Scholasticism and the Spirit of Modernity

Louis Rougier (1880-1980) is one of the main figures of French epistemology in the XXth century, and, possibly, the most original and brilliant one. He wrote more than 40 books, whose subjects range from the theory of knowledge to the philosophy of science, from the history of philosophy and religion to political science, from political economy to contemporary history. Yet, his work is still largely unknown to the general public and ignored by the world of scholars. This ostracism can be attributed to his political involvement, namely to the rather important part he had in the foreign policy of the Vichy regime in the 1940's and to his connections, in the 1970's, with the "Nouvelle Droite", whose members could not fail to be interested in his critique, in his "militancy against Christianity" and, most particularly, in his edition, with translation and commentary, of Celsus' "Alethes Logos" ("On The True Doctrine : A Discourse Against the Christians"), the earliest known comprehensive criticism of Christian doctrines. More generally, his support for the corporatist state, his opinion of the origin of egalitarianism in Jewish thought and in the prophets of Israel, and his general critique, somewhat along Pareto's lines, of democracy, could not but incline him to a far right position.

As one of the few contemporary experts on Rougier's work puts it, he can be considered as "a non-conformist in the IIIrd Republic". "Rougier (...) saw it as his duty to fight against the revival of scholastic philosophy in France. As a result of the impulse given by Leo XIII's encyclical Aeterna Patris in 1879, a neo-Thomist movement had emerged in predominantly Catholic countries such as France ; it had gained momentum in the 1920's and 1930's. Rougier published a lengthy critique of neo-Thomism in "La Scolastique et le thomisme", a huge book of more than 800 pages. It was not written as a piece of scholarship ; Rougier wanted to show that the scholastic attempt to reconcile the revealed truths of Christian religion with Greek rationalism was a complete failure. His peculiar approach was to 'axiomatise' scholastic philosophy and to show that its conclusions did not follow from its premises unless one committed one of a number of "paralogisms", i.e., fallacies that are committed in good faith and not with the intention to mislead. Rougier's book was very controversial and he was accused of plagiarism by Dominicans. The leading neo-Thomist figures of the day, Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson, became his bitter enemies (...). Rougier's atheistic and anti-scholastic stance was unusual for a philosopher of the IIIrd Republic, the vast majority of whom were practising Christians".

In the XIth century, through the development of contacts between the various parts of the Western world, a renewing of philosophical thought occurred. The works of Plato, of Aristotle, and of other Greek philosophers, were translated by Arab scholars and attracted the attention of the philosophers of Western Europe. Jewish, Muslim and Christian philosophers interpreted these writings in an effort to reconcile philosophy and religious faith and to give rational foundations to their religious convictions. Their researches laid the foundation of scholasticism. Scholastic thought endeavoured to

demonstrate the truth of existing convictions rather than to discover new facts and principles. Its method was therefore dialectical. Researches on reasoning lead to important developments in logic as well as in theology. Avicenna, the Arab physician of the XIIth century, integrated neo-Platonic and Aristotelian notions into the religious doctrine of Islam, and the Jewish poet Avicebron carried out a similar synthesis between Greek thought and Judaism. Saint Anselm, archibishop of Canterbury, reaffirmed the position of Augustine on the relation between faith and reason and associated Platonism with Christian theology. An adept of the Platonic Theory of Ideas, Anselm maintained the distinct existence of "universals" or common attributes of things. He thus established the position of realism in regard to one of the most controversial questions of medieval philosophy. The opposite position, nominalism, was formulated by the scholastic philosopher Roscelin, who held that only individual and concrete objects exist and that universals, forms, and ideas, under which particular things are subsumed, are only mere words or labels, and not intangible substances. He also asserted that the Trinity comprises three distinct persons. The scholastic French theologian Pierre Abélard offered a compromise between realism and nominalism : according to conceptualism, universals exist in particular things as attributes and outside things as concepts in the mind. Abélard believed that revealed religion must be justified by reason. He elaborated an ethics based on personal consciousness which presaged protestant thought. Averroes, the most famous Muslim philosopher of the Middle Ages, tried to overcome the contradictions between Aristotelian philosophy and revealed religion by distinguishing two distinct systems of truth : a corpus of scientific truths, built on reason, and a corpus of religious truths, built on revelation, while asserting that reason prevails over religion. The rabbi Maimonides, following in Averroes footsteps, united Aristotelian science with religion, while rejecting the idea that two incompatible conceptual systems could be equally true. Bonaventure, the philosopher of the XIIIth century, for his part, combined Platonic and Aristotelian principles, introducing the concept of substantial form or immaterial substance to explain the immortality of the soul. The concepts of Bonaventure bordered on pantheistic mysticism and regarded ecstatic union with god as the goal of philosophy.

However, the most eminent intellectual figure of the Medieval epoch was the Dominican monk Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas integrated Aristotelian science and Augustinian theology into a vast system of thought which was to become the official philosophy of the Catholic Church. He asserted, as against the Averroists, that the truths of faith and the truths of reason cannot contradict each other, since they apply to different domains. It is by looking into observable facts that the sciences and philosophy discover truths, whereas the articles of revealed religion, such as the Trinity, the creation of the world, and the other articles of Christian dogma, are beyond the capacity of human reason, although they are not contrary to reason, and they must be accepted by faith.

The major critics of Thomist philosophy were Duns Scotus and William of Occam - whose pre-idealist positions were often praised by Julius Evola. Duns Scotus, who formulated a subtle and highly technical system of logic and metaphysics, rejected the attempt of Thomas Aquinas to reconcile rational philosophy and revealed religion. Modifying the doctrine of the "double truth" of Averroes, he argued that all religious beliefs are a question of faith except for belief

in the existence of God, which he considered to be logically demonstrable. As against the position of Thomas Aquinas, according to which God acts in accordance with his rational nature, Duns Scotus stated that divine will prevails over divine intellect and creates the laws of nature and morality rather than follows them, and thus he differentiated his view from Thomas Aquinas' conception of free will. As far as the question of the universals is concerned, Duns Scotus developed a new compromise between realism and nominalism, considering that the distinction between individual objects and the forms which these objects accomplish is a logical rather than a real one.

This excursus through the main stages of development of scholasticism and the critiques raised against Thomism, necessary in order for the reader who is not familiar with this philosophical tradition to understand the dense and pointed considerations developed by Evola in "Scholasticism and the Spirit of Modernity", will now have given him an idea of the kind of criticisms which Evola wished to raise against scholasticism - criticisms which were to be taken up again in his "Teoria dell'Individuo assoluto", written in 1924 and published in 1927, and his "Fenomenologia dell'Individuo assoluto", written also in 1924 and published in 1930. It may be noted that, just as, with the theory of 'absolute idealism' that he was building at the time, he went beyond classical transcendental idealism, so also he went beyond the critique launched by Occamism and Scotism, as well as beyond that raised by Newtonianism and Empiricism, against the entire scholastic philosophy, based as it was on formal methods of teaching, knowledge from books, dialectics and words. In the course of this development, his thought intersected with that of Louis Rougier in "La Scolastique et le thomisme" (Gauthier-Villars, Paris, 1925). Finally it is not without importance to add that they both show a few flaws in their account of the reading by the scholastics of Aristotle's work.

"Scolastica in fronte dello spirito moderno" ("Scholasticism and the Spirit of Modernity") appeared in 1926 in Bilychnis, a review of religious studies founded in 1912 by the faculty of the Baptist Theological School of Rome. The nine essays (including this one) which were written for the journal by Julius Evola between 1925 to 1931 were all republished by Edizioni di Ar in 1970 in a collected edition entitled "I Saggi di Bilychnis" (reprinted 1987). We present here the first part of this essay ; the second part will follow next month.

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At times of crisis - when, as the spirit strives towards new and more living forms, the usual supports seem to disappear and general chaos reappears in the worlds of culture and values -, there are always people who are overcome by weariness and spinelessness so that, induced to run away by the fear of 'no longer touching the bottom', they start to search in the past for the life and the certainty which they have lost, and which in reality they could only recover by going further. This is the meaning of the so-called returns which are nowadays so fashionable and, more particularly, of the return to scholasticism.

Seen from outside, scholastics really appears as a grandiose
monument, as a whole, as something complete and exhaustive. It would
seem that the need for the spiritual and the supra-mundane, and the
requirement for a rationally justified system of human knowledge,
celebrate in it a harmonious union. This is why there is nothing more
natural than the suggestion it exerts on weary and distracted spirits
in our own time, a time which is precisely characterised, on one
hand, by nausea for a philosophy which has now weakened into a miasma
of abstractions and conceptual rhetoric, foreign to the living
reality of the individual ; and, on the other hand, by a vain effort
to attain a generic, vague, formless spirituality, which is unable to
create for itself a body, or to firmly account for itself in the face
of the challenges of knowledge and of action.

However, this fascination for scholasticism is just a mirage : only
the rhetoric of insufficiency fuels and vitalises it, only this
rhetoric makes people mistake the eternity in actuality of a
'perennis philosophia' for what is, in reality, only the immobility
peculiar to lifeless things and exhausted processes.

It has been some time since this author has attempted to examine
scholasticism thoroughly, to place himself decidedly within the
system, to dissect its mechanism, to authenticate its elements and
its connections in order to reach an impartial verdict on this moment
of the history of the spirit, which some people propose to protract.
This we can do, either by means of compromises and myths which we may
feel still have, to some extent, a raison d'être, or, more
essentially, we can treat the question as a contribution to the
higher task of assessing the extent to which a transcendental
religion (a religion, that is, which posits between man and God an
essential, irreducible difference) can find any foundation outside
the irrational act of merely passive faith. In fact, since we have in
Catholicism the typical form of such a religion, the examination of
scholasticism, which precisely sets itself to actualise the data of
Catholic faith in a speculative system, can be considered, in this
respect, as decisive. Our solution, or lack of a solution, to the
scholastic problem amounts, more or less, to a verdict on the
question of the rationality or the irrationality of transcendental
religion in general.

From this point of view, it seems that the analysis of scholasticism
which we wish to undertake has already been performed. The recently
published work of Rougier carries out our design : it is a masterly
volume, the fruit of eleven years of work, in which, with
mathematical lucidity, great richness of information and a
penetrating criticism, the birth, the essence and the significance of
scholasticism are truly exposed according to an objective but, at the
same time, inflexible and severe examination.

By expounding the general lines of this critique of his, we can say
that we expound our own ideas. Where we will make several
reservations is where Rougier passes from the critical to the
positive plane, that is, where he indicates what, for him, would be
of value, as against what he regards as the absolute valuelessness of

scholasticism,. Rougier, a disciple of Poincaré, is radically an anti-metaphysician. The critical empiricism of mathematical philosophy - limited to outer and analytical knowledge, opposed to all normativity, to all questions of meaning, to all problems of power and freedom - is for him the ultimate instance. Here we are not at all with him but, sticking firmly to the idea that the task of the individual is very different from the passive watching and exact recording of the contingencies of things and particular beings, we are instead decidedly against him. Thus the common road will concern the purely critical plane, after which we will part company with him in order to indicate what is, in our view, the positive direction, beyond the destroyed idol.

I. The Necessity of Scholasticism

The scholastic problem, in so far as it connects with that of the agreement between faith and reason, is a necessary problem. The inner and vague faith of the simpliciores, who think like Tertullian that the believer who attempts to justify his own faith by reason ceases thereby to be a believer, is an abstraction which could in no way amount to a faith in itself, and, on the other hand, could not be connected to any given religion in preference to any other.

Therefore, as determined within a specific religion, faith is faith only insofar as it is also philosophy : dogmatic definitions must be interpreted, otherwise they cannot be referred to a faith, that is, to an adhesion of the spirit to intelligible ideas, but rather to a psittacism, that is, to a servility to words which function as mere sounds. Since language itself presupposes, in any case, a philosophy of a rudimentary sort, when one says that one sticks to the pure letter of the dogma prior to any theology, one only prefers an inferior philosophy to a higher or more conscious one. So it is worth while to pose the problem frankly, that is, to look for a point which actualises the spirit of the faith in the body of a rationally founded system.

Therefore, after its first moment of mystical enthusiasm and messianic orgasm, we see Christian faith looking for compromises and thus trying to reconcile itself to the whole existing body of wisdom and to reduce the latter to itself. In the first place, we had the theory of plagiarism : that is, the idea that the various profane philosophies only had value to the extent that they had consciously or unconsciously taken elements from the Scriptures. In the second place, we had the theory of the subjective divine illumination : the ability to recognise the truth is rendered possible in man by a single immanent divine principle, which has been revealed partially and inadequately in the various profane philosophies, but in Christianity is revealed in its entirety. This theory basically is only a pretext for glossing over the antithesis with the various profane philosophies, drawing from them selected elements, and thus constructing a Christian theology. Therefore, it has as a logical consequence the theory of Justin, that profane reason is right insofar as it is Christianity, and insofar as it is not Christianity is not right - a theory which, if we examine it closely, means that it is not rational being which is the criterion according to which the divinity of the Christian revelation is to be acknowledged, but

the pure fact of being revealed by Christ is instead the criterion according to which what can be said to be rational is to be judged.

Scholasticism - specifically, Thomism - wanted to mitigate this position, which did not solve the problem of reconciliation for the simple reason that it suppressed one of the terms to be reconciled, namely reason. Conversely, the opposite position of rationalism, expressed from the beginning by Abelard, did not reconcile the terms either : "Nec quia Deus id dixerat, creditur, sed quia sic esse convincitur recipitur", since, here it was revelation as a distinct force which came to lose all its value : "Fides not habet meritum, cui humana ratio praebet experimentum"). Scholasticism wanted to combine faith and reason taken precisely as distinct and autonomous terms - and not by violence, but by inner concordance -, showing that, from reason, one can manage to understand that what is admitted according to faith ; and that, even if reason was not able to produce by its own means certain dogmatic points, it can always be shown that they are not irrational, but suprarational, and, legitimately, rationalisable.

We will show, with Rougier, that this is merely the pious hope of Thomism, since, in fact, Thomism in the service of faith desecrates reason, and, when it does not do this, it is absolutely powerless to acquit its task.

II. Presuppositions of Thomism

Once faith and reason were taken as distinct terms, two further problems were added to the problem of their reconciliation, namely, to define these terms themselves, to say what it is that is meant by 'faith' and what it is that is meant by 'reason'. However, scholasticism, Once faith and reason were taken as distinct terms, to the problem of their conciliation two others were presupposed, that is : to determine these terms themselves, to say what it is that is intended for faith and that is intended for reason. However, scholasticism, rather than solving these initial problems, supposes them to be already solved. It is thus based on a double dogmatism :

(a) It does not even suspect the existence of the Biblical problem, that is, the problem of the birth, nature and capacity of the scriptuary data ; it worries even less about analysing the historical genesis of the dogma on which it is based and asking itself to what extent the conciliar decisions are founded on the pure data of the Scriptures and to what extent they simply represent particular interpretations taken among many other possible ones.

(b) It does not face the critical problem, that is, the problem of the value, nature, and capacity of the rational principles on which it is based, by deducing those truths which are considered to be demonstrated according to logical necessity ; instead, it presupposes the existence of a natural reason, common to every man, whose content is purely and simply identified with the doctrinal system peculiar to

Aristotelianism.

Thus, for scholastics, the problem is reduced to that of conciliating Aristotle with the corpus of dogma defined by the Council of Trent. Now, Rougier shows that, in these conditions, the two terms are not open to reconciliation : reconciliation only seems to succeed, insofar as, consciously or unconsciously, an actual counterfeiting of Aristotelianism takes place, consisting in the conversion of the logical distinction between essence and existence into a real distinction.

The main points of Catholic doctrine in fact are :

(a) The contingency of the world and of beings, which God creates out of nothing (non ex se, sed ex nihilo) ;

(b) The dogma of the trinity ;

(c) The dogma of divine incarnation (and, in connection with this, the dogma of the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic species) ;

(d) The personal survival of souls ;

(e) The existence of disincarnate intelligences distinct from God (angels).

These are not positions one could reach on the basis of the data of Aristotelianism alone. In fact :

(a) The Aristotelian demonstration leads to The One who is purely and simply himself according to a perfect, solitary act detached from everything, unaware of all love and providence for particular beings, which fall outside of his immaterial self-revelation - not to the providential God creator of the Christians. As for the world, for Aristotle, it is eternal and necessary (necessitated by final causes if not by mechanical ones) rather than innovated and contingent, as the dogma would assert ;

(b) & (c) By admitting only a purely formal distinction between essence and existence, and between substance and accidents, Aristotle, as will be shown in more detail soon, prevents whoever follows him from grounding intelligibly the dogmas of the trinity, the incarnation and the Eucharist ;

(d) For Aristotle, the person is the particular individual who is derived from a particular individual organism, of which he is the act. To admit therefore the survival of the person after the dissolution of the corporeal organism is a contradiction in terms. The principle of individuation is matter : separated from matter, intelligences lose any personal character and are submerged in the unity of universal intellect – this, as seen by Averroes, is the only logical consequence which can be drawn from Aristotelianism, which, however, contradicts Christian doctrine ;

(e) The angels and the disincarnate souls, according to the dogma, are pure spirits, that is, in Aristotelian terms, "pure forms". Now, in Aristotle, form (= actuality) is the principle of existence : format dat esse. Pure forms would therefore mean : beings which are by and for themselves, and, thus, eternal, necessary beings, such that nothing could give or take away their existence : pure acts, gods. This goes against the dogma, which does not call the subsisting forms gods, but instead understands them as contingent beings, subordinate to divine omnipotence.

Pure Aristotelianism and revelation are therefore in striking contrast to one another. The means by which this contrast is magically resolved into a harmonious unity is the 'reification' of the logical distinction between essence and existence.

III. The real distinction between essence and existence

Aristotle had said : the definition of an entity never implies its existence. I can know perfectly well what man or the phoenix is, and yet not know whether or not there are really any such existents in nature. But this, for Aristotle, was a purely logical distinction, living in the mind (idealiter) and not in reality (objective), since his doctrine held, as against the Platonic one, that essence (= that which is given by the definition) and existence (the concrete being to which the definition is referred) realiter, in the indissociable unity of the synolon, are one and the same thing. Thus, for him, to speak about essence and existence as two distinct truths could have no meaning. Essence, as such, is not a reality, but an empty, abstract possibility ; let it be actualised, and it would become an existent essence, and only then, from the purely ideal point of view, could its being de facto (to on = that = Dasein) be distinguished from what it is (ti estin = what =Wesen).

Scholasticism neglects this fundamental point of Peripateticism, and transforms the distinction from ideal and logical to real and ontological. The concept of reality then becomes a genus of which essence and existence are two species. There is an essential reality and an existential reality, which are metaphysically distinct and, therefore, are able to enter in composition just as two physical realities can.

At this point we may note that at the root of this mental attitude - leaving aside the atheoretical rnovement of the apologetic - there is the prejudice of a naive realism, that is, a tendency to take concepts for reality and to think of all the distinctions created in the mind from the point of view, not so much of discursive knowledge as of mere language, as really existing in things. Such a prejudice leads, as we shall see, to a sea of antinomies and insoluble problems. But, without it, it is impossible to account logically for the data of the dogma. Those who - like Averroes, Duns Scotus, Suarez, and Ockam - rejected and refused to think of a real distinction between essence and existence are powerless against the scholastic problem.

IV. Thomist pseudo-justification of dogma

(a) Contingency of the world. - Point of departure : in the order of nature, the existence of a being is not included in its definition or essence, but it is instead contingent to it, since I can know what a thing is, and yet not know whether it exists. However, scholastic dogma moves then, paralogistically, from mere logical implication to real causation : a real principle is made of essence, a 'non being caused by' is made of the 'non being implicit in', and the natural being is therefore defined as something which is not the cause of its own existence, precisely because its definition does not imply its existence. If natural beings exist, this means therefore that 'another' gives them existence, and since one cannot go back ad infinitum (this is the Aristotelian argument known as ananké stènai, which is far from incontestable and for the Stagirite, anyway, had a purely logical use), this means that there exists a being in which essence and existence are one and the same thing, i.e., one that is pure, active power to exist (quod est non per se, est ab alio, quod est per se). Such is God, who says explicitly in the Scriptures : "I am the one who is", that is, the one who has existence as such as essence or definition.

The argument is completed a priori with the so-called ontological proof : God ,as the most perfect being, cannot be thought of as not existing, since existence, being a perfection, is ex hypothesi already comprised in the concept of God. Cause of himself, absolute and necessary existence, God gives existence to the natural beings, which are passive possibilities (= essences), incapable of bringing themselves into the active state (or existence if one wants to put this way). But let us beware : essence, being ex hypothesi distinct from existence, not merely as its abstract logical possibility, but rather as its real principle, does not vanish, but subsists beneath the divine command which makes it actual ; hence the existent owes its existence to God, but its essence, qua essence, is distinct from God. With this, the stumbling block of pantheism is, apparently, overcome.

As for the essence, in itself it must be understood as a limiting principle, whose function is to receive the indeterminate command to exist and to circumscribe it within the limits appropriate to the genus and species of the particular individual. This concept of essence is deduced from the following reductio ad absurdum of S.

Bonaventure. The concept of limitation and diversity of kind is not comprised within the concept of existence per se. However, since in fact a diversified universe does exist, it is necessary to admit, as its cause, a principle which is distinct from pure existence or Divinity, and which is precisely the finite quality of the essence, derived from its creation ex nihilo. The main points of the dogma are therefore conquered : the real distinction between creature and creator ; the contingency of the former – and, therefore, of the world ; and the logical necessity and the 'aseity' of the latter, shown both a priori and a posteriori.

This construction can be taken apart as follows. Real distinction only exists between two things which possess reality independently of each other. Now, since, ex hypothesi, only the existent is the real, to speak of a real essence before or outside of the command which renders it an object in the world of existence is a contradiction in terms. Thomism, using the Aristotelian principle of analogy (i.e. : that the same concept can be used in an analogical manner to designate various things) will say that the reality of essence is the sui generis reality inherent to that which is in potentia, as distinct from actual reality in the literal sense. But, if so, it is meaningless to assert that the essence remains passive and distinct beneath the divine command which makes of it an actual existent, since one and the same thing cannot be in potentia and in actu at the same time and in the same respect, and one falls therefore into a pantheism, since it will follow that the realities of the essences in potentia and the existents in actu would be one, without residual (1). It can be added that, besides, one enters into pantheism by two other ways:

(i) By analysing the principle of analogy. In fact, unless there is a degree of univocality between the things analogated, we have not analogous but merely homonymous notions. Analogy is equality in a certain respect. In respect of this common aspect, we are brought back to a principle of equality. It follows that it is worthless, in the service of Catholic theism, to distinguish the essential reality of the creatures from their existential reality: these two realities can only be such with regard to a deeper principle of reality, in respect of which they will be identical.

This can be explained by means of an examination of the argument of S. Bonaventure. Assuming that the idea of the absolute excludes that of any determination (we hold that true absoluteness is not indeterminacy, but rather the infinite, unconditioned power to determine oneself, to "be absolutely what one wants") ; given this, when one refers to the principle, as opposed to the essences, in order to explain the limited and differentiated existences which comprise the world, one will certainly not want to posit, in a Manichaean manner, a second God against God : this principle of essential limitation will have to be explained by a divine will which has created it and which wants it. This means : in a determinate being it is God himself who wants to take the determinate form of this being (2). It is not worth while here to appeal to malum metaphysicum : that is, to the thought that the concept of creature implicitly contains, legitimately or a priori, that of limitation, that God, as Malebranche says, does not create gods ; since it may be asked whether the Law of Identity is something against which God Himself can do nothing, in which case the strange conclusion would be

that, in order to explain the impotence of the creature, one is forced to make of God an impotent being.

It only remains to indicate the dangers of misunderstanding which are due to mere paralogisms.

The idea of God as most perfect being may imply the idea of an existing being, but it does not imply that this being exists in fact, since the idea of existence is one thing, and effective existence is another.

(ii) By reasoning within the analogy itself : from the fact that the definition of man does not imply his existence, it follows that the concept of man is that of a being which does not exist by himself, but not at all that this being really exists and that in order to explain him one must go back to a principle from which his existence comes and from the point of view of which, a priori, he is contingent – as in the 'a posteriori' proof of God.

(b) Dogma of trinity. – how do we account for the presence of three really distinct persons, defined by relationships of origin (generation for the Father, filiation for the Son, and spiration for the Spirit) within the supposed absolute simplicity in divine nature? The difficulty is the following : either the distinction of the persons is real, and then one falls into the tritheistic heresy (that is: realiter we would have three gods rather than one abstract divinity); or it is not real, by saying which one falls in the modalistic and Sabellian heresy (that is: the three persons would only be modes or accidental aspects of one and the same God). Thomism resolves the problem by means of positing a real distinction between 'esse ad' and 'esse in', which is closely connected to that between essence and existence. The reasoning is as follows : the former is what the persons are for the various relations ('esse ad', analogous to essence), the latter is what they are in substance ('esse in', analogous to existence). According to 'esse ad', there are really in God three persons (relation of the Father to the Son, etc.); according to 'esse in', that is, with respect to the substantial nature of these, they are one and the same thing. Thus God is, at the same time, one and trine

Against this reasoning one may argue that, for the purpose in hand, it forgets the previously admitted principle of the identity of essence and existence in God, which here transmute into that of 'esse ad' and of 'esse in'. Quite simply, a relation implies distinct terms, to which it is applied : it is relationship between one thing and another thing. Consequently, either these terms are identical – only the relation of identity will subsist and any other will be excluded – and then it will be necessary to renounce any understanding of the differences between the three divine persons as essential and we pass to the modalistic heresy ; or they are different, and then there are three substances which are distinct according to their essential characters, and, in this way, we fall into tritheism. Deprived of the notion of the real distinction between essence and existence, the trinitarian dogma is ruined by the

explanation of the latent contradiction in this distinction itself.

(c) Dogma of incarnation. - Here we meet the opposite difficulty to that found in the trinitarian dogma. There, it concerned the conceivability of there being three persons in one single nature, and here, instead, it concerns that of how in a single person (Christ), there can two natures, the divine and the human. On the presupposition of the identity of essence and existence, this dogma cannot be justified: one is forced either to deduce from the presence of the two natures or essences in Christ that of two distinct persons (Nestorian heresy), or, holding tight to the unity of natures, to deny as mere appearance the duplicity of the persons (Eustachian heresy). If, instead, one holds that essence (or nature) and existence (or person) are distinct in real terms, things change, and one can argue that that human existence which, in a natural manner, would be assigned to the being by a rational nature, could be taken away supernaturally, and substituted for by the existence peculiar to a supra-eminent person (the Logos).

This argument requires the rather absurd expedient of splitting in two parts the unity of the individual. In fact, existence, or form, according to Aristotle, is the act of the body. But if the dogma is true, it is necessary to admit an act related to the life of Christ as human nature which would be distinct from the act of its divine existence. This means breaking the unity of the concrete being : the life of such a being would be, and, at the same time, would not be, its own. Its actuality would not be one, but co-extensively double, which is contradictory.

The real distinction between essence and existence, understood as that between substance and accidents, in an analogous manner provides the basis for the Eucharistic dogma : if substance exists in itself, as distinct from its accidents, the mystery of transubstantiation of the species does not offer any difficulty. If however it is admitted - as, from the critical point of view, it cannot but be admitted - that a substance separated from the accidents in which it asserts itself is a flat, unreal abstraction, then this appearance of intelligibility entirely vanishes.

(d) & (e) Dogma of the subsisting pure forms. - the argument and the difficulty are similar to those we have found in the dogma of incarnation. We are forced to transcend the immanent concept of form and existence, understood as the act from which a being is individually this given being, and to duplicate it with a new distinction. In fact, it has already been said that, according to Aristotelianism, a discarnate spirit cannot retain the principle of personality, nor have the character of a contingent and dependent thing, since it is only in relation to matter that individuation and contingency have any signification. The discarnate spirit would be instead a pure act, a God - while the dogmatic data asserts the contrary. We then have this alternative : either to maintain the hylemorphism (the inherence to a certain vehicle composed of matter, even if 'subtle') of the angels and the disincarnate spirits, and thus to put ourselves in contradiction with the letter of the Scriptures ; or we may reaffirm, by using the concept of form, a principle of distinction and contingency, in grinding contrast to the

Aristotelian principle of the simplicity and of the being in themselves of the pure forms. This latter view is that of Thomism : it does not content itself with having weakened into composites the concrete unities of natural beings, but it weakens into composites the subsisting pure forms themselves, establishing a new and even more conflict-ridden distinction than that between essence and existence, one completely unknown to Aristotle : the distinction between form and existence. Even where matter has vanished - they claim - existence is not causa sui, but created by God contingently, through form; and since a sui generis principle of individuation (called 'ecceity' by Duns Scotus) is thus associated with form (quite apart from, and in the absence of, matter), the method by which angels and disincarnate spirits, while being pure spirits, would still keep their individuality, and not be gods but created beings, is explained.

In this distinction between form and existence the aporia indicated in a) and c) are exasperated. In fact, here, existence cannot be a 'potentia' which form would actualise, because of the premise that 'potentia' is innate in matter, whereas here it is a question of immaterial beings : thus there remains only the empty logical possibility that the factual existence of the immaterial spirit is identical to the form which actualises it.

In addition to these specific difficulties met by the real distinction in its various forms, there are generic ones, connected with its realistic presupposition. To imagine that, in reality, what is only distinct in the abstract intellect, and in language, is distinct also in things, is to condemn oneself to a world of antinomies and insoluble problems. If essence and substance are real, on one hand, and existence and accidents are real, on the other hand, how is one to conceive that union in act of theirs in which the concrete individual consists? What sense and what gnoseological foundation has an essence in itself, an essence which is neither the essence of this nor the essence of that particular existing being? If the 'universals' are aseities, how can we get from them to the variety of the individuals?

There is more : once the concepts are reified in distinct substances, the possibility of knowledge and transitive actions becomes inconceivable, as well as that of synthetic judgments; the logical consequence of such a presupposition is either Parmenidean 'being', intransigently incommunicable with everything which is not it, or the logical atomism of Antistene and Stilpone which, as is well-known, contested the legitimacy of connecting any attribute to any subject, for instance by saying : "man is white", for this reason : either whiteness is comprised in the idea of man, and then one need only say : "man is man"; or it is not, in which case one cannot proceed from one term to the other.

These are only a few examples, from among many other possible ones, of the absurdities and difficulties to which the realistic presupposition leads. Despite having been overcome by Aristotle by means of the doctrines of 'res in potentia' and 'res in actu', of the 'transcendentals', and of the immanence of the genera, it reappears, via the precarious compromises and verbal games of which Rougier has

collected so many, in scholasticism, since, here, the point of
concrete application vanishes and one is submerged, in the pursuit of
one's faith, in an ocean of reified logical abstractions.

V. The dilemma and the failure of scholasticism

With this we have reached the central point of our enquiry. We need
to ask why, in spite of the patent contradictions that it implies,
Thomism has held on tight to the principle of the real distinction
between essence and existence, and why Catholicism, in its turn, has
held on tight to Thomism, to the point of acknowledging it almost as
the official philosophy of orthodoxy? The answer is : because it is
only by means of the acknowledgement of this principle that any
rational justification of dogma is possible.

Here, then, is the dilemma of scholasticism : either to provide
revelation with a rational basis, but at the cost of an antinomy and
of an initial irrationality which taints the whole value of the
proposed explanation, and in addition does violence to the spirit of
Aristotelianism ; or to confine itself, impotent, to the problem of
reconciling faith and reason. It would have been easy for anti-
Thomists to reject, in agreement with both logic and Aristotle, the
Thomist principle, were it not that by doing so, they would have
arrived either at heresy, or at a confession of theological
agnosticism ; it would have been easy for Thomists to pride
themselves on having rationalised the dogma, and easy for them to
expose the dormant heresy of their adversaries, but they are
powerless to found their own principles intelligibly.

This means that scholasticism completely failed to achieve its
purpose.

That the rejection of the principle of real distinction necessitates
either a dormant heresy or an open divorce between faith and reason,
can be shown from the doctrines of the main anti-Thomists. Duns
Scotus, who admits in a coherent manner that there is no real
distinction between things existing in actu and things existing in a
physically distinct manner, i. e., that being and being in actu are
one and the same thing, and that potential existence, or essential
existence if one wants, is not existence at all but a mere logical
abstraction, wavers terribly, when it comes to the doctrine of the
Trinity, between tritheism and modalism, and grants a distinct
existence to the human nature of the Incarnate Christ, a view verging
on Nestorianism ; in general, he tends to see in dogmas mere
practical maxims of behaviour, in a way that presages pragmatism.
Ockham, who starts from the idea that only individual beings are real
and that, therefore, 'universals' are nothing but abstractions that
these arouse in the mind, and that substance is inseparable from its
accidents, is forced to the expedient of the 'double truth' implied
by a divine voluntarism : philosophy shows us the natural ways of the
economy of the world, but theology, the supranatural and impenetrable
ones which it pleased the omnipotence of God to choose, so that
nothing can be inferred from the opposition between the principles of
faith and those of reason, neither against faith, nor against reason

- a view which leads to the dissolution of the scholastic problem in
a mere fideism. Since Suarez acknowledged an ideal and modal, rather
than a real, distinction between essence and existence (essence, for
him, is the mere conceptual aspect of the possibility in the divine
mind of this essence, which, realiter, actualised, is nothing but
existence) he is also led, when it comes to the Incarnation, to waver
between the Nestorian heresy and the Eustachian one, and, in regard
to the Trinity, to deny that the principle of non-contradiction can
be applied to God as it is to the creatures, and to treat it as if it
were a mere contingent law of nature - which amounts to a declared
profession of theological agnosticism, with mere faith as only way
out.

Thus the inescapability of the dilemma of Catholicism, and of any
transcendental religion, is confirmed : either it must renounce, or
rationalise, faith, or it must do violence to reason.

VI. Criteriological evolution

All this holds true whether or not we accept the presuppositions of
scholasticism, which are, that the natural philosophy of the human
spirit is Aristotelianism, and that revelation coincides exactly with
the dogmas established by the Council of Trent.

It is in the question of the revision of these presuppositions that
we will have to part company with Rougier, as our paths diverge from
the route which we have travelled together so far. Rougier starts
this parting of the ways by saying that, even if one had managed to
bring together Aristotle and the Scriptures, this would not mean that
one would have established the agreement between reason and faith,
but, rather, that this achievement itself would constitute one more
presumption against the revealed dogma, since peripateticism is
disavowed by science and philosophy.

We retort that Aristotelianism cannot be disavowed by science for the
simple reason that what is living in it is a metaphysics, so that it
has nothing to do with science - even those elements which seem
completely fallen (i.e. physics and astronomy) are not positive
sciences but rational systematisations of a spiritual science,
resonant with the Mysteries, which, although little known, is
nonetheless real. As for philosophy as such (i.e., what is not a mere
reflection on scientific method), its 'progress' brings so little
discredit on Aristotle that, nowadays, albeit with a very different
consciousness, philosophy seems to be returning to him. So Hegel,
Ravaisson, Boutroux, Hamelin teach - we shall pursue this below.

We agree even less with Rougier when he limits the noetic capacity of
the 'I' to the mere empirical intellect, when he mixes the concept of
reason with the "sum of prejudices and opinions universally
substantiated owing to the state of [positive] knowledge in a given
epoch, in a people of a given culture". It would be tempting to
retort in this way : if this is true, your very concept that reason

is the product of the epoch, of prejudices, etc., is itself nothing but a contingent product of the epoch, of prejudices, etc., so that, in brief, you should be mute as a plant, even as a stone, without pretending to give any value to this idea, which is a mere contingency reassumed in an unforeseeable event. As for us, we think that, in man, there is the capacity for a metaphysical understanding of things, a power not of intellection of phenomena, but of organic and unitary comprehension of a system of significations and cosmic values. Therefore, if what was hidden behind the return to scholasticism was a reaction against the careless pretensions of empiricists and scientists, and a sincere need to rise to a supra-mundane comprehension of the mundane, to make everything which is wasted in exteriority and in particularity transparent, living and one in the spirit, we would definitively be for this return, while warning nevertheless that the turning of this need towards medieval scholasticism rather than towards a further development of modern metaphysics is on the wrong track or is afraid of itself.

As for the significance of the dogmatic data, we think that Rougier excuses himself a bit thoughtlessly. Here, we cannot examine this question thoroughly. That dogmas contain much more than can be derived from the Scriptures, and that to speak of a literal fall from the sky of these dogmas has not much sense, is agreed. However, even when the Jewish and Christian texts are restored to their natural connection with the body of myths common to the former or contemporary literatures of the Euro-Asiatic, Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Canaanite, etc., trunk, in which certain historical facts were cloaked, and when, thus, the human origin of these texts is shown, with this not much has been said on what matters. By humanising the divine, one only divinises the human, so that the position is not demolished, but, on the contrary, confirmed, as deriving from a deeper, more interior, root. Bearing this in mind, it will be more useful to say a few words about the problem of emancipation from dogmatic authority, as a transition to the last point of the current examination.

With the Renaissance there is the first step towards such an emancipation : the traditional interpretation of the Scriptures by which the Roman Church purported to justify its dogmatism is rejected and one refers, as a firmer ground, to the writings of the Church Fathers and to the texts themselves, conscious of the arbitrary elements added to them by the subsequent conciliar definitions. This is already an overcoming of the criterion of authority, a principle of emancipation. This material is however not as simple and clearly defined as it first seemed. Abélard, in the "Sic et non", had already indicated 250 points in which the original texts are conflicting and contradictory with respect to the fundamental points of dogma, and even before him Celsus and Porphyry had done so, hence the expedient of the first apologists, which consisted in distinguishing in the Scriptures four meanings : the literal, the allegorical, the tropological, and the moral. In these conditions, it was necessary to substitute a new criterion for the disappeared one of authority, in order to determine a meaning among the possible ones allowed by the equivocal nature of the texts.

Thus the problem of Reform is solved by means of the principle of divine subjective illumination. But, once this step is made, another is necessary : that of theological rationalism. As a matter of fact,

if the word of God within us is sufficient on its own to authentificate the inspiration of the Scriptures, this direct word of God in us has a higher authority, when it comes to faith, than the word of God indirectly gathered by the Scriptures, in which there can always be confusion and error. In this view the idea is implicit that, in the Scriptures, one can consider as inspired only what, interiorly, according to reason, one can acknowledge as such : that is, that rationality is the criterion of revelation and not vice versa. Here we arrive at Spinoza : religion is nothing but a transcription in symbols for the masses, which could not understand it otherwise, of philosophical truths which the gifted ones know by demonstration (3). I will not judge any given element as rational and true because I am told that it is revealed by God, but from its being intrinsically rational and true I will judge if it really proceeds from divine revelation.

This is the point at which subjective reason acquires compete autonomy and, when the leashes of its puerility are thrown away, proceeds by itself : its further development is no longer critique and extrinsic research into the texts and the dogmas, but rather, the auto-critique of reason, the effort of reason to become the producer of a system in which the object and its science, being identical, constitute according to the Aristotelian principle a system of absolute knowledge, a complete reconciliation of the 'I' with itself in the context of the inner world. Thus, here arise the problem of extrinsic certainty (Descartes), the gnoseological problem, the transcendental problem or the problem of the "conditions of experience" (German Romanticism), and, finally, the problem of power and of the absolute individual in contemporary thought ; thus we approach the constitution of an immanentist neo-Aristotelianism. A continuity, a unique conatus directs this whole development.

It can be noted in passing that this point confirms a priori the absurdity of the scholastic problem, which the dilemma between orthodox incoherence and heretical coherence shows a posteriori. In fact, either one admits that the data of faith cannot on their own produce rational assent, and that such assent, if it occurs, is not to faith, but to its own rationality ; or one denies this presupposition, and then faith remains an irreducible principle, which cannot be called suprarational, but either anti-rational or hetero-rational. This is an insurmountable dilemma for the simple reason that faith (or will) and reason are one and the same thing only at the level of a creative power, and, thus, as man becomes more capable of thinking of a solution which is really adequate, he ceases to expatiate and construct syllogisms, and instead makes himself capable of communication at the level of such a power.

VII. Neo-Aristotelianism - the problem of essence and existence in modern philosophy.

Rougier would certainly be highly surprised if we told him that the difference between the scholastic attitude and the empirical-scientific one which he supports, is minimal from a higher point of view, in the sense that both agree on a passive concept of the human spirit. For both, reason is not a self-sufficient principle and a power, but rather an instrument subordinate to a 'given' which is

rigidly that which it is, according to a brute alterity. For the former, this 'given' is the Catholic corpus of dogma, which it seeks to rationalise, thus making reason an 'ancilla theologiae' ; for the latter, the 'given' is physical nature, which it seeks to comprehend according to the supposedly incontrovertible necessity of mechanical and a-spiritual laws which govern its dead exteriority, thus making reason an 'ancilla rerum naturae'.

Now, in the aforementioned question of the internalisation and the immanentisation of the criterion of certainty, there was entailed the overcoming of this attitude (the philosophical criteriological doubt which leads, in Descartes, to the 'cogito') ; beyond this point a more and more precise assertion of the concept of the 'I', not as a mere instrument or spectator from which it is possible to abstract, but as the very substance of this whole reality in which one lives, is accomplished. Let us cut out the intermediary steps, and indicate how the new attitude is at the root of transcendental philosophy, for which reason is no longer the 'receptacle' of knowledge (the conditioned) but rather the creator of knowledge (the condition or, better, the conditioning agent) and let us see what follows from this point of view for the scholastic question of essence and existence.

The first point is the following : I cannot coherently speak of another reality beyond the one that, either by intuition, or by inference, or by any of my other faculties, I imagine. My imagination of this being – that is to say, this elementary act or assent by which, in general, I realise the thing, understand it, or posit it for myself – is therefore the first of the conditions necessary for any reality whatsoever. We can define this state of being imagined as the essence of such reality, and as what combines with existent of the being imagined or known, whatever it is per se.

Hence, we are faced with this problem : concretely, the distinction between that which is objectively real and that which is not (which is pure idea, illusion or fiction) has a meaning. Now, what has been said does not account for such a distinction, both a reality and an illusion, both a house and, for instance, its poetic fantasm, being equally nothing apart from my imagining of them. What then defines the reality of what is specifically called real?

The answer is : actuality, not insofar as it is simply such, but insofar as it is potent will, is the criterion of distinction. A real thing is basically simply a thing I cannot do anything against. Some of my particular representations, normally, I cannot change, destroy or create as I wish, as I can a mere thought, and these I distinguish with the attribute of reality.

Let us clarify straight away a central issue : once I have reached the fact of my relative non-power, the temptation to explain it by means of the concept of a real thing which resists me must itself be rejected, since, concretely, the question is precisely the opposite, that is to say that what comes first, the immediate and original data of consciousness, is the non-power, and the 'real thing' is nothing but a symbol and a conceptual transcription, created by the logical

category of causality. There is something on which I can and something on which I cannot - this is the whole thing. This aspect of the representations, by which these are representations to which I cannot do anything (arbitrarily change them, create them or cancel them), we will call existence. Let us note : the nature of this existence is purely negative ; since it is nothing but a privation (steresis) of my activity, and this is precisely what cannot be called being, but must be called non-being.

A third point. As soon as one questions the legitimacy of referring to a heteron, to a 'thing-in-itself', to explain the fact of my non-power, it will be asked how then one can realise this non-power itself (4)? Our answer is : there is no explanation, and, better, there is not to be an explanation. And let us clarify this as follows :

Realists start from the presupposition that a human activity which is imperfect per se is inconceivable as such, so that, as soon as one thinks of a limited human activity, one must necessarily think of something else, which is the cause of such limitation. Basically, it is by arguing that there is in things a side which depends on the 'I' (the side related to their being imagined or known, i.e. their essence), and also another side which does not depend on the 'I', that realism is led to posit a reality distinct from the 'I' as cause of what the 'I' imagines. Now, this presupposition can be questioned. It derives from this conception : that what comes first is the absolute, and that everything which is particularity and finitude is only a negation made by 'another' in the fullness of this pre-existing absolute. It is thus related to the Platonist or Spinozist position which finds expression in the principle : what really is, is the universal, and the particular as such does not exist, which is to say that insofar as it exists, it is the universal, and insofar as it is specifically particular it does not exist at all but is cold and dull negation.

Now, we can oppose to this conception another, inspired by Aristotle, according to which the absolute is not presupposed by the finite and the individual, but on the contrary it is argued that what comes first is precisely what is individual - understood, however, not as something contradictory in itself, but rather as something incomplete ; not as something which does not exist by itself, but rather as something which already possesses being to a certain extent ; so that the absolute is not its negation, but its development, the point at which it perfects its principial existence according to a process from negativity to positivity, from the power to the act, from a poorer grade to a richer grade, which formerly did not exist, of actuality and being.

Now, in such a conception - which is a necessary one if development, synthesis, and 'becoming' are not to be mere empty names - a certain degree of privation or non-power (steresis) is naturally inherent to what comes first, in that it comes first - a steresis which is the condition for the appearance of things and beings existing by themselves, and for which it is meaningless to seek an explanation beyond the thought that it is simply an insufficiency of the 'I', for which only the 'I' is therefore responsible, insofar it does not at

this initial stage yet will itself perfectly.

An explanation of this sort is not retrogressive, based on the idea of an absolute limited by another, but progressive, based on the process of the attainment of wholeness of the incomplete, of the potential which consumes and fulfils itself in action, of the insufficiency which makes itself sufficiency - so that it is not really in fact a matter of explaining existence (in the discursive sense), but of acting, fulfilling oneself more intensely, making oneself more and more sufficient to oneself and to anything within one's own potential. Accomplishing its potential, essence (the 'I') consumes or fulfils its existence, gradually pushing away the boundaries presented by the non-'I', and it is only in this way that it 'explains' the non-'I' to itself. The rest is nothing but pseudo-explanation, the lazy sophism of those inadequates who evade activity (5).

To make ourselves even clearer : things are essence and existence : the idea of one hundred thalers and the reality of one hundred thalers are obviously not the same thing. But, since, from the logical point of view, in the real one hundred thalers, there is - as observed by Kant - nothing not also present in the idea of one hundred thalers, it follows that, when one makes a distinction between one and the other, one refers to something irreducible to mere logic. This 'something' is existence, as opposed to essence.

Now, for essence, for the 'what it is' of a given reality, the concept is the explanatory principle. If this reality is accounted for through the concept genetically constructed in all the characters which determine it, the explanatory instance for the essence of the given reality is exhausted. Therefore, that an object of which one has given an exhaustive account, in addition, 'is', the brute fact of its 'being here' as real object, constitutes a point which escapes the conceptual explanation entirely, it is an alogon - and the explanatory principle appropriate to it is not the concept, but rather will or, better : power.

In fact, the pure 'being here' of things constitutes for me a mystery, insofar it has the character of a brute fact, of something which is there without the participation of my will, even asserting itself by violence to it - in short, insofar it is a privation of my activity. While essence I can think of and, thus, 'construct', existence I am simply subject to, and this is why it constitutes for me an obscurity. Let us imagine instead a situation in which I could link the 'being here' of things to my willing them, that is, in which my will would have the value of creative spiritual power : then their existence in fact, over and above their concept (their existence over and above their essence) would cease to be a mystery for me, it would be instead perfectly intelligible to me - it would be explained. Essence and existence thus have as respective explanatory principles the ideal construction by means of the concept and the real causation of will. This is the second point.

The third point is as follows : between ideal construction and

creative will - thus, between essence and existence - there is no difference of nature, but only of degree. The idea is already a first degree of real affirmation ; and the so-called 'objective reality' is nothing but the most intense and complete affirmation of this power which, in an elementary form, determined the merely thought or imagined thing. Reality is nothing but the actualisation of the idea, in which it determines and expresses itself entirely, just as the idea is nothing but a reality in potentia, that is, a reality merely sketched out or at the state of birth. There is no jump between them, but rather a progression. The thought of one hundred thalers and the one hundred real thalers are obviously not the same thing - but they are not qualitatively distinct (as it might seem according to the view that the thought is a mere representation of an objective reality), but rather they are distinct in their degree of intensity, in a sense that the real one hundred thalers is the deepest, the most intense potentiation resulting from the magical act (or, if one prefers, the active faith) of the affirmation corresponding to the thought of the one hundred thalers.

Now we can arrive at our conclusion. There is an existence which, from the point of view of the spiritual and of the liberty of the 'I', is death, privation, and obscurity ; this is the existence in which the representative activity of the 'I' is passive and insufficient, which it does not dominate as its master but with which it is identical according to spontaneity. This existence, which is the very existence of the 'other', of nature and of the physical object, there is no certainty of. If my representative activity is limited to that which is in me, but does not depend on me, such as passion or emotion, a principle of radical contingency reassumes it.

But there is a second existence, which is that which a will raised to power can unconditionally produce : this is the true, absolute existence, and it is only in this existence, reconciled with itself in possession and in dominion, that the 'I' can have real, unconditioned certainty. These two existences are in the relation of potential to actual (in the Aristotelian sense of the words), of insufficiency and sufficiency. The ideal attitude is in between these two extremes, and is the attitude to which, according to what has already been said, intellectual essence corresponds, that is : even under the reign of pure necessity, even in his state of privation, his being 'in potentia', the individual delights in the ideal activity of a first, and sufficient, degree of actuality and liberty. From this degree he proceeds towards the perfection of his development, as his 'I' dominates continually deeper and more complex levels of his being, up to the very intensive limit to which his real or physical existence corresponds. Then, from the obscure passions and ferocious deserts of necessity, from the 'crucifixion of the celestial man', the world will make itself the very act of the individual, and, in this, he will be redeemed and 'persuaded'.

God is this final self-manifestation : the act of the individual (or essence), and, in him, of all things, so that the individual can consider himself to be God in potentia. Not by a jump between two co-existents (Catholic dualism), but by continuity and progression of construction, one passes from one term to the other. Then, it can be said, like Meister Eckhart : all the creatures want their supreme perfection, all of them want the essential life, all of them move into my reason to become reason. I - the Unique - raise all the

creatures from their consciousness to mine because they become unity
in it. The individual must comprehend, according to the principle of
cosmic responsibility, what it is that he does.

It seems to the author that modern speculation, when closely
examined, necessarily leads to this neo-Aristotelianism, which is at
the same time the doctrine of power, and of the absolute individual :
those who really and positively want to overcome the crisis of the
modern spirit, to go beyond the abstraction of a certain formless,
dreamy and sensualising mysticism, as well as of the even worse
abstraction of a philosophy which exhausts or exacerbates itself in
an empty formal sufficiency, if not bluntly in verbal games, and of a
dead, lethargic knowledge of phenomena (by which, perhaps, some
breathless spirits aiming at something more, but jejune and muddle-
headed, were pushed towards the Thomist pseudo-synthesis) must, he
considers, turn their gaze in this direction.

Julius EVOLA

(1)This is the nonsensicality of the ex nihilo, in which 'nothing' -
correlative to essence - is constituted as a distinct principle which
subsists by virtue of the 'being' which, once it engages in the
creational act, cannot but deny it. But this requires us to say that
creatures are, and, at the same time, in that they are made of
nothing, they are not - without thinking either that God is really
such, in which case there can be nothing outside of him, not even
'nothing'...; or, that having 'another' over against him, he is not
really God.

(2) This is the root of the famous dilemma of Kirilov in 'The
Obsessed' by Dostoievsky : either God does not exist, and then my
will is the supreme reason of itself, and I am God ; or he exists -
and, then, I cannot escape His will, and my will must be His own
will, which he has chosen to express in this form. There are only
three alternatives : either Manichean dualism, or divine solipsism,
or human solipsism.

(3) This view was already formulated by Celsus. Cf. Origen, Adv.
Cels., VI, I.

(4) This is the opposite difficulty to that on which was based the
aforementioned argument of S. Bonaventure. As we do not start
dogmatically from pure existence (God), but rather critically from
determined existence (the 'I' as partially sufficient condition of
his own experience), it is no longer a matter of going back to the
finite capacity of essence as what determines being, but, instead, of
explaining this privation, this limit which existence represents
against the 'I'. There, the negative was essence, here existence.

(5) Here, philosophy goes beyond itself, and acknowledges that only

by means of the absolute value of activity can its greatest problems find solution. Cf. J. Lagneau, Ecrits, Paris, p. 297 : "Philosophy is the reflection which comes to acknowledge its own insufficiency and the necessity of recognising the absolute value of activity ... Philosophy is the search of reality through reflection first, and then through fulfilment". This thesis is developed in our 'Saggi sull'idealismo magico' (Roma, 1925), as well as in 'L'Uomo come potenza' (ed. Atanor) and 'Teoria dell'Individuo assoluto' (ed. Bocca, in two volumes) which will be published next year.