

## PART III



# Wisdom and Grace

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

—T.S. Eliot, “The Rock”

The spiritual dynamism at work in human culture implies a twofold movement. First, there is the movement of descent, the movement by which divine plenitude, the prime source of existence, descends into human reality to permeate and vivify it. For God infuses in every creature goodness with lovability together with being, and has the *first* initiative in every good activity. Then there is the movement of ascent, which is the answer of man, by which human reality takes the *second* initiative, activates itself toward the unfolding of its energies and toward God. . . . A new age of civilization will realize again that the descent of divine plenitude into man matters more than the ascent of man toward self-perfection. In this new age the movement by which the human being answers God's movement of effusion would not take place, as in the Middle Ages, in a childlike, ignorant-of-itself humanity. Its new simplicity would be a mature and experienced, self-awakened simplicity, enlightened by what might be called a free and evangelical introspection.

—Jacques Maritain, “A New Approach to God”



## CHAPTER ELEVEN



# John Paul II and the Exorcism of Descartes' Ghost

In *Fides et Ratio* Pope John Paul II invites us to consider both the ways of faith and the ways of reason in overcoming the crisis of our time—the crisis of meaning and truth which has issued in human degradation—called “nihilism.” This crisis of modernity has led people to face the untenable options of “a destructive will to power or to a solitude without hope” (§90). The roots of this crisis lie deep in historical decision and philosophical reflection in the encounter of human beings with their own conscience, with the question of being and God. The contemporary crisis recapitulates in the depths of the soul of modern man, the foundational and originating questions of modern philosophy. In brief, the crisis is spawned by a hyper-rationalist mentality which separated itself from the wisdom of faith, claiming for itself more than the legitimate autonomy of the ancients, but a self-sufficiency, closed in and hostile to faith (§75). The modern philosophy required the abandonment of a living faith, a faith that provides guideposts that beckon along the way and transform the interiority of the search. And by the great irony of history, the result has led to an abandonment of reason. Thus, by the same dynamic, working in reverse, a recovery of reason—a bold philosophical reason—is in some way connected to a revitalization of faith: “each without the other is impoverished and enfeebled” (§48). There are many ways to approach this rich text of John Paul II, the philosopher Pope.

I propose to read this encyclical as a venture into the philosophic quarrel of the ancients and moderns, a quarrel which has been engaged by such seminal thinkers as Jacques Maritain and Leo Strauss.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, I propose to

trace certain themes in *Fides et Ratio* which we must come to identify as “Cartesian.” We must then come to understand the nature of Descartes’ quarrel with premodern philosophy and the problematic character of its resolution; this should help us to appreciate what positive gains were made by Descartes and what important things were lost. An authentic “postmodern” position must continue to hold these gains and losses in tension and perspective. That is, John Paul II’s critique of modernity seeks to rescue the advances and aspirations of the modern age and yet to understand them in a larger perspective in which the wisdom of the ancients and medievals can be reappropriated and provide some ways out of the present crisis. In order to explore John Paul II’s account of the philosophic crisis of the modern age, I propose to do the following: first, gather together the various signs of the times which indicate the crisis of modern philosophy and culture; second, match up such signs with their philosophic roots in the modern project as found in Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*; third, review the important critique of Descartes made by Jacques Maritain, one of five Western thinkers put forward by John Paul II as an exemplar of the successful integration of *fides et ratio*.

### Signs of the Times: The Crisis of Modernity

John Paul II approaches the crisis of modern philosophy in terms that Nietzsche revealed long ago—the crisis of nihilism. Modern man has lost a sense of the meaning of life and the cosmos. The very search for meaning is made “difficult and fruitless” because of the fragmentation of knowledge and the proliferation of theories (§81). Many can remain content within a purely utilitarian point of view “locked in the confines of immanence” with an indifference to the very question of transcendence and “ultimate and overarching meaning” (§81). John Paul II is concerned for the younger generation who find themselves at a loss in contemporary culture: For it is undeniable that this time of rapid and complex change can leave especially the younger generation, to whom the future belongs and on whom it depends, with a sense that they have no valid points of reference. The need for a foundation for personal and communal life becomes all the more pressing at a time when we are faced with the patent inadequacy of perspectives in which the ephemeral is affirmed as a value and the possibility of discovering the real meaning of life is cast into doubt. This is why many people stumble through life to the very edge of the abyss without knowing where they are going. At times, this happens because those whose vocation it is to give cultural expression to their thinking no longer look to truth, preferring quick success to

the toil of patient enquiry into what makes life worth living. With its enduring appeal to the search for truth, philosophy has the great responsibility of forming thought and culture; and now it must strive resolutely to recover its original vocation (§6). For the sake of the young, if not for the older generations, John Paul II considers it a time to take stock of modern philosophy. If the path of modern philosophy has led to nihilism, is it not time to reconsider some of its fundamental principles, specifically its very self-conscious rejection of the ancient philosophy?

John Paul II discusses at least three points in which modern philosophy has resolved its quarrel with the ancients in ways that now have become problematic in their connection to nihilism. The three points are: (1) the emphasis upon subjectivity; (2) the method of separation and reduction; (3) the project of mastery of nature. Each of these items contributes some share to the nihilism of the present age. Perhaps then we could see better the need for: (a) a rediscovery of being, (b) a refashioning of an integrative and expansive approach to knowledge, and (c) a reaffirmation of a moral and contemplative good beyond mastery and utility. In other words, a serious look at the crisis of the modern age recommends to us a reconsideration of ancient philosophy as a constructive task.

It is part of John Paul II's great achievement to combine the old and the new, he has done so philosophically as well as theologically. The discovery of subjectivity he acknowledges to be an advance of modern philosophy<sup>2</sup> which "clearly has the great merit of focusing attention upon man. From this starting-point, human reason with its many questions has developed further its yearning to know more and to know it ever more deeply" (§5). But he adds that this advance has been "one sided," thereby obscuring other important truths: Yet the positive results achieved must not obscure the fact that reason, in its one-sided concern to investigate human subjectivity, seems to have forgotten that men and women are always called to direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them. . . . It has happened therefore that reason, rather than voicing the human orientation towards truth, has wilted under the weight of so much knowledge and little by little has lost the capacity to lift its gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being. Abandoning the investigation of being, modern philosophical research has concentrated instead upon human knowing. Rather than make use of the human capacity to know the truth, modern philosophy has preferred to accentuate the ways in which this capacity is limited and conditioned. Or again, John Paul II says that some moderns have simply abandoned the search for truth as they make their "sole aim the attainment of subjective certainty or a pragmatic sense of utility" (§47).

John Paul II uses the same language again saying that this modern turn leads to an “obscuring” of “the dignity of reason” equipped as it is to know truth and the absolute (§47). The crisis of modern philosophy is due in part therefore to loss of a sense of being, and a sense of the absolute in whose mystery we live and move and have our being. John Paul II does not of course deny that human mind suffers from limit and condition. But modern philosophy has so emphasized this aspect, that the very quest for being is atrophied—it does not “dare to rise to the truth of being” (§5). Using the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins we may say that the moderns have discovered how much our knowledge “wears man’s smudge [&] shares man’s smell; the soil/ Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.” And thus does the modern soul despair of the richness of transcendent meaning and objective truth. They do not see that “for all this, nature is never spent;/ There lives the dearest freshness deep down things,” which nature and freshness reason could discover. Nor can they see anymore that morning of faith which comes because the “Holy Ghost over the bent/ World broods with warm breast [&] with ah! bright wings.”<sup>33</sup> They look not to the wings of the spirit, neither reason energized by nature and its deep freshness nor the bright and warmth effects of faith. It is the loss of the élan of knowledge, the weariness with reason, which John Paul II seeks to counter and revive: “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves” (§1).

The second point concerning modernity, needing fundamental reconsideration, accompanies the first. It is the separation of thought from faith and a reduction of the richness of human experience. Philosophy rightly seeks its own “autonomy” or distinction from theology and so too are the various disciplines to be distinguished each from the other. Each seeks an authentic “autonomy” in the sense of following a proper method and tracing distinct lines of causality and intelligibility: “If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy . . . all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, philosophy is rightly distinguished from faith and seeks to follow its own methods and demand its own evidence and proof. But in modern philosophy the quest for distinction has become separation. John Paul II calls this position a form of rationalism—the philosopher seeks to be

“separate from and absolutely independent of the contents of faith” (§76). Complete independence or self-sufficiency are other terms used by John Paul II to describe this approach of modern philosophy. It is an exaggerated sense of autonomy.

It is a “false autonomy,” say the Council Fathers, which seeks to cut off temporal and secular affairs from their deeper roots and ultimate goals, to suppose that created things do not depend on God and that man can use them without any reference to their Creator. Nihilism follows as a consequence of this separation, for without the Creator the creature disappears. One finds in modern method a dogmatic separation; a reductive approach which excludes the very possibility of faith. This is done because faith is considered to be a threat to the autonomy of the mind. The third factor in the crisis of modernity may well be the most decisive. It is the capstone; the other two themes, the focus on subjectivity and the reductive method, are often mentioned as dynamically connected to the quest for mastery over nature. The modern age is characterized by great technological progress. The technical advances grant what seems to be “a quasi-divine power over nature and even over human beings” (§46). The desire for mastery most engenders the crisis of meaning. Nihilism results from the denial of limitation, ethical principle, and a higher being. The technological mentality moves away from “contemplative truth,” abandons the search for ultimate goal, and substitutes instead an “instrumental” conception of reason that promises to procure for man “enjoyment or power” (§47). In his first encyclical John Paul II mentioned this problem as indicating the crisis of our time, and he refers to that very text here in *Fides et Ratio*.<sup>5</sup>

The deep fear of technology bringing with it a widespread tyranny or degradation is one of the deepest signs of the times and an indication of the crisis of modernity. Philosophy must recover a “sapiential dimension” so that the “immense expansion of humanity’s technical capability—[be] ordered to something greater lest inhuman and destroyer of human race” (§81). The great evil of this century, a century of technological progress, causes a sense of despair in reason (§91). We now have an opportunity for recovering the sapiential dimension precisely because we have come see the illusion of “technical progress making us a demiurge, single handedly and completely taking charge of destiny.”<sup>6</sup> These three themes resound throughout *Fides et Ratio*: the turn to subjectivity, a reductive and separatist method, and mastery of nature. It does not take too much reflection to detect here the presence of Descartes. John Paul II does not mention him by name, but this constellation of philosophical themes puts us on the trail of Descartes; and it is John Paul II’s mission to exorcise his ghost.

The spirit of Descartes—subjectivity, rationalist separation, and mastery—continues to haunt modern and contemporary philosophy; now one, now another element may be denounced or shaken off by this or that thinker claiming to be “postmodern.” Descartes is a favorite object of critique by postmodern philosophers; and yet they continue to employ one or the other theme. But it is rare indeed to find a bold thinker who would throw them all off at once. John Paul II urges us to do just that and begin anew in our philosophical quest for first things. In an official document of the church, it would be not be fitting to name names, but rather to sketch trends and identify principles. But we may surmise that John Paul II has Descartes in sight from looking at names he does mention favorably. Jacques Maritain is held up as an exemplar of a thinker who well integrated faith and reason (§74). We know that Jacques Maritain sketched out his philosophical project of recovery of Aristotle and Aquinas in explicit contrast with Descartes and modern philosophy. This is evident from his great work *Degrees of Knowledge*, to his treatments of Descartes in *Three Reformers* and *The Dream of Descartes*.<sup>7</sup> In addition to thematic analysis and the indirect link through Jacques Maritain, we have direct indications of John Paul II’s concern with the ghost of Descartes in his more informal work entitled *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. We find a striking similarity in the use of the three themes of modernity in the sections entitled “If God exists, why is he hiding?” and “What has become of the History of Salvation?”<sup>8</sup> John Paul II claims that the very demand for the total evidence of God stems from a way of philosophy “that is purely rationalistic, one that is characteristic of modern philosophy—the history of which begins with Descartes, who split thought from existence and identified existence with thought itself.”<sup>9</sup> John Paul II detects impatience with mystery. The term rationalism embraces the first two of the themes mentioned above: the turn to subjectivity and the reductive method. The turn to subjectivity evinces a rebellion against our creaturely status and an attempt to overcome the distance between God and man.

Picking up on this theme a few pages later John Paul II claims that the very idea of salvation history is forgotten, obscured if you will, because of Descartes; while he does not claim that Descartes lacked faith or even sought to destroy it, at least we can say that Descartes created a “climate in which, in the modern era, such estrangement became possible.”<sup>10</sup> What is this era, and what characterizes the climate hostile to faith? The new era is characterized by a “great anthropocentric shift” in which subjectivity and reduction prevail—the *cogito* as the motto of modern rationalism signifies the plan for subjectivity and separation—the Cartesian method.<sup>11</sup> John Paul II says that the trajectory of modern philosophy, anglo and continental—is but an ex-

pansion of the fundamental Cartesian position. John Paul II finds its root in the *cogito*: “by making subjective consciousness absolute, Descartes moves instead toward pure consciousness of the Absolute, which is pure thought.” That is, compared to Thomas’ philosophy of existence and God as *Ipsum esse subsistens*, Descartes unfolds “autonomous thought.” Human thought must measure existence and banish mystery. Objectivity is lost in favor of human consciousness. Hence, John Paul II says Descartes put us “on the threshold of modern immanentism and subjectivism.”<sup>12</sup> The transcendence of truth and of God are lost. As we have seen, these themes echo throughout *Fides et Ratio*. Now John Paul II does not name Descartes and the theme of mastery, but it follows close behind his treatment of Descartes as “father of rationalism.” That is, the rationalism of subjectivity and reduction, is the rationalism of mastery. Thus in the following section of *Crossing the Threshold*, “The Centrality of Salvation,” John Paul II says that the Enlightenment mentality does not need God’s love. No one needs his intervention, he says, in a world that is “self-sufficient, transparent to human knowledge, free of mystery thanks to scientific research, that is evermore an inexhaustible mine of raw materials for man—the demigod of modern technology.”<sup>13</sup> It is clear that John Paul II’s *Fides et Ratio* seeks to reopen the quarrel with modern rationalism, with the Enlightenment mentality, which has banned faith and which is rooted squarely in Descartes. It would be worthwhile therefore to make a brief survey of Descartes’ own account of this new philosophy, which created the climate for loss of faith.

### **Revisiting the Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns: Descartes’ Discourse on Method**

Descartes’ *Discourse* is one of the founding documents for modern philosophy. Descartes surveys his training in the ancients and self-consciously proclaims the need for a new method, indeed a new goal for philosophy and all learning. With good reason then does Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, name the *Discourse* as one of three key works, the others being Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* and John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*.<sup>14</sup> Borgmann rightly notes that any attempt to get through the “post” of postmodern must first understand what is distinctively modern. Just the briefest review of Descartes’ *Discourse on Method* will show us that the problematic of *Fides et Ratio* involves the way of philosophizing initiated by Descartes. The question of Descartes’ deepest intention as an author, and the question of his relationship to the faith of the Catholic Church, is beyond the scope of this brief chapter.<sup>15</sup> But we

can show how Descartes did indeed create the intellectual climate for the eventual loss of faith.<sup>16</sup> René Descartes outlined the philosophy which gave a charter to the growth of modern technological society in his *Discourse on Method*. Rejecting the ancient philosophy for its lack of effective control, Descartes says that he wishes to found a new practical philosophy; by “knowing the force and actions of the fire, water, air and stars, the heavens, and all other bodies that surround us, just as we understand the various skills of our craftsmen, we could make ourselves the masters and possessors of nature.”<sup>17</sup>

Surely, John Paul II looks out at Europe and the West and sees that we are now approaching the fulfilled dream of Descartes’ modern project. Descartes promised, as the fruit of his new philosophy, “an infinity of devices that would enable us to enjoy without pain the fruits of the earth and all the goods one finds in it, but also principally the maintenance of health.”<sup>18</sup> John Paul II sees rather a society “completely centered upon the cult of action and production and caught up in the heady enthusiasm of consumerism and pleasure seeking.”<sup>19</sup> Technology has fulfilled its dream, only to find a life now emptied of higher purpose or deeper meaning. Faith suffers in such a climate “free of mystery thanks to scientific research, that is evermore an inexhaustible mine of raw materials for man—the demigod of modern technology.”<sup>20</sup> The Pope seems to indicate his awareness too of the source deeper than Descartes, namely Machiavelli, who counseled the mastery of fortune and chance and providence itself. Furthermore, is faith also not cast into oblivion in light of the other great criterion for the modern philosophy—mathematical certitude? In order to reach this goal, Descartes recognized the need to reform the entirety of education and the social role of the intellectual in society such that expertise would be more readily developed and experts be revered as great benefactors who are free to pursue their study. He evaluated the curriculum of studies in terms of certitude and utility: he sought “a clear and assured knowledge useful for life.”<sup>21</sup>

Poetry, theology, philosophy, ethics, and a few other disciplines were cast aside in light of these new criteria of certitude and utility. In fact, the disciplines that would lay the basis for the experts, scientific studies, would have to be built from the ground up. On the basis of mathematical science, Descartes proposed his famous new method for the conduct of inquiry. It would begin with a universal doubt of anything not clear and distinct; again, traditional opinion would be swept aside in all areas in order to make room for the useful and certain knowledge of science. The certitude of science would be assured by the use of simple nature and forms such as principles of mechanics. In its streamlined form, the method for arriving at knowledge

would follow the analytical method, breaking apart a problem into its simplest terms and then building up to greater levels of complexity. Descartes' project and method have been tremendously successful. But its success is marred by an ambiguity about its goal or purpose. For when Descartes turned to human production he praised projects that followed a rational and effective plan, whatever their end. For he admits that in the political order he must admire Sparta even if its ends or purposes were not sound. At least they were organized effectively. The crack in the system appears here. For the end is not subject to the same clarity as the method. The end is left ambiguous since it is not within the competence of the new science to determine it; as Richard Kennington puts it, "the utility goal can never be brought within the charmed circle of certitude."<sup>22</sup> Descartes simply adopts the lowest common denominator by appealing to that which is most universally desired: health and life and convenience of living. To cite Kennington again, "the benefits are as universally available to humanity as they are devoid of exacting duties or self-sacrifice."<sup>23</sup> But this begs the question about the nature of the good life. The technical skills appear to be neutral to an end, but, in fact, they point to one end and encourage us to judge in terms of a utilitarian and hedonistic ethic. The criterion for the new knowledge is certitude that entails a skepticism toward traditional modes of opinion and grants to the expert a special status.

The method is not only inherently set against tradition and opinion, it requires a reductive approach to the material in the name of "objectivity." And it further requires specialization and a narrow or partial vision in the name of competence. Most of all, the Cartesian project is problematic because of the ambiguity about the end or purpose. On the one hand, the expert must appear neutral; for the question of end or purpose is beyond his competence. This is the contradiction at the heart of the project. Every technique is put to use for some end, but the end is not determined by a technique. The expert easily assumes an end for technique by appealing to what people want. Thus, on second look, the expert appears as a humanitarian who simply appeals to universal human desires and passions. The expert is therefore unproblematic. But when it is seen that the method requires a reductive approach and that it encourages the lowering of human goals, it becomes problematic in the extreme. The reductive approach to human affairs is potentially dehumanizing and degrading. It may well lead to the "abolition of man."<sup>24</sup> Man no longer dares to know the truth of being, says John Paul II. This ghost of Descartes needs to be exorcised by a return to and recovery of the premodern traditions of the ancient Greeks and medievals. A climate must be restored in which we dare to seek the truth of

being. Thus we shall finish our presentation with a turn to the philosophy of Jacques Maritain. Maritain took upon himself the task of working through the modern philosophy and finding those places at which the perennial philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, and Aristotle, could assist us in restoring a sound philosophy of being.

### Maritain on Descartes' *Fides et Ratio*

Maritain provides a thorough and detailed critique of Descartes in *The Dream of Descartes*. It is beyond the scope of this brief chapter to explore the long list of texts of Descartes in which Maritain finds the deep betrayal of Catholic intelligence made in the name of the modern project. Fortunately, there are variations of his critique to be found in his more popular work, *Three Reformers*, as well as in his *Saint Thomas Aquinas*.<sup>25</sup> Maritain's general accounts of the Cartesian origins of the crisis of modernity match the basic account of the crisis of our time provided by John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio*. That is, Maritain says that the Cartesian heritage has bequeathed to us a distorted philosophy because of (1) idealism, (2) rationalism, and (3) dualism.<sup>26</sup>

These three problems bequeathed to us by Descartes correspond to the themes of *Fides et Ratio* identified above: subjectivism, methodological reduction, and mastery of nature. Idealism is the separation of thought from being, the very root of modernity identified by John Paul II in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. Indeed, Richard Kennington has argued that Descartes' *Meditations* is metaphysically neutral, that is, the precise nature of being human or the scope of nature and being themselves are secondary to the utility of our understanding of nature. Maritain pursues the problem in terms of the basic orientation of the mind to things. It is the angelic mode of knowing which can proceed as if independent from things, in a fully intuitive mode, with eventual power over natural forces. Although Maritain and John Paul II seem to think that the mind's orientation to being is the root issue for understanding the relationship of faith and reason—it is the second item, rationalism, which must be of more immediate concern. Maritain's account of this notion of rationalism is quite thorough and shows the reason why our intellectual climate is so hostile to faith. In his chapter entitled "The Revelation of Science," Maritain points out the reductive method of Descartes imposes mathematical intelligibility on all knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

The premodern tradition recognized that human knowing is diverse and requires various methods or modalities. It would be foolish to demand the same level of certitude in all matters (See Aristotle's *Ethics*, *Metaphysics*).<sup>28</sup> The mind has an expansive range of objects of thought, but not every object

can be made to conform to the same method without suffering a distortion or obscuring of its true being. Thomas also discusses the divisions and methods of the sciences and he speaks rather of “modes” not methods of science, to indicate the need for the human mind to approach the levels of science in diverse, analogous ways. The third consequence of Cartesian philosophy, dualism, stems from the split between consciousness and body. It allows the body to be exploited by technical means serving the enjoyment of a detached consciousness. John Paul II argues that dualism has obscured the importance of virtue as a habit of personal choice and self-mastery.<sup>29</sup> Maritain previously saw the impending nihilism. Man has been “split asunder” and “nothing in human life is any longer made to man’s measure, to the rhythm of the human heart.” Man is at the center of a world “inhuman in every respect.”<sup>30</sup> Maritain and John Paul II both see the greatest sign of the time to be this fear of technology. It is the confusion brought about by the originating principle of modern philosophy in Machiavelli and Descartes—the mastery of fortune and nature. The first work of renewal requires a return to moral self-mastery as taught by the ancients and medieval. Perhaps C. S. Lewis was not far off when he said that what we need is something like repentance if we are to find our way out of the modern crisis.<sup>31</sup> For grace (*fides*) not only presupposes and perfects nature (*ratio*); but grace also restores and heals nature. Reason will be restored by faith. Perhaps the deepest lesson we learn from John Paul II, Maritain, and Lewis is that the nihilistic spirit of modernity, the ghost of Descartes, can only be cast out by prayer and fasting.

## Notes

This chapter extracted from “Fides et ratio: Exorcizing the Ghost of Descartes,” in *Faith and Reason*, ed. Timothy L. Smith (South Bend, Ind.: St Augustine Press, 2001), 217–29.

1. See Jacques Maritain, “Integral Humanism and the Crisis of Modern Times,” *Scholasticism and Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), 11–32; Maritain, *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of New Christendom*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973); Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953); idem, *What Is Political Philosophy?* (New York: The Free Press, 1959).

2. See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

3. G. M. Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Selection of His Poems and Prose*, ed. W. H. Gardner (New York: Penguin, 1953), 27.

4. *Gaudium et spes*, §36.

5. *Redemptor Hominis*, §15.

6. “[P]ropter reperta scientifica et technica, homo veluti demiurgus assequi ex se solo possit sibique obtinere plenum suam in fortunam dominatum” *Fides et Ratio*, §91 (Emphases added).

7. Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers* (New York: Apollo, 1970); idem, *The Dream of Descartes*, trans. Labelle L. Andison (London: Editions Poetry, 1946).

8. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. Vittorio Messori (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 37–41, 50–53.

9. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold*, 38.

10. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold*, 52.

11. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold*, 51.

12. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold*, 51; Cf. *Fides et Ratio*, §81.

13. *Crossing the Threshold*, 55.

14. Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 22–26.

15. I wish to thank Cyrille Michon for raising the issue of Descartes’ knowledge and commitment to Catholic principles, as indicated in Descartes’ “Notes directed against a certain programme” (Cf. *Discourse on Method, The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, ed. and trans. E. S. Haldrane and G. R. T. Ross [Cambridge: University Press, 1972] vol. 1, 438–39). In this text he provides a role for the faith to give a negative influence, that is, reason may be used to disprove contradictions to itself. It may be close to but does not really reflect the Thomistic view. Cf. *Fides et Ratio*, §76.

16. I shall be drawing on many points which I learned from Richard Kennington, my professor at the Catholic University of America, from class and from his published articles: Richard Kennington, “René Descartes,” in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, third ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 421–39; Richard Kennington, “Descartes and the Mastery of Nature,” in *Organism, Medicine, and Metaphysics*, ed. S. F. Spicker (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1978), 201–23. I take responsibility for this interpretation as applied to John Paul II and the problem of Catholic philosophy in the contemporary context. Some material is drawn from my articles “The Moral Status of the Expert in Contemporary Society,” *The World and I* 4:8 (August 1989): 560–85; and idem, “Why Locke Rejected an Ethics of Virtue and Turned to an Ethic of Utility,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (1990): 267–76.

17. Descartes, *Discourse on Method, The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, ed. and trans. E. S. Haldrane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), vol. 1, 119 (§6).

18. Descartes, *Discourse on Method* VI, 83.

19. John Paul II, *Reconciliation and Penance*, §18.

20. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold*, 55.

21. Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 83.

22. Kennington, “René Descartes,” 212.

23. Kennington, “René Descartes,” 221.

24. See C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 80–91; Michael D. Aeschliman, *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case against Scientism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Peter Kreeft, *C. S. Lewis for the Third Millennium* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).

25. Maritain, *Dream of Descartes*; idem, *Three Reformers*; idem, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1931 ); idem, *Peasant of the Garonne*, trans. M. Cuddihy and E. Hughes (New York: Holt, 1968); see also work by Peter Redpath, *Cartesian Nightmare: An Introduction to Transcendental Sophistry* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodolpi, 1997).

26. This is from his most thorough critique in *Dream of Descartes*, 130–50. In *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (58–59), Maritain works the trilogy of Agnosticism (“by cultivating a more or less refined doubt which is an outrage both to the perception of the senses and the principles of reason, that is to say the very things on which all our knowledge depends”), naturalism (“The mind at the same time refuses to recognize the rights of primary Truth and repudiates the supernatural order, considering it impossible—and such a denial is a blow at all the interior life of grace”), and individualism/angelism (“the mind allows itself to be deceived by the mirage of a mythical conception of human nature, which attributes to that nature conditions peculiar to pure spirit, assumes that nature to be in each of us as perfect and complete as the angelic nature in the angel and therefore claims for us, as being in justice our due, along with complete domination over nature, the superior autonomy, the full self sufficiency, the *autóoxela* appropriate to pure forms”). In *Three Reformers* (55ff) he emphasizes that the root of “angelism” is something that embraces all three in many respects.

27. Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes*, 37–42.

28. Aristotle, *Ethics* I. 3 1094b20–27; idem, *Metaphysics* II. 3 995a5–20.

29. John Paul II, *Reflections on Humanae Vitae* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1984), 36–38.

30. Maritain, *Dream of Descartes*, 146.

31. C. S. Lewis, *Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 89.

