

## INTRODUCTION

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This special issue of *Forum Philosophicum* is dedicated to current work by Jesuit philosophers. Philosophy has always enjoyed a special role within the Christian tradition. The Society of Jesus, ever since it was founded, has respected this fact and has made significant contributions to philosophy in various ways. Is there a typically Jesuit way of engaging in philosophical work? Although a typical Jesuit approach is not easy to define precisely, at least some elements of a common style can indeed be identified. Jesuits tend to situate all their intellectual and practical output by asking the meta-question “So what for Christ?” In other words, they tend to be apostolically pragmatic in much of what they do. As regards philosophy, such an attitude can result in two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, it can generate a disposition to use philosophy with the aim of securing or defending Church unity. In this sense, Jesuits engage in philosophy so as to ensure that new ideas, whatever their source, are carefully filtered, and any truth and goodness they contain becomes manifestly grounded in the accepted, well-tested bedrock of Catholic tradition. The founder of the Jesuits, St Ignatius of Loyola, seemed to foster this attitude. He made it part of the Order’s constitutions that “in logic, natural and moral philosophy, and metaphysics, the doctrine of Aristotle should be followed.”<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the meta-question “So what for Christ?” can produce a tendency to use philosophy to explore new ground. A clear statement on this point was made in the 1922 documents of the 27<sup>th</sup> General Congregation, where we read: “In no way [...] does the Society intend to lessen a just freedom in doubtful matters, and much less to disapprove the proper use of learning,

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<sup>1</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *The constitutions of the Society of Jesus and their complementary norms*, trans. G.E. Ganss, S.J. (Saint Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), Part IV, Chapter 14, § 3.

criticism, and all the other most useful benefits that have stemmed from the advance of scholarship. Those, indeed, deserve much praise who devote themselves to these disciplines and with strenuous labour strive to defend the ancient faith with new weaponry.”<sup>2</sup>

In this issue of *Forum Philosophicum*, the reader is presented with nine studies that offer a glimpse on the way these two trends are bearing fruit in current work by Jesuits. Although the overall title of this special issue *Truth, Reality, and Religion* appears broad, it in fact refers to one definite cluster of questions within the area of metaphysics. The first four papers were presented and discussed during the 2010 meeting of a group of Jesuits that meets once every two years; the group is called the European Jesuit Philosophers (JESPHIL). This meeting took place at Heythrop College, London, between 26 August and 30 August, 2010. It brought together a number of academics from fourteen different countries to share their academic experience and expertise as they deal with the topic *Criticism and Culture: the role of ontology and the architecture of reason*.<sup>3</sup> This conference was meant to deal mainly with the current status of metaphysics and ontology. Ontology, as the etymological structure of the word suggests, is the study of being. For some prominent philosophers, this means that ontology is the study of how being is disclosed to the human mind. For others, it means that it is a study of what kinds of thing exist. In the last hundred years or so, the first trend is well represented by M. Heidegger; the second by recent developments in analytic philosophy, especially those influenced by W.V.O. Quine. For both these traditions, ontology is one of the most central, if not the most central, subject of philosophy. Contrary to this, some philosophers outside these two trends have argued that

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<sup>2</sup> J. W. Padberg, S.J., M. D. O’Keefe, S.J., and J. L. McCarthy, S.J., (eds), *For Matters of Greater Moment: the first thirty Jesuit general congregations* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994), pp. 547-548.

<sup>3</sup> The participants were: Gianluigi Brena (Italia – Padova); Louis Caruana (Malta – London Heythrop); Guilhem Causse (France – Paris Centre Sèvres); Eric Charmetant (France – Paris Centre Sèvres); Paul Favraux (Belgique Méridionale – Bruxelles IET); Peter Gallagher (British Province – London Heythrop); Paul Gilbert (Belgique Méridionale – Roma Gregoriana); Gerry Hughes (British Province – Oxford); George Karuvelil (India – Pune Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth); Bogdan Lisiak (Polonia Meridionalis – Cracow); Misael Enrique Meza Rueda (Colombia – Boston College); José Daniel López (Argentina – Paris Centre Sèvres); Otto Muck (Austria – Innsbruck); Bruno Niederbacher (Austria – Innsbruck); Gaetano Piccolo (Italia – Padova); Lubos Royka (Slovakia – Bratislava); Harald Schöndorf (Deutschland – München Hochschule für Philosophie); Terry Walsh (New England Province – London Heythrop); Heinrich Watzka (Deutschland – Frankfurt Sankt Georgen); Dany Younes (Near East Province – Beirut St Joseph). The meeting was organized by L. Caruana, H. Watzka, and T. Walsh, with help from Stefan Garcia.

philosophy should not be concerned with this sub-discipline any longer. Philosophy should be essentially engaged with the question of how to live a good life. For them, ontology has no relevance for this task.

The authors of the first four papers in this issue of *Forum Philosophicum* had been invited months before the conference to reflect on and react to this seminal idea on the subject. They had also been asked to evaluate some arguments for and against ontology. For instance, many consider ontology one of the best intellectual exercises for sharpening our reasoning. Because of its closeness to logic, ontology leads to the eradication of conceptual confusion. It helps us avoid obscure reasoning by clarifying the basic concepts we often take for granted. It also helps us become aware of the content and limits of what is expressed metaphorically or poetically, as in religious texts. Those in favour of ontology include philosophers who work closely with the social sciences. A number of such philosophers of the social sciences are currently seeking a better understanding of social units as entities in their own right. They ask: In what way can a social group be more than just the sum of the individuals constituting it? Can a social group have intentional states? Can social institutions sin? There are also those who work closely with the natural sciences. These are usually defenders of naturalism. They want to reduce everything, including persons, to the ontological categories of physics. When accused of promoting physics as the only valid discipline, some of them hide behind the idea of ontological relativity. What is real is relative to the culture we are talking about. It depends on what people within a particular culture or discipline take as a basic existing unit. They thus consider ontology a part of cultural anthropology, and are happy to admit a variety of ontologies as a sign of post-modern trends. This approach has perhaps some significance for inter-religious dialogue, but it carries with it the danger of relativism. If we assume that everything is relative to the local culture, including the basic categories of reality, why should we care to engage in dialogue at all?

Arguments against ontology include, for instance, some trends in Philosophy of Religion, where the traditional role played by ontology used to concern the existence and the nature of God. But can we not talk about God without using 'being', 'substance', and other ontological terms? The Biblical authors and the ordinary believer in the course of history have never resorted to ontology, and they survived very well. Are there narrative approaches within theology and philosophy that can effectively bypass completely the traditional role of ontology? Other arguments against ontology are derived from philosophers who refer to the alleged uselessness of this sub-discipline. In the spirit of the Ancient Greek sceptical schools

of thought, they declare that ontology is the source of interminable and useless disputes. Since it has never proved useful in bringing justice to the poor, humanity is better off without it. We should therefore concentrate on what is immediate and obvious to all, and we should admit that any ontological extrapolation is always hopelessly under-determined.

Building on this background, the first paper in this collection written by Heinrich Watzka explores the basic idea that ontology is the systematic study of the most fundamental categories not of thought but of being. He shows how problems arise for instance, as described in recent work in this area, because experience cannot tell us whether entities persist through time by enduring or by perduring. He then explores the extent to which this Anglo-American approach can be consistent with Heidegger's focus on Being itself rather than on entities. The second paper, by Paul Gilbert, offers a study of how current phenomenology returns to some extent to Aristotle by highlighting ontological difference and analogy, while analytic philosophy remains firmly within the tradition of ontology as developed in modern thought. Paul Favraux's paper argues that ontology is still relevant for the reception of Christian revelation, especially as it expresses the fundamental idea of participation of all beings in Being and in God, as explained and analysed by St Thomas. He adds, however, that in the context of contemporary philosophy, ontology needs to be supplemented by an anthropological reflection on liberty. The final paper from the conference explores a different dimension. Eric Charmetant examines the ontological points of reference for determining the specificity of human beings. He presses a number of arguments, deriving from science and from philosophy, against a return to traditional essentialism and then suggests a more responsible approach to understanding human specificity.

Apart from these contributions related to the 2010 JESPHIL meeting, this special issue of *Forum Philosophicum* contains as well five other papers by Jesuit philosophers on topics related to metaphysics. Józef Bremer offers a detailed study of Aristotle's interesting philosophical investigation of the sense of touch. This sense, according to Aristotle, is the fundamental sense with respect to all the others, the one that distinguishes the organic world from the inorganic. Bremer concludes his paper by evaluating the relation between Aristotle's views and current work in neurophysiology. The following paper shifts the reader's attention to the area of metaphysics and philosophy of religion. Terrance Walsh explores the classic question: If being by its very nature is good, how are we to explain the existence of evil? The original perspective adopted in this paper involves the comparison between Aquinas and Hegel. The overall result throws light not only on

the problem of evil itself but also on the limits of classical metaphysical methods. The social and political dimension of this special issue of *Forum Philosophicum* is represented by the following paper dealing with Max Weber. Anthony Carroll shows how Weber's account of theoretical and practical rationality is inspired by some ideas inherent within nineteenth century German Protestantism. The metaphysical background of Weber's views offer a glimpse into the deep conceptual nature of Protestant modernity. The final two papers reflect the current concern with philosophical issues related to inter-religious dialogue. George Karuvelil starts by introducing a new interpretation of Schleiermacher's work on religious experience. In line with this, the major point in this paper is essentially an invitation to reconfigure Christian theology around the fundamental communicative role of religious experience. In the final paper, I revisit the perennial question of the one and the many. My aim is to justify the striving for universality in judgment. The fragmentation due to cultural, philosophical and religious variety seems to suggest that such striving is misguided or useless. I argue against this by referring to the scientific paradigm and by concentrating on two relatively neglected notions: loyalty and tradition.

It should be clear after this brief introduction that this collection of original papers, presented together in one special issue of *Forum Philosophicum*, is meant to offer some idea of the current state of the philosophical output of the Society of Jesus, especially in Europe. The Jesuits have a long history of work in philosophy and in related disciplines. Constituting an international and multicultural body, and inspired ultimately by the values of the Gospel, they are in a reasonably good position to build bridges between artificially separated sectors of a world wounded by fragmentation and division.