

Personal "Philosophic" reflections on the Theories of Knowledge, Freedom + ~~Unity~~ ^{Immortality}.

Well, Angela, I guess this is the part you've been waiting for. Don't be surprised if this second section of this letter is characterized by ~~it~~ more than ^{my usual} ~~common~~ disappointedness and vagueness.

Here goes my theory of knowledge, which has been "gleaned" from more than a few philosophers and contains little originality other than ~~by~~ ^{that} the pattern assumed by my eclecticism.

By the very fact that I am ~~trying~~ writing this I immediately reject the Sceptic position on knowledge which states that everything is subjective and that we can't really be sure of anything. If I really believed that I wouldn't have to bother with writing, speaking or even taking exams. I could be what you might call a conscientious objector to taking tests and exams (this has its definite advantages, to be sure). I think that there is such a thing as objective reality and objective truths and that man can come to an adequate knowledge of facts, not exactly as they are in themselves, determined ~~by~~ and individualized by their matter and proper essences, but in a matter manner nevertheless adequate and consonant with the mode of knowledge proper to man. This might sound like I'm begging the question a little. I'm inclined to be a little practical and pragmatic like the Marxists or like Dewey and ~~a few~~ ^{most} of the American philosophers. ~~I think~~ Even before I was introduced to these philosophers I used to think that to ask whether what I think I see really corresponds to what is really there is of little use. I think that ~~man~~ it is proof enough for man that ~~what~~ his

... unless these we can

concepts of things, derived from ^{can be said to} per sense perception, correspond with what is really "out there" if man can work with what he knows about facts, and apply his knowledge to the objects outside of him and obtain useful and good results, that is, progress. Let's take an example and hope that it will bring my meaning out more clearly. Here is a chemist or pharmacist. He has a terribly upset stomach because he overate. He has a certain knowledge of some chemicals which to him are present in the form of sense impressions or sense data. Now when that chemist goes into his laboratory and, using what he thinks is knowledge of the properties of the sense data present to him, he puts together an Alka Seltzer, which, after he ingests it, ~~enters~~ enters into a chemical balance with other chemicals in his stomach, a balance the chemist had "knowledge" of, and succeeds in relieving him of his upset stomach. I would say that that man has good and ~~de~~ adequate knowledge of the reality beyond the white crystals presented to him by his senses.

This example is a little trivial but it is clear.

In the case of a more complex and vital medicine that can save a human life, its importance as well as its clarity can be brought out. If ~~I have~~ with my knowledge of a medicine I can save such a precious thing as a human life, how can anything ~~other~~ ^{else} that the medicine "really is" be compared in importance with what I know it to be?

Apart from material existence, in an unchanging, timeless spiritual world of Forms or Ideas. Plato claimed that the soul saw and had direct knowledge of these forms in a previous existence before being joined with the body, and that the material objects we see now in the present world only exist insofar as they "participate" in the likeness or essence of the divine forms. That is, they have the power to stir up my recollection of the divine forms. As an example Plato would say that a girl is beautiful because of her participation in the Idea or form of Absolute Beauty, an Idea which whose recollection she stirs up in the ~~own~~ mind of the person who sees her. He explains everything then by participation in the divine, unchanging Form Ideas or Forms.

This theory appeals to me because it explains and gives objective status to Universals (Man, Beauty, Justice, etc) but I confess that I can't see my way through the many difficulties raised by Parmenides and Zeno in Plato's own dialogue, the Parmenides.

Just One last point, I do believe in Universals such as the idea of man or animal or something else. I think, along with ~~Plato~~ Aristotle and St. Thomas that man can discover the essences of things, that is, what things really are, and on this point, I think there is no discrepancy between my present

In short, Ange, the thing really is what I with my knowledge can do with it and if I can use it well to achieve important results, such as saving a life, whatever else the thing might be does not really matter. I would go even further and say that whatever else the thing might "really" be is not what it really is at all for I can neither know, nor make use of the properties it "really has".

This, Ange, would seem to leave the ~~thing~~^{situation} open-ended and the more I can learn ^{about} and do with a reality the more I can be said to know it. But the thing really is and remains what I know it to be. This is about as far as I have worked this out with myself. I am aware that it needs a lot more thought and that there are difficulties contained in it, but time and space do not allow a discussion of the difficulties now. Perhaps we can talk about it more when I get home.

When we were studying Plato I was strongly attracted to his theory of the Universal and Absolute Forms. He said, for instance, that when I ~~see a man~~ see a man my senses present me with a sense image of a man. I know that that sense image represents a man because that particular sense image stirs up in me a "recollection" of what the perfect and absolute concept or idea of man really is. This Ideal man exists as an absolute.

As a Christian I believe that man will someday have to render an account of his existence to his Creator, and be rewarded or punished according to the use he made of his life. Now it would seem senseless and ~~not~~ make God seem unjust ~~both~~ if he rewarded or punished actions which ~~had~~ were necessarily performed by their agents. In order to merit Heaven or deserve punishment man has to be free to choose the good and reject ~~the~~ evil, for which he is rewarded, or to reject the good and choose ~~the~~ evil, for which he is punished.

I also agree with St. Thomas when he says that man must necessarily choose the Good, and so when a man chooses what would objectively ^{be} considered evil, he is nevertheless choosing in under the aspect of good. If man saw something ^{good} as evil he would not choose it, and consequently likewise, if he saw something ^{of} evil as good he would choose it. I do not think this orientation toward the good in any way violates man's free will, for it is by this principle that man ^{anything} wills at all, ultimately.

And now a very few final words on the Unity of Man. It is difficult to get away from St. Thomas. So far of ~~all~~ the philosophers I have studied he has been the most influential on me in the most of the philosophical categories. I think that man is the union of the body and soul which he needs to operate humanly and to attain to the function of intellectual knowledge, the characteristic ~~of~~ human function. Plato attributed the human essence to the soul of man alone and taught that the body was just something that the God's had created to punish the soul for ~~its~~ some sort of offense ^{committed} in its existence in

I will now try to elaborate some of my ideas on the Freedom of man.

Essentially I think that man is essentially a free being, that is, he can use the unique powers that he possesses to choose ~~between~~ between one thing or another, to follow a course of action or not to. This, I believe, is essential to man's dignity as man, as a human, and as a creature created in the Image of God. Perhaps, because I have adopted the Faith, my opinions on the Freedom of man are more directed by theological rather than philosophical convictions. But ultimately, these former are, I believe, reducible to the latter. Let me go into a little more detail. My most immediate and direct evidence that man is ~~basic~~ essentially free is that I experience freedom in myself. I ~~act~~ think, I evaluate and I act. I can, on occasion rise above my strongest natural feelings and inclinations. As a man I can even counter-act my strongest natural instinct, that of self-preservation, and give up my life or face certain death in order to save another or uphold a cherished personal conviction. Witness the thousands of martyrs and war-heroes. Nor is there any doubt as to the normality of their mental states or consciousness, for many illustrious examples exist where a man or woman knowingly, with in perfect control of their powers, and with pre-meditation did give up their lives for others or for their Beliefs. In this reliance on my own experience you might rightly notice a bit of the pragmatist but which was quite explicit in my earlier discussion of the Theory of Knowledge.

inclination, which I spoke about earlier and my
basic agreement with Thomism, for in the last
analysis both their epistemology of St. Thomas and
that of the pragmatist do both admit that man
arrives at or can arrive at knowledge of what a
thing really is, ~~by different methods to be sure,~~

of course pragmatism stops at the knowledge
of physical reality, why St. Thomas goes much
further when this and asserts that the soul, by a
process of intellectual induction can come to the
knowledge of the existence of the spiritual, which
Pragmatism & materialism flatly deny -

the Ideal World. I reject this position, as I do that of the Marxist who would hold that man is only material and that his ~~mind~~ consciousness is a product of a history of the development of matter through greater and greater complexity. ~~I realize I must give much further~~

I realize I should give much more thought to all of the concepts I have spoken of above and I plan to do this in my future studies. But for now, quod scripsi, scripsi.

You realize of course, that it is only because we are so close that I address a letter such as this to you. I hate to think of what an ordinary friend would think if he got a letter like this from me.

Love, keep well and I'm looking forward to hearing your reactions to these ideas when I get home.

Love,
Tom.