the angels, finds in man a bridge to material life.

Man is a rational animal. He is at once the highest in the material order and the lowest in the spiritual order. In man to whom St. Thomas repeatedly refers as "a little world," are to be found three species of life, vegetable, animal, and intellectual, all vitalized by the one principle, the human soul.

Descartes can be said to have had an exaggerated conception of the gap that lies between matter and spirit. And yet, as far as the gap itself is concerned, it can not be exaggerated; it is infinite. But in-

finiteness is not synonymous with impossibility. It is one thing to say that the gap is infinite and quite another to maintain that it defies negotiation even by a power that is divine. No one is more conscious of the gap between matter and spirit than is the Scholastic, but he will not make this a reason for shutting his eyes to the stop-gap that he finds in man.

Nowhere is this perfect order better exemplified or more thoroughly apparent than in the Aristotelian-Thomistic theory of knowledge. This theory depends upon the truth of the Scholastic doctrine of the harmony of the universe and in its turn vindicates that doctrine because it so perfectly fits the known facts.

Since knowledge is a perfection which in itself contains no limitation it can be applied in general to every being from the lowest creature endowed with sensation to the Creator of the universe. It is limited or not, therefore, by reason of the subject who possesses it.

The lowest creature capable of acquiring knowledge is, then, the brute. Here is knowledge limited indeed. Of itself infinite, knowledge is to be found in the brute in the state of its greatest limitation. The brute knows things but he knows only individual, concrete, and corporeal things and his knowledge does not lose its corporeal character.

Now purely spiritual creatures can not obtain their knowledge from corporeal things. To do so would be for them an imperfection. God's knowledge has its source in His own essence with which His knowledge is identical. The knowledge of the angels is obtained by the impression of purely spiritual species or forms. They can in no way depend upon material creation for their knowledge.

The gap here between brute knowledge and angelic knowledge is readily apparent. The brute can not rise above corporeal knowledge. The angel can not stoop to it.

Perfect harmony demands their union and finds it in man,—an animal receiving from the corporeal world individual, concrete, and corporeal forms and by reason of his spiritual principle, transforming these into universal and spiritual ideas.

And what is true of the problem of knowledge is true of other problems. The sanction for a retreat from reality in this initial question of harmony is an increasingly fanciful explanation of dependent and related questions. So that at last the simplest actions of every day life must receive complicated, imaginary, and utterly ridiculous explanations that bear no trace of reality or common sense. As Harvey Wickham so truly said, "Everyone is a Scholastic at two but by

dint of learning a sufficient number of things that aren't true many lose their early grasp upon the theory."

In the light of the Scholastic doctrine of the harmony of the universe a point of interest is the consideration of the hypothetical convenience of man's existence. That is, postulating the existence of lower creation, the existence of man is so pressingly demanded that without him the order of things would be destroyed. The harmony of the universe is such that all things having come out from God all things must be returned to Him. Now brute creation knows only the individual, concrete, and corporeal, and in the brute knowledge must remain in that state. Man, however, although he first knows things as individual, concrete, and corporeal, later by means of his intellect transforms sense knowledge so that it becomes knowledge of the universal or the essential. And knowing God and knowing things and that they have come out from God, man returns them to Him. The angels can not do it, for their knowledge does not come from corporeal things. The brute can not do it, for his knowledge embraces only the corporeal, and below the brute not even this knowledge is to be found. So that given corporeal creation, man with his peculiar knowledge born in the senses and perfected in the intellect is the final touch that perfects the whole, the last stroke that betrays the master's handiwork.

This, then, is the beautiful order Descartes would destroy. This is the obvious and perfect harmony established by God, simple with the simplicity of the divine intelligence that conceived it, beautiful with the beauty of the divine essence which it intimates. No artist's brush, no poet's melody can ever touch it for the artist and the poet here is God. And Descartes would slash the Master's canvas; he would sound the sour note in the song that God has sung.