

## ANSWERING HEIDEGGER'S CHALLENGE

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*The Catholicity of Reason* by D. C. Schindler  
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Some years ago I planned to teach a course on “faith and reason in an age of doubt.” As I sensed while plotting the syllabus, and as was confirmed in teaching it, the real challenge was not in getting my students to make intellectual room for faith—they already had a place for that alongside any number of sentiments and tastes—but in helping them attain a proper understanding of reason. They found reason a useful tool for accomplishing certain tasks but doubted its capacity to know the deepest truths about the world, and they had no sense that reason could seriously inform Christian faith.

I should have anticipated as much. A decade earlier, John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* had called for a recovery of philosophy's sapiential and metaphysical dimensions: human beings must relearn, in the wake of modern philosophy, that it is by way of reason we set out in search of the meaning of our lives, and it is in being—the currency of the real, as it were—that reason arrives as the ground and fullness of truth. The world does not normally pay much attention to papal encyclicals, sad to say, but even so Pope Benedict managed to set off a firestorm in his 2006 Regensburg address, where he repeated John Paul's challenge to the West to embrace “the

questions which underlie its rationality” and to discover the “courage to engage the whole breadth of reason.”

In the brilliant *The Catholicity of Reason*, D. C. Schindler answers the call of both popes by providing the most satisfactory and comprehensive account of the nature of reason—in its essence and in its relation to being and faith—that I have seen. He argues that while the modern “rational domination of nature in science and technology” and the “violence of absolutist claims” may seem to “require above all a restraining of reason,” the true necessity is a recovery of reason's scope: “It is not the grandeur of reason but its impoverishment that leads to oppressive rationalism and the arbitrary irrationalism inseparable from it.”

As Plato and Edmund Burke suggested in different ways and at different times, a society that rejects its foundation in reason will reestablish itself on the basis of force. As the response to Benedict's Regensburg address showed, East and West in modernity have indeed elected to become societies of force. The pope's words provoked violent protests in the East; while in the West, his counsel could not even be heard, because, as it were, we were too deaf and distracted with living in the thrall of our many little powers over nature.

Schindler sees well that we do not need either to restrain reason or to discover something new to replace it, as some Enlighten-

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ment and Romantic figures did with their theories of moral sentiments. We need to recover it. And so he enters into deep conversation with the West's "perennial philosophy," beginning with Plato and Aristotle and continuing through Aquinas to the great Christian philosophers and theologians of the present day, above all Hans Urs von Balthasar. His attempt to recover *reason (ratio)* rather than *intellect (intellectus)*, as one of Schindler's influences, the French neo-Thomist philosopher Pierre Rousselot, might have phrased it, serves as a kind of gauntlet thrown at the feet of modernity's supposed "rationalism"; Schindler engages modern accounts of reason from Hume and Kant to Hegel and Heidegger, drawing richly and sometimes sympathetically on their provocations all the while refusing to accept that their accounts of reason, however critical (Heidegger) or totalizing (Hegel), strike home.

In his three previous books—on Balthasar, Plato's *Republic*, and the German idealists—Schindler worked out in detail fundamental questions on the nature of truth, reason, and human freedom. In this one, he draws on those studies in a series of challenging but engaging essays, most accessible perhaps to the trained philosopher and theologian, but rewarding for any person.

Schindler takes up Heidegger's two most striking claims about modern man: he has lost the ability to contemplate being and so has rendered himself "incapable of wonder." In reducing being to ideas of causality, Heidegger famously claimed, the modern mind refuses to let being be, harnesses it for use, and so strips it of all mystery. Heidegger savagely critiqued this practice of what he called "ontotheology," where God and being are ultimately reduced to their use-value for human rationality. He wanted us to "dwell poetically" in wonder.

As Schindler notes, many Catholic thinkers have ceded Heidegger the point, and then simply exempted one figure or another from the accusation. Jean Luc Marion, for instance, attempted even to exonerate Thomas Aquinas from the charge, which leaves the lay reader scratching his head and saying, "If not Thomas, then who?"

This is not the sort of game Schindler plays. For Heidegger to be right, our thinking on causality would have to entail a forgetting or subordination of being to our exploitation. But what if causality lies not outside of being—like a pickaxe (a cause) breaking a stone (effect) to render it useful for building a house—but at the very heart of being, as when a mother and father communicate their substance and love for one another *in, through, and to* their newly conceived child?

In what most readers will surely find a less than obvious move, Schindler gives an account of Dionysius the Aeropagite's *Divine Names* as answering Heidegger's complaint. Drawing on Plato, Dionysius envisioned God as the Good and as akin to the sun: as the universal cause of all things whose intrinsic self-diffusiveness is above all a "generosity or self-giving" that "gives rise to the world *in giving itself.*" The desire to know that is wonder, the love or act of self-giving that is causality, and the gift given that is being are finally one. As Schindler pithily concludes, "To desire is to be is to give."

Being is not only caused by love; it is not merely an expression of love; it *is* love "all the way down." Contrary to Heidegger, the causality of the Good extends to the very depths of reality and defines it. The further we journey into the knowledge of causes, far from reducing wonder to knowledge (*scientia*), the deeper will our wonder actually become. Aristotle was right: philosophy begins in wonder. It ends in wonder, too, because the truth, as self-diffusive love, is wonder-full.

Catholic thought has always held that God is being Itself and that God is Love, as Moses and John tell us, but Schindler's Dionysius makes clear why these are but two ways of expressing the same reality. This central claim explains Schindler's approach as a whole. If being is fundamentally love, and if modern persons have in some sense missed that fact, then everything—because what is there outside of being?—must be rethought.

Schindler does much of the rethinking for us by sketching a definition of reason as catholic, or “according to the whole,” in a fourfold sense. Reason by definition is concerned with being as a whole; it is the act of the whole person; what it knows, it grasps in terms of the universal whole and also, finally, the whole of the individual concrete thing known. In the context of these claims, Schindler proceeds to argue for a conception of reason and being standing in natural relation to each other as intrinsically self-transcending realities. Reason is “always already beyond itself,” dwelling in being, while being, in turn, gives itself to be known. In brief, “reason is in being, and being is in reason.” Schindler's appreciation of this ecstatic quality at the heart of reality helps him to resolve a number of impasses that have frustrated both modern and post-modern philosophy as well as other recent efforts to revive the metaphysical realism and basic intellectualism of the perennial tradition.

Throughout *Catholicity*, we find a satisfying philosophical elaboration and fulfillment of the principles outlined in *Fides et*

*Ratio*, with its sense of the life of reason as an act of the whole person conducted always in contact with being as truth. This, despite few actual references to the encyclical. We also find many echoes of John Henry Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, with its effort to provide a richer knowledge than that of Enlightenment rationalism, as well as his *Idea of a University*, with its insistence that knowledge is an organic unity from which no part may be excluded without corrupting the whole. And so we may be surprised to find not a single mention of him in these pages. This may be, in part, because Schindler has simply absorbed so much of Newman by way of Blondel, de Lubac, and von Balthasar; but there may be another reason worth mentioning because it clarifies a particular strength of Schindler's work.

In the *Grammar*, Newman argued in direct opposition to British empiricism, and so felt obliged to satisfy the standards of a crude and finally provincial conception of human reason—a conception Nietzsche and Heidegger together have since laid waste. Schindler returns, with Heidegger at his side, to Plato and the superlative intellectual tradition he initiated. Intellect, being, and the Good constitute his natural vocabulary. This sense of speaking within the broad tradition of Christian-Platonism lends to Schindler's volume still one more catholic note. As he would have it, that tradition was always in contact with reality. We needed only some distance, and critical challenges to it, to discover new riches in those old depths. †