

Luther's Use of Philosophy

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Anyone who assumes that Luther believed that philosophy had no positive contribution to make to theology simply fails to deal with Luther's corpus. Undoubtedly, Luther puts his finger on an irresolvable tension between philosophy and theology, especially as the latter is obliged to articulate faithfully the gospel as *promissio* (of which philosophy knows nothing). However, there is no question that Luther found philosophy, especially logic, to be a helpful tool by which to establish doctrinal clarity through the use of syllogisms when properly following the grammar of the new tongue (*nova lingua*) of theology.¹ As such, logic helps ward off heresy

- 1 However, we must keep in mind that »even the study of grammar that Luther praised so highly and gave pride of place to in the *trivium* is not something that theology can follow uncritically, for it also reflects certain biases and the linguistic conventions of the day. The way that key theological terms are used, such as the words ›God‹ and ›human being‹, ›creator‹ and ›creature‹, proves disastrous for theology. The world of sin, the old world, also has its own ›old language‹ [...]. In this sense the Holy Spirit, who makes the old world and its old language new, ›has his own grammar‹ [WA 39,2; 104,24]. Indeed, ›grammar operates in all fields, but when the subject is greater than can be comprehended by the rules of grammar and philosophy, it must be left behind‹ [WA 39,2; 104,24–26].« Indeed, »Grammar confirms and strengthens the ›philosophical argument‹, that ›there is no relation between the creature and the creator, between the finite and the infinite‹, between a beginning in time and eternity. ›We, on the other hand, assert not only a relation, but [even] the union of the finite and the infinite‹ [WA 39,2; 112,15–19].« See O. BAYER, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, trans. by J. SILCOCK/M. MATTES, 2007, 81. – Luther particularly employed syllogistic reasoning in Christology. See his comments on Hebrews 1 at WA 10,1,1; 151 or on the deity of Christ at WA 37; 44,10–14 or on the deity of Christ at WA 28; 92,29–36. See also S. BECKER, *The Foolishness of God: The Place of Reason in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 2009, 82–87.

and clarifies true doctrine.² Secondly, however, at least early in his career, Luther could employ not merely the formalism of logic but also the substance of Platonic thinking in opposition to Aristotelian since he saw its apophaticism³ as better able to honor God's hiddenness and more compatible with a theology of the cross (*theologia crucis*). Extending the *via negativa*, Luther claims that the theology of the cross enables us to distinguish appearance and reality with respect to God and our works since we become aware that while our works appear meritorious and God's appear evil, in fact just the opposite is the case. More generally, philosophical concepts – including metaphysical ones – must first be »bathed« before they can become useful in theology.⁴ Thirdly, with respect to the divergent schools of Nominalism and Realism, Luther comes across as somewhat eclectic – borrowing ideas from and rejecting aspects of both – making it challenging to peg him under those categories. The overall shape of relating philosophy and theology in terms of »two spheres,«⁵ (1) philoso-

- 2 »Reason is used to understand the object of faith in an area formed by the center and circumscribed by the boundary. When attacks from the boundary threaten to erode the center, or when the certainty of the center is shaken, the theological task begins.« See C. HELMER, *The Trinity and Martin Luther: A Study on the Relationship between Genre, Language and the Trinity in Luther's Works (1523–1546)*, 1999, 3.
- 3 Knut Alfsvåg, who places Luther within the wider Platonic-Augustinian-Mystical apophatic tradition defines apophaticism as that path which systematically rejects all necessary predicates of God, and then again rejects the rejections, locating the presence of God in an area beyond all positive conceptualities including the concepts of being and not-being. See K. ALFSVÅG, *What No Mind Has Conceived: On the Significance of Christological Apophaticism*, 2010, 1.
- 4 See S. JUNTUNEN, *Luther and Metaphysics: What is the Structure of Being according to Luther?* (in: *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, ed. by C. BRAATEN/R. JENSON, 1998, 129–160), 134. »Si tamen vultis uti vocabulis istis, prius quaeso illa bene purgate, fūret sic mal zum Bade« in WA 39,1; 229,16–19.
- 5 Usually Luther distinguishes the sphere of philosophy as dealing with the temporal while theology deals with the eternal (WA 51; 243,10–18 = LW 13,199) but sometimes he distinguishes them as »present« (philosophy) and »future« (theology) (WA 56; 371,30 = LW 25,361). Oswald Bayer helpfully situates the relation between philosophy and theology as parallel to »humanity in general and Christians in particular«. »Luther's distinction between knowledge and certainty is along the same lines as that between ›holy‹ and ›saved‹ that we find in his *Confession* (1528). This distinction is highly illuminating

phy, aligned with temporal matters, and (2) theology, aligned with eternal ones, as well as his view of the inscrutability of God's will,⁶ seems to be indebted to Nominalism. However, in theology, Luther is not averse to using a Realist approach to universals and in semantics. Luther's eclecticism is not inconsistent because his standard for evaluating philosophy is primarily the requirement of clarifying and advancing the gospel to which philosophy is called upon to serve. Fourthly, in Luther's view, when philosophy is applied to practical matters in the temporal realm, it can positively contribute to human flourishing. Just as the law is valuable for directing human conduct *coram mundo* but has no say as a way for self-justification *coram deo*, so philosophy works in tandem with the law to help people determine more productive ways to support the common good. Finally, philosophy needs to come with a warning label. It is not neutral turf but can be exploited by the purposes of the old Adam. If philosophy opts to encroach upon theology, Luther sets clear demarcations for it.⁷ He will not allow it to be misused to bury the risen Christ who seeks

for his definition of the relationship between philosophy and theology. God orders his creation within three orders. The basic order of all human life is 'holy' because it is 'grounded in God's word and commandment'. However, none of the orders is a way of salvation. There is only one way beyond all these, the way of faith in Jesus Christ. For to be holy and to be saved are two entirely different things. We are saved through Christ alone. But we become holy through this faith as well as through these divine institutions and orders. Even the godless can have much about them that is holy, but they are not for that reason saved inwardly.« Bayer refers to WA 26; 505,16–21 = LW 37,365. See BAYER (see n. 1), 75.

- 6 Against Erasmus, Luther writes, »I say that the righteous God does not deplore the death of His people which he Himself works in them, but He deplores the death which He finds in His people and desires to remove from them. God preached works to the end that sin and death may be taken away, and we may be saved. 'He sent His word and healed them' (Ps. 107.20). but God hidden in Majesty neither deplores nor takes away death, but works life, and death, and all in all; nor has He set bounds to Himself by His Word, but has kept Himself free over all things.« See WA 18; 685,18–24 = M. LUTHER, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. by J. I. PACKER/O. R. JOHNSTON, 1957, 170.
- 7 »To be sure, theology encroaches upon the rules of philosophy, but, contrariwise, philosophy itself encroaches more often upon the rules of theology.« WA 39,2; 4,22–23 (*Die Disputationen über Joh 1,14*, 1539) = LW 38,240 (thesis 15).

to raise those dead in sin.⁸ Indeed, this risen Christ renders all theoreticians guided by *ambitio divinitatis*⁹ quite passive *coram deo*. It is Christ as the *novum* to whom every thought – including philosophical ones – must be taken captive. In so doing, *philosophia* can serve »not as mistress but as maidservant and bondwoman and most beautiful helper« for theology.¹⁰

I The Scope of Philosophy in the Late Medieval University

Philosophia in the Late Middle Ages was a demonstrative science based on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, established through analytic deductions and syllogisms. It included those sub-disciplines present in contemporary philosophy, such as metaphysics and ethics, but was wider than the discipline as presently defined since it included what we would call the natural sciences.¹¹ The most important subject for the Bachelor's Degree was logic.¹² The Master's Degree continued the study of logic,

8 WA 39,2; 13,15 = LW 38,248.

9 In his letter to George Spalatin (June 30, 1530), Luther writes, »Be strong in the Lord, and on my behalf continuously admonish Philip [Melanchthon] not to become like God [Gen 3: 5], but to fight that innate ambition to be like God, which was planted in us in paradise by the devil. This [ambition] doesn't do us any good. It drove Adam from paradise, and it alone also drives us away, and drives peace away from us. In summary: we are to be men and not God; it will not be otherwise, or eternal anxiety and affliction will be our reward.« (WAB 5; 415,41–46 = LW 49,337).

10 WA 39,2; 24,24 = LW 38,257. In general, Luther represents the view that philosophy is an *ancilla theologiae* or servant of faith. See WA 39,2; 24,20–26 and WA 1; 355,1–5. Luther says, »Theology shall be empress. Philosophy and other good arts shall be her servants. They are not to rule or to govern« (WATR 5; 616).

11 G. WHITE, *Luther as Nominalist: A Study of the Logical Methods used in Martin Luther's Disputations in the Light of Their Medieval Background*, 1994, 86ff. As White and others note, philosophy in Luther's day was guided by semantic and ontological concerns, not epistemological ones as has been the case since Descartes and Hobbes.

12 The primary textbook on logic was the thirteenth-century compendium of Petrus Hispanus. However, the Neo-Platonist Porphyry's commentary on Aristotle (called the »old art« [*ars vetus*]) was studied, culminating in a reading of Aristotle's *Prior Analytics* and *Posterior Analytics*, and Aristotle's work dealing with fallacies. See M. BRECHT, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483–1521*, trans. by J. SCHAAF, 1993, 32ff.

investigating Aristotle's *Topics* and his philosophy of nature.¹³ Martin Brecht notes that Luther's Erfurt philosophy teachers, Trutvetter and Usingen, following the *via moderna*, »did not question the superior authority of revelation and the Bible over against philosophy.«¹⁴ Nevertheless, all *moderni* acknowledged that theology was not a science, a theoretical system of truth established via demonstration. Reason could work within theology but its fundamental axioms were accepted on the basis of authority.¹⁵

The foundation for all study in medieval universities was the *trivium*, i. e., grammar, logic, and rhetoric. For Scholastics, the study of grammar included semantical and logical analysis. Luther was grounded in these disciplines at Erfurt. However, Luther was also influenced by Humanism, best understood not as a philosophical system but as a cultural program.¹⁶ Especially in Northern Europe, the Humanists' call was a return to the sources (*ad fontes*) of classical and biblical texts in their original languages. In contrast to Scholasticism, Humanists were primarily lexicographers, recounting matters within a text, and not analysts, who are better served by syllogistic reasoning.

The public exercise of logic in the university for the sake of establishing clarity and truth culminated in academic disputations, a dialectic between two people, a master and a respondent. »Disputations were a regular part of academic life, which occurred publicly at fixed points on the academic calendar, as part of graduation exercises, and in private between pupils and masters.«¹⁷ The goal of such disputations, which all made

13 Aristotle's philosophy of nature included: »On the Heavens«, »On Generation and Corruption«, »Meteorology«, »On the Soul«, and »Parva Naturalia.«

14 BRECHT (see n. 12), 35.

15 Indeed, Luther regarded Trutvetter as the one »who first taught him that belief is to be accorded only to the biblical books, and all others are to be accepted with critical judgment«, a precursory formulation of the »scriptural principle«, as Brecht notes, making possible a kind of coexistence between philosophy and theology. See BRECHT (see n. 12), 35.

16 A. E. MCGRATH, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 1985, 40.

17 R. S. CLARK, *Iustitia Imputata Christi: Alien or Proper to Luther's Doctrine of Justification* (CTQ 70, 2006, 269–310), 297. In an academic disputation, theses written by a professor were presented. In the course of the disputation opponents would provide arguments

extensive use of syllogistic reasoning, was to establish theological truth (though not the agenda or grounds for truth) in the face of heresies threatening the catholic faith or to clarify specific loci. Early in the Reformation, between the years 1522–1533, there were practically no disputations held at Wittenberg. However, when Luther was Dean of the Theological Faculty, after 1533, the practice was revived. It is likely that Luther, who had a reputation as a skillful interlocutor in disputations, valued them »because it was through them [...] that he made his most important breakthroughs in 1518 (Heidelberg) and 1519 (Leipzig).«¹⁸

II *Nominalism and Realism*

Insofar as Luther's thinking is beholden (as he claims) to Ockham, Luther too takes a position that rejects a radical separation which would wholly isolate faith from reason but also rejects a synthesis of faith and reason. For Luther, the relation between philosophy and theology is not determined by the relation between nature and grace (as it was for Nominalists and Realists). Instead, it is guided by the distinction between law and gospel which construes philosophy as a suitable instrument for service in this world – including theology as an academic endeavor.¹⁹ For Luther, in stark

attacking the theses while it was the responsibility of the *respondens*, usually a doctoral candidate, to reply to these arguments. The *respondens'* job was not to argue for the theses but instead to find fault with the opposing syllogisms of the *opponentes*. Given that the primary vocation of the Theological Faculty was the training of clergy, it is clear that what in contemporary parlance is called »critical thinking« was deemed requisite for successful pastoral leadership. It staggers the imagination to think if such public disputations would be required of today's pastoral and doctoral candidates. Additionally, disputation as a social practice indicates the high value that was placed on rigorous, clear thinking in the attempt to establish theological truth.

¹⁸ CLARK (see n. 17), 297.

¹⁹ Ingolf Dalferth notes, »The difference may be described as the transition from an additive co-ordination of the two perspectives of Faith and Reason to an internal reconstruction of the perspective of Reason within the perspective of Faith. What used to be an external contrast between Nature and Grace is now re-created as an internal differentiation of the perspective of Faith in terms of Law (*lex*) and Gospel (*evangelium*), viz. the knowledge of God, world and human existence *extra Christum* and *in Christo*. This is a

contrast to Aristotle's valuation of philosophy as contemplative, theology is a practical not a contemplative discipline. Early in his career he defined it as *sapientia experimentalis* which, as Oswald Bayer notes, means that, as wisdom, it includes science, unites theory and practice and grounds both in an experiential or receptive life (*vita passiva*). Again, as Bayer notes, experiential wisdom would be a contradiction in terms for Aristotle. Nothing historical or experiential can serve as a basis for knowledge in Aristotle's perspective.²⁰

While the subject matter of philosophy in the medieval German university centered primarily (though not solely) on Aristotle's works, these writings were interpreted through the lens of two opposing perspectives, Realism and Nominalism. The heart of the philosophical debate between these schools was over the nature of universals. Realists held that universals like »whiteness« had their being either apart from their instantiations in white things (the Platonic view, as seen in William of Champaeux), or had their being not fully accounted for by their instantiations in white things, but not yet having their being apart from their instantiations (the Aristotelian view, as seen in Thomas Aquinas). In contrast, extreme Nominalists (like Roscelin) held that general terms like »whiteness« did not refer to universals, but simply were different names for the particulars of which they were predicated. For Nominalists like Ockham, all that exists are particular entities having particular qualities. As noted, Luther was educated in the Ockhamist (Nominalist) tradition.²¹ However, his teachers were more eclectic in their approach to the status of universals than what they supposed. While the approach of Luther's teacher Trutvet-

purely theological distinction. But by relating two theological perspectives, not a theological and a non-theological one, the theological perspective is universalized and made independent on the philosophical perspective. Theology is seen strictly in the service of the explication of faith in Christ and its vision of reality [...]. Hence it constitutes the decisive point of reference for interpreting the totality of reality, and requires all theological thinking about God, the world, and human existence to be christologically determined.« See I. DALFERTH: *Theology and Philosophy*, 1988, 76.

²⁰ BAYER (see n. 1), 28f.

²¹ See D. BIELFELDT, *Clarity with Respect to Realism. Disputationes* (<http://disputationes.blogspot.com>).

ter to logic and semantics was shaped by Nominalism, in metaphysics he assumed a theory of participation of creatures in God which is closer to a Realist position on the status of universals as objective realities.²²

Luther referred to himself as a »terminist« (a Nominalist), and that Ockham was his teacher (*magister meus*).²³ It is likely, however, that his approach, similar to his teachers, is more fluid than his self-designation would indicate. When he calls himself a *modernus*, he is referring to semantic and logical skills he gained from disputational methodology. However, he is also indebted to the *via moderna* for its greater emphases on discontinuity between philosophy and theology than that of the *via antiqua*. In Luther's judgment, philosophy and theology constitute two quite different spheres whose boundaries must be properly honored if both philosophy and theology are to do their respective work.²⁴ Broadly construed, he rejected Aristotelian essentialism (that our duty in life is to realize our fixed potentials in a hierarchical scheme), but he thinks in terms of »natures« as sets of possibilities by which we generalize and classify

22 »Luther's teachers Jodocus Trutvetter and Bartholomaeus Usingen, who wanted to renew teaching at the University of Erfurt and bring it into line with orthodox Ockhamist tradition, were actually themselves Ockhamist only in their logic. When they treated themes like creation or the existence of creatures in their natural philosophy, they could imply the concept of participation in a way that was contradictory to Ockham's basic intentions [...] that his teacher did not pay much attention to contradiction between the use of the supposition they and the ontological use of the concept of participation leads one to think that Luther might have understood created being as participation in God, though as a good ›terminist‹ he should not have done so.« See S. JUNTUNEN (see n. 4), 150.

23 See WA 38; 160,3; see also McGRATH (see n. 16), 36.

24 Bruce Marshall helpfully indicates that theology unlike philosophy deals with the *whole* of reality. »Theology and philosophy each has its own ›sphere‹; neither provides the content for the other's discourse, and each has its own rules for forming true sentences. But this distinction turns out to be a way of insisting that theology has to keep its epistemic priorities straight. Theology's ›sphere‹ ends up being the whole; theology puts philosophy in its place by defining philosophy's sphere, that is, by marking out the boundaries within which its rules for forming true sentences may apply (viz., wherever they do not conflict with the truth of Scripture and creed taken in their natural sense).« See B. MARSHALL, Faith and Reason Reconsidered: Aquinas and Luther on Deciding what is True (The Thomist 63, 1999, 1–48), 46.

objects in the world.²⁵ In theology, however, he could at times think in terms very similar to that of Realists. For instance, when he describes Christ as the *forma* of faith,²⁶ in which believers share the same form as

25 For this insight I am indebted to Paul Hinlicky, email correspondence of August 17, 2011.

26 See WA 40,1; 229,22–32 = LW 26,130 and T. MANNERMAA'S discussion in *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, trans. by K. STJERNA, 2005, 57f. With respect to the relation between God's favor and God's gift in justification, which is disputed between advocates of ›forensic‹ justification and the Mannermaa school, Risto Saarinen makes headway, ›While it is true that God's benevolence and God's gift appear together, one also needs to say that God's gift needs to be preconditioned by benevolence in order that it can be a gift [...]. In this very specific and limited sense, there is a conceptual priority of favor over the gift.‹ Saarinen goes on to caution ›adherents to forensic justification readily affirm the primacy of merciful favor, but they fail to see the dynamics of one's being both recipient and beneficiary. Adherents of effective justification grasp this dynamic, but they do not see the fine differences between the concepts of favor and gift.‹ See R. SAARINEN, *Finnish Luther Studies: A Story and a Program* (in: *Engaging Luther: A (New) Theological Assessment*, ed. by O.-P. VAINIO, 2010, 1–27), 23f. However, for all Saarinen's protestations, I find his position here to be hardly different from my own (›Christ is so for us that he becomes one with us in this marriage of the conscience to Christ‹) which he describes on pages 21f. For a thorough critique of the Finnish School, see W.W. SCHUMACHER, *Who Do I Say That You Are? Anthropology and the Theology of Theosis in the Finnish School of Tuomo Mannermaa*, 2010. Commenting on WA 31,1; 217,4–17 = LW 13,71 Schumacher writes (p. 113), ›Here Luther construes the sense of ›deify‹ in a very different way than the ›real-ontic‹ union urged by the Finnish school. In a sense, Luther is more pragmatic, and more ›real‹, since he has here become anchored to the concrete realities of human existence as creatures. In this mature, evangelical view, such human existence is properly connected to God – ›deified‹ – precisely to the extent that it is concretely played out in the divinely ordered (divinely ›spoken‹) sphere of very *human* activity: parents, children, master, servants. The ›divine‹ character of such people has nothing to do with overcoming or transcending who they are as human creatures, but depends directly on what God says. God's word blesses, sanctifies – even *deifies* – precisely in the midst of created human life.‹ Simply said, united with Christ believers share in both natures of Christ – they are not only being ›deified‹ but also ›humanized.‹ Hence, in *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (WA 2; 148,33–149,16 = LW 31,302–303), Luther writes, ›If one has wisdom, righteousness, or power with which one can excel others and boast in the ›form of God‹, so to speak, one should not keep all this to himself, but surrender it to God and become altogether as if he did not possess it [II Cor 6: 10], as one of those who lack it. Paul's meaning is that

the object of their knowledge, Christ, then Christ is the reality as such, the universal, and that believers as »little Christs,« have their reality as participating in Christ, as Christ's instantiations in the world.

The *via antiqua* hearkened back to Thomas Aquinas who as much as possible sought to harmonize the Christian faith and Aristotelian philosophy.

Observing that in Christ grace and nature are combined, Aquinas argued that a commonality exists between God and the creature whereby grace perfects nature, and nature serves as a vehicle for grace. But this also means for the later Thomists that reason is a necessary starting point for theology, and that philosophy and theology are completely intertwined.²⁷

In contrast, the *via moderna* left open »the question of the coherence of reality, of the commonality between the Creator and the creature.«²⁸ The *via moderna* held faith to be a separate realm of truth, though not a demonstrative science, and so »not subject to the same methods and standards of proof.«²⁹ For the Ockhamists, theology and philosophy do not dissolve into a unity of truth. When Ockham asserted that there were »many kings« governing a plurality of academic disciples, it would seem that he was opposing Aristotle's dictum that the »rule of many is not good; let one [reason] be the ruler.«³⁰ Hence, Ockham countenances the possibility

when each person has forgotten himself and emptied himself of God's gifts, he should conduct himself as if he neighbor's weakness, sin, and foolishness were his very own. He should not boast or get puffed up. Nor should he despise or triumph over his neighbor as if he were his god or equal to God. Since God's prerogatives ought to be left to God alone, it becomes robbery when a man in haughty foolhardiness ignores this fact [...]. And if we do not free desire to put off that form of God and take on the form of a servant, let us be compelled to do so against our will.«

27 R. BRADBURY, *Cross Theology: The Classical Theologia Crucis and Karl Barth's Modern Theology of the Cross*, 2010, 49. For an extensive discussion of the relation between Luther and Aquinas, see D. JANZ, *Luther on Thomas Aquinas: The Angelic Doctor in the Thought of the Reformer*, 1989.

28 BRADBURY (see n. 27), 50.

29 *Ibid.*

30 »Luther does not agree with this sole or absolute rule of reason, nor does William of Ockham whose philosophy of science Luther had become acquainted with through his Erfurt teacher and his own study of Biel's *Collectorium*, especially the prologue, which

of conflict between faith and reason that is irresolvable in this life. Such a distinction (though not separation) of philosophy and theology influenced Luther's view. Upping the ante, Luther's conviction that the gospel is a *promise* – a word which creates new life from the nothingness of sin and death and neither a directive nor a description of a state of affairs – further situates philosophy as belonging to the temporal and not the eternal realm.³¹

In general, the Realists affirmed a continuum between nature and grace, in which grace is able to perfect nature by healing the wound of sin and elevating finite, created being to the infinite, uncreated Being, God. For Realists, it was possible to establish a synthesis of all knowledge achieved through various gradations of reality as instantiating the triune life. By contrast, Nominalists felt that the analogical transparency of such gradations violated the very divinity of God, which for them was anchored in God's will and not God's intellect. Nominalists focused on the divine will as inscrutable while Realists focused on God's intellect whose intelligence is imprinted in the various gradations of order attested to in the world. Realism affirmed that the analogy of being (*analogia entis*) assumes a still greater difference in the midst of such great similarity between the uncreated God and his created world. By contrast, Nominalism focused not on the analogy of being but instead on »being« as a univocally shared

deals with the questions of the philosophy of science. Ockham is skeptical of the Aristotelian idea that science should rule supreme. His remark at the end of book 12 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, that there is not just one king but many kings, can no doubt be understood as a counter-metaphor.« See BAYER (see n. 1), 28f.

- ³¹ Luther notes, »Gospel is and should be nothing else than a discourse or story about Christ, just as happens among men when one writes a book about a king or a prince, telling what he did, said, and suffered in his day. Such a story can be told in various ways; one spins it out, and the other is brief. Thus the gospel is and should be nothing else than a chronicle, a story, a narrative about Christ, telling who he is, what he did, said, and suffered – a subject which one describes briefly, another more fully, one this way, another that way.« See WA 10,1,1; 9,11–15 = LW 35,117 (Eyn kleyn unterricht, was man ynn den Evangelijis suchen und gewartten soll). Of course, the gospel as a creative word which creates out of nothing stands in contrast to the philosophical axiom that »out of nothing, nothing comes.«

concept between the infinite and the finite in the fact that both realities *are*.

For Nominalists, grace elevates nature by requiring humans to honor what God has enjoined humans to do via covenant (*pactum*) while, for Realists, grace perfects humans as they more and more conform to eternal law. For Luther, both views are criticized in that they fail to love God for his own sake because we eudaimonistically seek our own well being even in our quest for salvation.³² Both views could appeal to the Aristotelian dictum, »reason pleads for the best.«³³ Hence, Luther was adverse to Aristotle's voice in matters pertaining to salvation, although he would find a place for Aristotle in logic and ethics for the good of worldly affairs (including theological inquiry). Likewise, for Luther, there is a sense in which nature as created good needs not perfection but liberation – from sin, death, and the accusations of the law. So, for Luther, theology does not perfect philosophy (Realism) nor does it do parallel play with philosophy (Nominalism); instead, it sets limits to philosophy which surreptitiously seeks to enter theology's arena (matters of infinitude and/or grace) but also exploits its logical tools for rigorous clarification of doctrine.

For some time there has been a tendency to »cast« Aquinas as a veritable »rationalist« in order to contrast his view of faith and reason in opposition to Ockham's alleged »fideism.« But as Alfred Freddoso notes, this opposition engenders »exaggerated estimates of the degree of confidence that Aquinas and Scotus repose in natural reason.«³⁴ All medieval theologians believed that »divine revelation is absolutely necessary« for humans to flourish and »that, as far as ultimate metaphysical and moral questions

32 See T. DIETER, Why Does Luther's Doctrine of Justification Matter Today? (in: The Global Luther: A Theologian for Modern Times, ed. by C. HELMER, 2009, 189–209), 194–196.

33 Luther was fond of criticizing this expropriation of Aristotle's thinking for late Medieval scholastic soteriology. See WA 42; 107,34–38 = LW 1,143 where Luther indicates that »when they say: ›Reason pleads for the best‹, you should say: ›For the best in a mundane sense that is, in things about which reason can judge‹. There it directs and leads to what is honorable and useful in respect to the body or the flesh.« Luther makes a sharp distinction between the temporal and the eternal and situates philosophy as appropriate in the former while theology alone is appropriate in the latter.

34 See A. FREDDOSO, Ockham on Faith and Reason, <http://www.3nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/f&rcam.htm>, for all references in this paragraph.

are concerned, we remain in an utterly perilous state of ignorance without it.«³⁵ Even in Thomas's approach to reason and faith, philosophy and theology, »theological inquirers cannot have *scientia* with respect to the conclusions of theology. This is a point Ockham emphasizes repeatedly in his critique of the claim that »our theology« counts as a science.«³⁶ Ockham offers an »irenic separatism« that rejects

the prototypically Catholic intellectual project of unifying classical philosophy and the Christian faith in such a way as to exhibit the latter as the perfection of the former, and yet that stops short of disdaining the light of natural reason in the manner of radical intellectual separatism.

Overall, such an Ockhamist spirit seems to be operative in Luther's distinction between philosophy and theology as »two spheres.« If anything, Luther – less irenic than Ockham – accentuates the distinction between philosophy and theology since he will indulge no *mixing* between philosophy and theology,³⁷ providing no philosophical fuel that might aid the free

35 Freddoso notes that »Aquinas divides divinely revealed truths into what he elsewhere calls the mysteries [or: articles] of the faith, which »altogether exceed the capability of human reason«, and the preambles of the faith, which can at least in principle be established by the light of natural reason. Ockham draws a similar distinction between theological truths that we are naturally able to have evident cognition of and theological truths that we can have cognition of only supernaturally.«

36 Freddoso indicates that »Aquinas cites approvingly Aristotle's dictum that natural reason is as incapable of comprehending the most intelligible natures as the eye of an owl is of viewing the sun.« Hence, for both Thomas and Ockham, »philosophical inquiry unaided by divine revelation can help foster logical skills and intellectual habits that are required for the articulation of true wisdom within Christian theology; it can even provide Christian thinkers with new and useful conceptual resources. But it cannot on its own make any noteworthy progress toward providing us with the substance of absolute wisdom.«

37 Luther maintains that the Scholastics mistaken notion of seeing faith as a habit is due to the fact that they have obscured faith by mixing Aristotelian philosophy with theology. Hence, he notes, »Philosophy and theology must be carefully distinguished. Philosophy also speaks of a good will and of right reason, and the sophists are forced to admit that a work is not morally good unless a good will is present first. And yet they are such stupid asses when they proceed to theology. They want to prescribe a work before the good will, although in philosophy it is necessary for the person to be justified morally

will in its conviction that it can make progress in righteousness *coram deo* and so marginalize faith.

III *Luther's Divergences from Nominalism*

Nominalism's assumption of a *pactum de potentia ordinata* between God and humanity in which God will give his grace to those who do their very best (*facere quod in se est*), maintained by Gabriel Biel, was Luther's chief target in his early attempt to understand the true nature of human justification *coram deo*. In spite of Luther's self-identity as a »terminist« it is hard to imagine that his rejection of a Nominalist view of salvation would have no impact whatsoever on his reception of philosophy. Bengt Hägg-lund pointed out that, unlike Nominalist psychology which assumed reason's capacity to submit itself to the imperative to conform to the truth that God as the Supreme Being ought to be loved above all things, Luther affirmed instead that we rebel against grace and are unable to control our interior will.³⁸ Nor for Luther is grace to be understood as an infused new quality in the regenerate but instead is »the divine mercy that brings about the forgiveness of sins. As the Spirit of God gives life, so grace confers that eternal life which is given us in and with the forgiveness of sins.«³⁹ But given that the Nominalists held that God of his absolute power (*de potentia absoluta*) could declare humans »righteous only because God accepts« them »as such quite apart from any infusion of grace« (the doctrine of acceptance),⁴⁰ Luther was decisively anti-Nominalist. For Luther, »imputation is nothing else but the work of grace. And grace, instead of being the arbitrary will of God, works the justification of the sinner because of Jesus Christ.«⁴¹ Nominalist views of justification as construed either through the lens of *de potentia ordinata* or *de potentia*

before the work. Thus the tree is prior to the fruit, both in essence and in nature.« See WA 40,I; 410,14–20 = LW 26,261.

38 B. HÄGGLUND, Was Luther a Nominalist? (Theology 59, 1956, 226–234), 227.

39 Loc. cit., 228.

40 Loc. cit., 229.

41 Ibid.

absoluta fail to acknowledge that our justification is *propter Christum* (for the sake of Christ).

Jettisoning any saving efficacy for the law, Luther heightens the distinction between faith and works. Works are crucial for the well-being of the neighbor, not for our salvation. Luther construes philosophy as parallel to works or law and theology as parallel to God's favor or grace. With respect to salvation Christ alone means that the law codified as the *pactum* offers nothing *coram deo*. No longer given the aura of a manual to salvation, the law is restored as a way to order life *coram mundo*. It is relegated to temporal matters and loses any potency in eternal matters. But Luther notes that the Nominalist perspective also appeals to philosophy as a way to affirm human activity *coram deo*. In so doing, such »sophist« mixing of philosophy with theology marginalizes the efficacious role of an active Christ. Speaking against the Faculty of the Sorbonne, Luther in 1539 writes:

But here we especially oppose the men at the Sorbonne who allow such things as the forgiveness of sins and the mystery of the incarnation and eternal life to be deduced by logic. They have asserted that they are there and can be obtained by living according to the law and through philosophy. This we deny. For they speak thus and allege that whoever has done what he was able to do is justified and merits grace according to his fitness, and afterward even in strict justice. This we deny. What use would there be here for Christ? He would be set aside and buried completely. For when they want to be justified altogether without Christ, what else are they doing than consigning Christ to oblivion so that Christ might be completely useless for us and have died in vain? We admit that philosophy teaches and all men know by nature that theft is unlawful, as are many other things. But we cannot and ought not tolerate the fact that these chief theological articles – for whose sake alone Scripture was given – namely, those concerning justification, the forgiveness of sins, liberation from eternal death, are actually attributed to philosophy and human powers.⁴²

In a word, philosophy knows nothing of grace – which is the most important thing to know.⁴³ Just as an active – unburied Christ – relativizes law and gives it its appropriate locus in temporal matters, so philosophy is similarly relativized by the gospel *promissio* – a move which, given their

42 WA 39,2; 13,10–14,6 (Die Disputationen über Joh 1,14) = LW 38,248.

43 Luther writes that philosophers know nothing of mercy and truth. See WA 43; 242,21–22 (Genesisvorlesung) = LW 4,148.

soteriology of human contribution to justification, Nominalists could not make. For Luther, philosophy has its full voice in temporal matters, not eternal matters. In the same disputation, he notes,

we say that theology does not contradict philosophy because the latter speaks only about matrimony, obedience, chastity, liberality, and other virtues. But it is one thing to believe in the Son of God, to possess and to expect eternal life, and something else again to be chaste, to marry, to live honestly in the world, to be liberal, meek, obedient, kind, and peaceable.⁴⁴

As noted above, for Aristotle, reason had a divine status in the theoretical, contemplative life. In contrast, Luther shifts the focus of the divine dimension of human reason to the »active life« of human beings where reason is capable of making sound decisions about the economy, politics, and natural sciences. Luther reverses the Augustinian and scholastic distinction between a superior part (*a portio superiore*) and an inferior part (*a portio inferiore*) of reason with respect to faith. In the traditional Augustinian scheme, the superior part of reason

is directed toward the *aeterna*, or eternal things, and the inferior part is directed toward the *temporalia*, the temporal objects. This distinction also reflects two different acts of knowledge: the superior part of reason is intellectual (*intelligere*), knowing something in its simple wholeness, and the inferior part employs discursive thinking (*ratiocinari*). This distinction in other words is the distinction between wisdom and science. The Scholastics, like Augustine, distinguished between use (*uti*) and enjoyment (*frui*), which means that all *temporalia* are meant to be used by us, and all *aeterna* are meant to be enjoyed by us – and not to be used.⁴⁵

Luther rejects this classic distinction between the superior and inferior parts of reason and distinguishes instead between reason (*ratio*) and faith (*fides*).

any relationship between human beings and God (and all eternal things) is not conceived by reason – not even by a superior part of reason. Faith alone is the vehicle and instrument by which the human person is related to the triune God [...]. Reason is, thereby, freed by faith from any illusions of attaining God on its own capacity.⁴⁶

44 WA 39,2; 14,8–13 = LW 38,248.

45 H.-P. GROSSHANS, Luther on Faith and Reason: The Light of Reason at the Twilight of the World (in: The Global Luther, [see n. 32], 173–185), 181.

46 Ibid.

While demarcating philosophy as a demonstrable science in contradistinction to theology as grounded in revelation that is to be accepted on the basis of the authority, Hägglund noted that Nominalism also affirmed that

not only are certain theological truths accessible to reason and that those that rest on a supernatural revelation can, after the event, become the object of rational speculation. Theological knowledge is, so to speak, on the same level as rational knowledge. The chief difference between them is that the former presupposes revelation and faith, faith being conceived as the submission of the will to the authority of revealed truth.⁴⁷

For Nominalists, humans are capable of producing saving faith on the basis of one's natural powers. »Free will is then capable of adhering to truths of faith which ecclesiastical authority proposes to it.«⁴⁸ When useful for theology, *recta ratio* is defined not from nature but from grace. Such reasoning will follow the narrative of the gospel as outlined and presented in scripture.

Repeatedly Luther cautions that when there is conflict between philosophy and theology – as invariably there must be since philosophy knows nothing of God's grace, nor can it encompass God's infinity which transcends all human conceptuality –, then »all thought (no doubt this also includes philosophy) is to be taken captive to the obedience of Christ (II Cor 10: 5)«⁴⁹ and following Ambrose he argues that »the dialecticians have to give way where the apostolic fishermen are to be trusted.«⁵⁰ Syllogistic reasoning is an excellent approach to academic inquiry, but it is useful only to the extent that it conveys the subject matter. And, the subject matter of theology – the sinful human needing justification and the God who justifies in Christ as promise – cannot be encompassed by reason. Rather, it is reason which must be subject to Christ.

The means by which Luther limits the scope of philosophy to temporal matters is nothing other than his distinction between law and gospel.

47 HÄGGLUND (see n. 38), 231.

48 Ibid.

49 WA 39,2; 4,6–7 (Die Disputationen über Joh 1,14, 1539) = LW 38,239 (thesis 8).

50 WA 39,2; 4,8–9 = LW 38,239 (thesis 9).

The meaning of the law is, under various circumstances, known to the philosophers. But the promises of God belong to theology, and the gospel is not known to every creature because it is a mystery hidden from the world.⁵¹

Philosophy is akin to law as theology is akin to gospel. Just like God's promise actually affirms the law by situating it within *temporalia* where it properly belongs, indicating that antinomianism is inappropriate, so also there is no »antinomianism of philosophy.« Even as the law abides for sinners as an instructor and accuser, so philosophy abides as practical thinking about furthering human life, community, and service. It also, as we shall see, can provide theology useful logical tools to establish sound doctrine, once thinking is taken captive to Christ (and not vice versa).

IV Aristotle's Inadequacies and Adequacies

As is well known, Luther at times disparaged Aristotle (designated by medieval theologians as »the philosopher«) for Aristotle's discrepancies from scripture and the misuse of Aristotelian reasoning in Nominalist schemes of salvation.⁵² Luther repeatedly noted that neither Aristotle's cosmology nor his psychology squares with scripture. For Aristotle, the world is eternal while the soul is mortal, a reversal of scriptural truth.⁵³ Even so, Luther appeals to Aristotle's conviction that the goal of life is happiness. Here, Aristotle has an inkling of the truth.⁵⁴ The problem is that Aristotle's God,

⁵¹ WA 39,2; 5,3–4 = LW 38,258 (argument 24).

⁵² For the most thorough recent studies of Luther on Aristotle, see T. DIETER, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles. Eine historisch-systematische Untersuchung zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Philosophie*, 2001 and E. ANDREATTA, *Lutero e Aristotele*, 1996.

⁵³ WA 42; 3,31–4,1 (Genesisvorlesung) = LW 1,3–4.

⁵⁴ »Aristotle says something worthwhile when he declares that the goal of man is happiness, which consists in a virtuous life. But in view of the weakness of our nature who can reach this goal? Even those who are the most fortunate encounter discomforts of various kinds, which both misfortune and the ill will and meanness of men bring on. For such happiness peace of mind is necessary. But who can always preserve this amid the great changes of fortune? It is vain, therefore, to point out this goal which no one reaches. The main goal, then, to which Scripture points is that man is created according to the likeness of God; in eternity, therefore, he is to live with God, and while he is here on earth, he is to preach God, thank Him, and patiently obey His Word. In this life we lay hold of this goal in ever so weak a manner; but in the future life we shall attain it

who cares nothing for the world but only for himself, can never be the *telos* of human life. Aristotle's God knows nothing of grace. While God exists for Aristotle, Aristotle's God simply does not communicate with humans, which is vital for Luther's understanding of God. Hence, Luther is quick to respond about this Aristotelian God, »He means nothing to us.«⁵⁵ However, Luther's rapport with Aristotle is far broader than this. As can be seen in *The Disputation Concerning Man* (1536), Luther does not reject Aristotle's theory of fourfold causality consisting of the efficient (from whence does the matter come?), material (in what does it consist?), formal (as what does it exist?), and final (toward what does it aim?) causes but does indicate its inadequacy for theological anthropology. What is problematic is the limited epistemological access which humans have about themselves with respect to ultimate matters. Here, philosophy offers only »fragmentary, fleeting, and exceedingly material« knowledge.⁵⁶ We scarcely perceive humanity's material cause sufficiently, and philosophy does not know the efficient nor final cause for certain.⁵⁷ Instead, it is through scriptural revelation that we learn that »man is a creature of God consisting of body and a living soul, made in the beginning after the image of God, without sin, so that he should procreate and rule over the created things, and never die.«⁵⁸ The problem is not with reason as such which is »most excellent,« indeed »a sun and a kind of god appointed to administer these things in this life.« (Indeed, after the fall, God did not »take away this majesty of reason, but rather confirmed it.«⁵⁹) Rather, the problem is that we finite and sinful creatures are too distanced from these truths. It is through Paul that we properly understand that it is justification by faith alone which briefly sums up the definition of humanity.⁶⁰

fully. This the philosophers do not know. Therefore the world with its greatest wisdom is most ignorant when it does not take advantage of Holy Scripture or of theology. Human beings know neither their beginning nor their end when they are without the Word.« See WA 42; 98,13–26 (Genesisvorlesung) = LW 1,131.

55 WA 43; 240,30 (Genesisvorlesung) = LW 4,145 (translation altered).

56 WA 39,1; 175,3–4 (Die Disputation de homine) = LW 34,138 (thesis 19).

57 WA 39,1; 175,26–29 = LW 34,138 (theses 12–13).

58 WA 39,1; 176,7–9 = LW 34,138 (thesis 21).

59 WA 39,1; 175,24–25 = LW 34,137–138 (thesis 11).

60 WA 39,1; 176,33–35 = LW 34,139 (thesis 32).

V Early Appropriation of Plato

In spite of Luther's rejection of a hierarchy between *a portio superior* and *a portio inferior*, we can discern an appropriation of aspects of Plato's thinking, especially in his early theology. This appropriation of Plato's thinking over Aristotle's is likely traced to his intense reading of Augustine as well as German mystics such as Tauler and the anonymous author of *Theologia Deutsch*, a book he edited early in his career. In his explanation of thesis eight of the philosophical theses of the *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) Luther argued that Aristotle who »insists on the priority of the sensible« only *seems* to give knowledge of reality.⁶¹ As Knut Alfsvåg notes, for Luther, Aristotle's epistemology arises from the senses. So, for Aristotle, if knowledge is to obtain, then (unlike Plato) form and matter cannot be separated. But for Luther, such an approach is tied to the »instability« and uncertainty of the senses and thus fails to convey the eternal. In fact, with Plato, we should affirm the »priority of the infinite and divine. True knowledge is according to Luther dependent on the acceptance of unknowability.«⁶² There is no *proportio* between the Creator and created things, and thus no ladder between what we can perceive and the »invisible things of God« can be constructed for the *viator*. Hence, the »visible and manifest things of God« are to be seen only »through suffering and the cross.« So, in the following thesis (nine), Luther argues that Pythagoras and especially Plato, unlike Aristotle, appropriately integrate the infinite and the finite in the concept of participation.⁶³ Alfsvåg notes:

As evidence for the latter, Luther explicitly refers to what he calls the most beautiful discussion of oneness in Parmenides, where the author first deprives oneness of every-

61 See K. ALFSVÅG (see n. 3), 194. For a translation of the Heidelberg Disputation's philosophical theses into German, see H. JUNGHANS, Die probationes zu den philosophischen Thesen der Heidelberger Disputation Luthers im Jahre 1518 (LuJ 46, 1979, 10–59). This article contains both Latin and German; however, the Latin text can also be found in WA 59; 409–425. Thesis 36 reads: »Aristotle wrongly finds fault with and derides the ideas of Plato, which actually are better than his own.« WA 1; 355.

62 ALFSVÅG (see n. 3), 194.

63 Thesis 37 reads: »The mathematical order of material things is ingeniously maintained by Pythagoras, but more ingenious is the interaction of ideas maintained by Plato.« See WA 1; 355 (Disputatio Heidelbergae habita. 1518) = LW 31,42.

thing until it is reduced to nothing, and then gives everything back until there is nothing left in which oneness is not. There is thus nothing that does not exist through oneness, which in this way at the same time is outside of and in everything.⁶⁴

Since God is incomprehensible and invisible, we simply cannot move, as Luther notes in the theological theses of the Heidelberg Disputation, from knowledge of creatures to their creator. This truth is decisive for his rejection of a »theology of glory« and his approval of a »theology of the cross.« As important as this move is for Luther's theological development in distinguishing law from gospel and associating the gospel with a word of promise, Luther would increasingly challenge the »speculation« inherent in Platonism and Christian Platonists' neglect of the word of God. Or, said differently, a consistent *via negativa* leads not only to negating divine attributes and then negating these negations, but also to the negation or death of the theologian himself or herself since such an apophatic approach gains us only the *deus absconditus* and thus functions as God's *opus alienum*. Only in the word does God wish to be found.⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Luther's consistent perspective that God is a given for all people not especially needing demonstration seems to be grounded in a Platonic view of anamnesis as can be seen in Luther's description of the terrified sailors who flee to God in his *Commentary on Jonah* (1526). Luther perceives the general revelation of God less through the lens of inference on the basis of design in nature or the goal of human life and more through an anamnesis in which all people have a memory that there is a God.⁶⁶

For Luther, the existence of God is never in doubt. But God's disposition toward humankind is.

That there is a God, by whom all things were made, that you know from his works, [...] but God himself, who he is, what sort of divine Being he is, and how he is disposed toward you – this you can never discover nor experience from the outside.⁶⁷

64 ALFSVÅG (see n. 3), 195.

65 See Alfsvåg's discussion in *What No Mind Has Conceived*, 197.

66 WA 19; 205,27–206,7 = LW 19,53.

67 WA 51; 150,42–151,3.

True knowledge of God must acknowledge awareness that God cares for his world. This divine love is foreign to philosophers, even the likes of Plato.

Philosophers argue and ask speculative questions about God and arrive at some kind of knowledge, just as Plato looks at and acknowledges the government of God. But everything is merely objective; it is not yet that knowledge which Joseph has, that God cares, that He hears the afflicted and helps them. Plato cannot determine this; he remains in his metaphysical thinking, as a cow looks at a new door.⁶⁸

If one is to have true knowledge of God, one cannot escape the forensic, *pro me* dimension if such knowledge is in fact true.

You have the true knowledge of God when you believe and know that God and Christ are your God and your Christ. This the devil and the false Christians cannot believe. Thus this knowledge is nothing else than the true Christian faith; for when you know God and Christ in this way, you will rely on Him with all your heart and trust in Him in good fortune and misfortune, in life and death.⁶⁹

To call Luther's view of knowledge of God »existentialist« would be anachronistic, but it is true to say that Luther's perspective is highly experiential without permitting experience to be a source or norm for theology. Of course, our experience with God is often quite painful for, as you remember, »it is by living – no, not living, but by dying and giving ourselves up to hell that we become theologians, not by understanding, reading, and speculating.«⁷⁰

VI *The Question of Double Truth*

In his 1539 *Disputation Concerning the Passage: ›Word Was Made Flesh‹* Luther maintains that even though »every truth is in agreement with every other truth,« still »what is true in one field of learning is not always true in other fields of learning.«⁷¹ His chief example is the Christological principle that in theology »it is true that the Word was made flesh« but in

68 WA 44; 591,34–39 = LW 8,17.

69 WA 14; 16 = LW 30,152.

70 WA 5; 163,28f.

71 WA 39,2; 3,1–2 (Die Disputationen über Joh 1,14) = LW 38,239 (thesis 1).

philosophy the »statement is simply impossible and absurd.«⁷² Was Luther an advocate of the »double truth« theory, that what is true in philosophy may be false in theology and vice versa?

In this disputation, Luther takes the Scholastic axiom *nulla est proportio finite ad infiniti* (»there is no relationship between the finite and the infinite«) as a philosophical given. The infinite cannot be made finite and still remain infinite.⁷³ But this is exactly what has happened in the incarnation. Luther proceeds by developing a series of syllogisms which are formally sound philosophically but which result in false conclusions in theology. He also provides examples from the »other arts and sciences that the same thing is not true in all of them,« for instance, an incommensurability between the measurements of lines and weights.⁷⁴

Luther rejects the position of the Sorbonne that the same is true in philosophy and theology. His point is that in their attempt to defend univocal truth between philosophy and theology, they equivocate on the nature of humanity as shared by all people and Christ. The Sorbonne's position represents a reaction against »double truth theory« of Latin Averroism (radical Aristotelianism), which had been championed by Siger of Brabant (c. 1235–c. 1282).⁷⁵ Following up on Parisian Bishop Stephen Tempier's gen-

72 WA 39,2; 3,3–4 = LW 38,239 (thesis 2).

73 The phrase as such can be traced to Scotus but it can be found through medieval scholasticism, including Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. The phrase was used by these earlier figures as »just one aspect of the *analogia entis*, to be complemented by the notion of a likeness or relation between God and humanity. The nominalists, in opposing Thomistic Christology, emphasize the distinction in a stronger way than their predecessors.« See D. W. CONGDON, *Nova Lingua Dei: The Problem of Chalcedonian Metaphysics and the Promise of the Genus Tapeinoticon in Luther's Later Theology*, unpublished paper, 2011, 42, n. 126.

74 WA 39,2; 5,19–20 = LW 38,242 (thesis 32). Theses 16–25 develop syllogism which are structurally sound philosophically but conclude with false beliefs theologically. Theses 29–37 offer examples of matters true in one discipline but not in another.

75 This position can be traced to the Muslim philosopher Averroes (1126–1198) known as the »Commentator« on Aristotle. Since Averroes judged Aristotle to be the pinnacle of human intellect but his views did not always correspond with the Quran, he proposed a double truth. »This does not mean that [...] a proposition can be true in philosophy and false in theology or vice versa: his theory is that one and the same truth is understood clearly in philosophy and expressed allegorically in theology. The scientific formulation

eral condemnation (219 condemnations) of Latin Averroism on March 7, 1277,⁷⁶ Edward Kilwardby, Archbishop of Canterbury, on March 18, 1277, published thirty prohibited propositions, known as the Oxford condemnation. The first two condemned theses read:

1. *Quod contraria simul possunt esse vera in aliqua materia* (that contraries can be simultaneously true in a certain subject-matter).
2. *Item quod syllogismus pecans in material non est syllogismus* (that the syllogism which is materially erroneous [with respect to a subject-matter] is not a syllogism).⁷⁷

By rejecting the first thesis, Kilwardby seems to affirm that truth is univocal; there can only be one kind of attribution of truth. In rejecting the second thesis, it is affirmed that as long as a syllogism is formally correct, it remains rational regardless of the subject-matter. These theses, along with the others, together imply a rejection of any contradiction between philosophy and theology; what is rational and true in one subject-matter must be rational and true in the other.⁷⁸

Luther is no advocate of double truth theory, but he does maintain that philosophy and theology constitute two distinct spheres with their own distinct logics. The univocal approach to truth advocated by the Sorbonne would result in the »articles of faith« to be »subject to the judgment of human reason.«⁷⁹

In their attempt to establish univocal truth in philosophy and theology the Sorbonne actually equivocates. The word »man« ends up meaning one thing in reference to humans generally and another in reference to the Word made flesh. Hence the syllogism:

of truth is achieved only in philosophy, but the same truth is expressed in theology, only in a different manner.« See CONGDON (see n. 73), 29–30, quoting Frederick Copleston. While privileging philosophy over theology, Averroes still maintained the unity of truth. In contrast, Siger allowed philosophy to contradict theology in favor of philosophy.

⁷⁶ Here Bishop Tempier rejected the view that »things are true according to philosophy, but not according to the catholic faith, as if there are two contrary truths.«

⁷⁷ Denifle and Chatelain, *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, I: 558, as quoted by CONGDON (see n. 73), 31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ WA 39,2; 4,2–3 = LW 38,239 (thesis 6).

1. Every man is a creature.
2. Christ is a man.
3. Therefore, Christ is a creature.⁸⁰

Luther notes that this is a sound syllogism in philosophy but in theology has an erroneous conclusion. As Reijo Työrinoja notes,

According to the philosophical argumentation, there is no proportion between the Creator and a creature, infinite and finite. But in theology, Luther states, there is not only a proportion, but in Christ the unity of finite and infinite (*unitas finiti et infiniti*). Therefore the predicates of God and man are the same.⁸¹

The point is that the above syllogism fails to follow theological grammar. Luther notes that with respect to such syllogistic reasoning the fault is not due to a

defect of the syllogistic form but because of the lofty character and majesty of the matter which cannot be enclosed in the narrow confines of reason or syllogism. So the matter is not indeed something contrary to, but is outside, within, above, below, before, and beyond all logical truth.⁸²

While the

syllogism is a most excellent form [...] it is useless with regard to the matter itself. Therefore, in articles of faith one must have recourse to another dialectic and philosophy, which is called the word of God and faith.⁸³

⁸⁰ WA 39,2; 5,3–4 = LW 38,241 (thesis 24) translation altered.

⁸¹ R. TYÖRINOJA, *Nova Vocabula et Nova Lingua: Luther's Conception of Doctrinal Formulas* (in: *Thesaurus Lutheri. Auf der Suche nach neuen Paradigmen der Luther-Forschung*, 1987, 221–236), 229. As a rule, Luther does not generalize expressions like unity of finite and infinite, but limits that very concretely to the incarnation and the person of Christ. Melancthon, Chemnitz, and others make it more explicit perhaps, or emphasize it more, but Luther does not argue for a general unity of the finite and the infinite but limits it to the person of Christ.

⁸² WA 39,2; 4,34–35 = LW 38,241 (thesis 21).

⁸³ WA 39,2; 5,9–10 = LW 38,241 (thesis 27).

VII *Priority of Grammar over Logic*

For Luther, philosophy, including logic, is beholden to grammar (semantical analysis). His view came to the fore in his debates with Zwingli and Oecolampadius over the nature of the Lord's Supper.⁸⁴ Following the Roman rhetorician Quintilian on the nature of metaphor or »transfers of words« (new words or tropes) produced according to the rules of comparison, Luther indicates that a word such as »vine« has both an old and a new meaning. In the old sense it means simply the stock in the vineyard. But »according to the new it means Christ, Jn 15[: 5]: ›I am the vine.‹»⁸⁵ Luther explains how Christ himself is the basis on which the comparison is made. »For Christ is not a likeness of the vine, but on the contrary the vine is a likeness of Christ.« Explaining the word »seed« in »the seed is the word of God« [Lk 8: 11], Luther says,

here the word ›seed‹ does not indicate the grain, which is a simile of the gospel, but as a new word or trope should, signifies the gospel, the true, new seed itself, which is not a likeness. And so forth; all tropes in Scripture signify the true, new object, and not the simile of this new object.⁸⁶

Luther agrees with his opponents that »it is undeniably true that two diverse substances cannot be one substance. For example, an ass cannot be an ox, a man cannot be a stone or a piece of wood.«⁸⁷ This, of course, follows the law of contradiction and it makes it problematic for reason to be able to affirm that bread simultaneously can be Christ's body. Luther notes that Wycliffe solved the problem by affirming that bread remains bread while Christ's body is literally absent, while Aquinas maintained that Christ's body is literally present but the bread is absent. Luther responds, »against all reason and hairsplitting logic I hold that two diverse

84 See WA 26; 437–445 (Vom Abendmahl Christi. Bekenntnis) = LW 37,294–303. For a sound commentary on this treatise, see J. BAUR, *Luther und die Philosophie* (NZST 26, 1984, 13–28) and E. DE NEGRI, *Offenbarung und Dialektik. Luthers Realtheologie*, 1973, 207–218.

85 WA 26; 379,27 = LW 37,252–253.

86 WA 26; 380,27–33 = LW 37,253.

87 WA 26; 439,6–7 = LW 37,295.

substances may well be, in reality and in name, one substance.«⁸⁸ Building his case, he provides examples of how two distinct beings can be one. The Trinity, for example, is a »natural union« of the three triune persons sharing the same essence. Likewise, Christ is one person with two natures, a »personal union.« There is also a »union of effect« when angels are described in scripture as winds and flames of fire. Similarly there is a »formal union« when the Holy Spirit is seen as a dove. All this makes plausible Luther's contention that there is a »sacramental union« in which bread can be Christ's body and wine can be Christ's blood. He chides Wycliffe's view of an absent Christ in the host for prematurely applying logic and not taking into account the rules of grammar or the science of words.

Logic rightly teaches that bread and body, dove and Spirit, God and man are diverse beings. But it should first seek the aid of grammar, which lays down a rule of expression applicable to all languages: when two diverse beings become one being, grammar embraces these two things in a single expression, and as it views the union of the two beings, it refers to the two in one term.⁸⁹

Grammatically, Luther maintains that his examples are expressions of synecdoche. Hence, Luther concludes,

No *identical* predication is even there; Wycliffe and the sophists only dream that it is. For even though body and bread are two distinct substances, each one existing by itself, and though neither is mistaken for the other where they are separated from each other, nevertheless where they are united and become a new, entire substance, they lose their difference so far as this new, unique substances is concerned.⁹⁰

Hence we can see why in the *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ* (1541) that Luther maintained that »it is certain that with regard to Christ [*in Christo*] all words receive a new signification, though the thing signified is the same.«⁹¹ He was building on his understanding of grammar as accountable to the narrative of Jesus Christ who is the truth.

88 WA 26; 439,29–31 = LW 37,296.

89 WA 26; 443,12–16 = LW 37,301.

90 WA 26; 445,1–6 = LW 37,303.

91 WA 39,2; 94 = Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ, trans. C.B. BROWN (<http://www.leaderu.com/philosophy/luther-humanitychrist.html>), thesis 20, page 2.

In the old usage of language »creature« signifies (causes us to think⁹²) »a thing separated from divinity by infinite degrees« while in the new usage creature »signifies a thing inseparably joined with divinity in the same person in an ineffable way.«⁹³ Indeed, words like »man, humanity, suffered« and »everything that is said of Christ, are new words.«⁹⁴ With Ingolf Dalferth, we can conclude that philosophy and theology deal not with different things but with the same things in different ways.⁹⁵

92 See D. BIELFELDT, Luther's Late Trinitarian Disputations: Semantic Realism and the Trinity (in: The Substance of Faith: Luther's Doctrinal Theology for Today, ed. by D. BIELFELDT/M. MATTOX/P. HINLICKY 2008, 59–130), 109.

93 WA 39,2; 94,19–20 = Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ, thesis 21, page 2.

94 WA 39,2; 94,23–24 = Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ, thesis 23, page 2.

95 DALFERTH, Theology and Philosophy (see n. 19), 77, says »According to Luther, philosophy and theology are fundamentally different, yet they neither contradict nor complement each other (WA 39,2; 27,31–32). Philosophy has the world for its field and whatever it talks about, even in metaphysics, must make itself felt in the present and experienced world. Theology, on the other hand, has ›the invisible things as subject‹ (WA 39,2; 15,8–9), i.e., those ›which are believed, i.e., which are apprehended by faith‹ (WA 39,2; 6,26–28). This looks like the traditional distinction between the knowable and the merely credible. But it is not. Philosophy and theology are neither different stages in our knowledge of things nor knowledge about different sorts of things. They are different kinds of knowledge of the same things, placed in different perspectives and different frames of reference: viz. the *coram mundo-deo*-perspective of its relations to God. Both perspectives are necessary for an adequate understanding of reality; both allow for growth of knowledge and a perfecting of our understanding of God, world and human existence; but there is no transition from knowledge in the first perspective to knowledge in the second, and thus no direct combination of knowledge achieved in the one frame with knowledge achieved in the second. Confusion is bound to result from mixing philosophical discourse about things *coram mundo* with theological discourse about things *coram deo*; and precisely this mixing of discourses Luther diagnoses as having been the endemic evil of scholastic theology.« With respect to grammar, Risto Saarinen notes, »it can be observed that Luther distinguishes theological grammar from philosophical. However, theological grammar is for him by no means an esoteric code that has normal words and everyday phrases as its external manifestation. The difference between philosophical and theological grammar is, linguistically speaking, not primarily a syntactic but a *semantic* and a *pragmatic* difference. The specific art of theological grammar is determined by its subject matter, namely, by the *significata* of biblical language. The

Theology acknowledges a new signification for the same thing in Christ. In the old usage there can be no inclusion of the property of humanity in the property of God. But in the new, the property of the divine conjoins itself with the property of the human. Hence, the Sorbonne must be wrong in maintaining a univocal view of truth shared between philosophy and theology. It fails to acknowledge the newness of words transposed in Christ. This »eschatological« dimension⁹⁶ – for lack of a better term – of Christ the *novum* both constitutes the old as old, but does not eliminate or dismiss it but allows it to stand in its own unique temporality and likewise can incorporate it in theology with its own intelligibility. As Luther notes,

We would act more correctly if we left dialectic and philosophy in their own area and learned to speak in a new language in the realm of faith apart from every sphere. Otherwise, it will turn out that, if we put the new wine in old wineskins, both of them will perish.⁹⁷

VIII *The Semantics of the New Tongue*

But this raises the question about Luther's Christological syllogism outlined above: what semantic theory would allow (1) and (2) to be true, but (3) false? Is it the case that new meanings of terms emerge within theological contexts or is it the case that no real difference in meanings exists between the terms within the two languages but there is only a difference in the inferences permitted? It would seem that different rules govern theology and philosophy. Just as different rules apply in regions within philosophy, so too are there different rules operative between theology and philosophy. Dennis Bielfeldt has cogently argued that Luther should not be seen here as having employed standard Ockhamist supposition the-

presence of the unique subject matter, the new entity (*nova res*), implies that even the way of the understanding that new entity and the modes of speaking about its properties have to be unique, although these new ways and modes are, nevertheless, conveyed by normal, everyday words.« See R. SAARINEN, *The Word of God in Luther's Theology* (LuthQ 4, 1990, 31–44), 39f.

⁹⁶ DALFERTH (see n. 19), 79.

⁹⁷ WA 39,2; 5,35–38 (Die Disputationen über Joh 1,14) = LW 38,242 (theses 40–41).

ory. Supposition is a semantic relation between the terms in a proposition and the things to which those terms refer (their extension).⁹⁸ Since Ockham rejected the existence of real universals or common natures, written and spoken terms must »primarily« signify individuals, »the things they can be truly predicated of.« For example in the proposition »the cow is red« is true, the term »cow« supposits for the same individual for which the term »red« supposits. Late medieval supposition theory understood the truth conditions and the meaning of statements extensionally, that is, by whether or not they supposit for the same individual or individuals. By contrast, the *via antiqua* was more intensionalist. Bielfeldt argues:

All men are rational is true if and only if ›man‹ signifies (causes the mind to think about) a property inexorably instanced only if the property signified by ›rational‹ is instanced. An intension of a predicate specifies all and only those properties a thing must have in order for the predicate truly to apply to it. An extension, on the other hand, is the class of things to which the predicate rightly applies. In an intensionalist semantics, the intension establishes the conditions by virtue of which extension is determined.⁹⁹

Bielfeldt asks whether »God is man« is best understood in an nominalistic, extensional sense or in an intensionalist way. He answers that if »God is man« is construed intensionally, then the property of being God does not exclude the property of being a man. In theology, this is the truth of the incarnation. But this is impossible in philosophy. Here specification of the properties of God includes that of being infinite. But since human beings are not infinite, specification of God-making properties must include the property of not being a human being. Thus, the conceptual rules by which theology proceeds must differ from philosophy, because terms such as »God« and »mother« do not exclude predication by man and virgin respectively. Indeed, the terms »God« and »mother« have different significations in theology and philosophy respectively. They cause one to think about different things in philosophy and theology, as one would expect in signification theory.

The upshot of Bielfeldt's case is that theological truth cannot be reduced to that which can be said philosophically. Hence Luther refuses

⁹⁸ BIELFELDT, Luther's Late Trinitarian Disputations (see n. 92), 111.

⁹⁹ Loc. cit., 113.

the notion that there could be one vast tree of Porphyry in which only theology has access to some of the branches. Hence, with Christ, something new has emerged.¹⁰⁰ The semantics of the *via antiqua* can serve as a suitable vehicle of Christ the *novum*.

IX Conclusion

The distinction between law and gospel governs Luther's approach to philosophy. Nominalism and Realism are no longer alternatives for him because their conclusions must each be evaluated in light of the law/gospel distinction. Luther charts a new path beyond that philosophical debate in which universals as an ontological reality and not merely generalizations, as Realists contend, may prove to be appropriate in theology but his overall positioning of philosophy in relation to theology has a Nominalist contour. Philosophy is limited by the fact that it knows nothing of the incarnation and is not able to accommodate its truth; nor does philosophy have a sense of God's grace. But it does have its place when restricted to this-worldly matters. Even so, Luther values syllogistic reasoning and uses it in theology when it is accountable to theological grammar.

¹⁰⁰ Bielfeldt waxes lyrically in his positive assessment of the role of philosophy for theology. »Just as old legalisms have been taken up in the grace of Christ's free justification, so too the old language of philosophy has been interrupted by the presence of something new. Just as the gospel is a new ingredient in the old mix of the law, so does the language that talks about the gospel possess a new ingredient in the old mix of philosophy. Just as the law cannot contain the gospel, so too does philosophical language not contain the good news about which theology speaks. The law, reason, and philosophy belong to God's left hand, while the gospel, faith, and theology concern His right. This intensionalist alternative fits well with the Lutheran notion of the infinite being available in the finite, for just as there is a real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, so too is there a ›real presence‹ of the deepest theological truths in human philosophical language. Just as God's presence is mediated through the earthly elements of the sacraments, so too is the presence of the nova lingua of theology mediated through the old language of philosophy. Just as everyday earthly elements are retained yet transformed sacramentally, so too is the everyday language of philosophy retained yet transformed in theology.« See BIELFELDT, Luther's Late Trinitarian Disputations (see n. 92), 114f.

Philosophy is no jump start which could impel us further along in the ladder of salvation. Instead, for Luther, philosophy becomes akin to law and can be affirmed as appropriate for temporal matters, though not for eternal ones. It can have a place in theology only as it is properly bathed. As such, it is most helpful in establishing doctrinal truth which is beholden to Christ who as the *new*, having in his resurrection emerged from sin and the consequences of sin, death refigures human relationship with creation, indeed allows us to accept our creatureliness under God and his goodness. Similar to other medieval thinkers, Luther denied philosophy a stance by which it could set the agenda for theology. More than anything, Luther would not want to see philosophy misused to limit or stymie an active, risen Christ through which God favors sinners and imputes to them his righteousness. But, Luther is ever vigilant that genuine theology faithful to the gospel employs rigorous logic, though only as faithful to the grammar of theology.