

2. Notes from the class of 20 04 98

On the "filosophia perennis," on what recurs for centuries in philosophy (3blz.).

(Editorial : Mr. T'Jampens is speaking.)

Edgar Allan Poe died of delirium tremens, one begins, due to excessive alcohol consumption, to tremble and one becomes insane. Part romantic, Poe wanted to push the limits of consciousness through a variety of experiments. He took laudanum to have artistic experiences. It is a kind of painkiller, but you can also use that as a drug. Some believe you are not in if you don't take drugs. Poe wrote *The purloined letter*. Lacan, the great psychoanalyst gave an infamous lecture on it in 1955. He describes the work of the psychiatrist based on that story.

The postmodern thinker Jacques Derrida, deconstructionist, someone who specializes in the weaknesses of a theory, responded. The detective Dupain in that story stands as a model for the psychiatrist, who searches for the true cause of a problem. Derrida, winding down, says: yes but Lacan, the psychoanalyst, pretends to be above and beyond the story, but the psychoanalyst himself is a part of his psychoanalytic practice, he is therefore never completely objective, there is also a subjective input. Lacan pretends to possess the truth in everything. Derrida says that what Dupain and Lacan do possess is only "their" truth. This is typically postmodern. Descartes still believes in absolute truth without more. Leibniz, Spinoza and Wolf, too, believe in truth without more. Postmodern man says: each has his own view of truth, but there is no such thing as an absolute truth. Archutias reasoned much more cautiously. He says: if someone knows everything ... and adds: then such a person possesses divine attributes.

The American, Feibleman, published a series of books entitled, "The system," and concerns an attempt to describe all of reality. He started it in 1863 and wrote 18 volumes. But that data was outdated within the shortest time. Today's sciences are in such great development that no one can keep up and oversee it. No mathematician knows total mathematics anymore. Every mathematician owns a part of it but the total field of mathematics escapes even any mathematician.

The 'philosophia perennis,' the 'eternal philosophy,' seeks a firm footing, strictly provable grounds. And upon this then 'the logical building' is erected. An Aristotle, Suarez, Thomas Aquinas, Wolff, Feiblemann, Hegel... thought this way. Postmodern philosophy disputes the

existence of fixed foundations, and readily dismisses this as fundamentalism and essentialism.... For them, a "fixed footing," self-assured thinking, an attempt to establish truth once and for all, has pejorative connotations.

Plato and Socrates did believe in the existence of an all-encompassing reality, but it is too vast, too inaccessible and unattainable as a totality for man. Hence Plato wrote only dialogues, never tracts. People talk to each other, defending their point of view, complementing each other or emphasizing their mutual difference in views. Inductively, part of the truth then comes to light. That we would know it in its totality, Plato does not believe that. Plato does not write books but literary dialogues, written in beautiful Greek.

All those great system-builders knew that wanting to establish comprehensive systems was actually only provisional. Thomas Aquinas, who died in 1274, and who is the great Vatican thinker of medieval philosophy, said on his deathbed regarding his tracts, "non es nisi palia," "that is but straw." It is but something that, like straw, decays with time. Still, what he writes remains largely valid, because those medieval thinkers were trained in ultra-strict logic. One has to wait until the 19^{de} and the 20^{ste} century to see a logical current emerge that can logically match that of the Middle Ages. The great modern thinkers, except Leibniz who was logically very well trained, knew of logic only very superficial concepts.

Even in his time, Aristotle realized that his treatises were only the preliminary results of research. Aristotle possessed an open mind; he accompanied his disciple Alexander the Great on his conquests. Alexander the Great was educated and intellectual, and had an army of scientists with him on his travels to investigate peoples, plants, rocks.... Where Greeks go, professional science and philosophy arise.

F. Suarez (1548-1617), the scholastic Jesuit, was read for a few centuries at all universities, even among Protestants, it was a medieval philosophy in a modern form. I follow Wolff's scheme from the 18^{de} century, namely: cosmology, that is, general ontology, theology and psychology. Kant and Hegel speak of Wolff with very great reverence. Wolff also knew that his work would become obsolete with time.

The crisis of ontology, does not concern ontology proper, but those systems that rise and fall. They become 'palia' over time. If someone does not believe in ontology he may never use

the word 'real' again. Then you can never say that something is real or unreal. On the one hand we cannot do without it, it is the basic concept, on the other hand we know only pieces of it. Everyone lives with an understanding of reality, but as a whole we cannot know that reality.