

SP18

Conflict in early modern
Philosophy"

Philosophy IV

John Shaver.

B

Conflict in Early Modern Philosophy

SP18

The seed of early modern philosophy was a product of the Renaissance. It represented, in the realm of thought, whole effort of the Renaissance to free the individual from the restrictions of arbitrary authority. Thus in its very birth, it was a conflict with the past. The Church of the Middle Ages had taken hold of philosophy and transformed it into an apologetic. The function of the scholastic philosophy was to declare, from the established basis of Revelation, all manner of unimportant distinctions. The scholastics were subservient to Theology. Thus any kind of independent investigation was in conflict with this whole culture.

Out of this seed, this practice of independent investigation thus arose rival systems of philosophy. There was the empiricist systems with its emphasis on experience and the Rational dogmatists system with its emphasis on the ability of reason ^{to} transcend experience, and reach a criterion of ultimate truth. In this early modern philosophy there were also the beginnings of the more recent critical system. These three systems were in conflict. Furthermore they were revealed, in varying degrees in the exponent of each system, setting up a conflict with in the system itself. Again different exponents of the same system conflicted on certain points.

This essay will deal with the conflicts as outlined above. It is not going to deal with the problems, unresolved or otherwise, of these philosophies as such, but only as they gave the basis for these conflicts.

Breuer has been the first of our modern philosophers to break with the Church. It is generally recognized that he was the first of our philosophers to rely on independent investigation. In his "Philosophy was no longer the handmaid of Christianity." The astronomical

dissonances of Copernicus made him to renounce the physical philosophy of the Catholic Church and build up his own. He was in direct conflict with the Church. The fact that he was burned as a heretic seems to put the Historical stamp of truth on such a statement.

His monistic philosophy not only plays havoc with the doctrine of the Trinity, but with the whole basis of traditional Christian doctrine. God is infinity. The universe is infinity. The two are identical. The created nature and the creative soul are one. The stars move by souls which are immanent in them. Matter contains within itself the form of things. God causes the world to come out of himself because of the inner necessity of his character. His nature works. As can be seen this was in direct conflict with the medieval conception of the universal. His method of seeking the causes of things and from thence the ultimate causes was in conflict with the scholastic method.

The next step in the history of Philosophy, was the beginning of the two rival systems of Empiricism and Dogmatism. They differed in method and substance from each other and both differed to a greater or lesser extent from the scholastic method.

Bacon is considered as the founder of the empirical line of modern Philosophy. He conflicts with the mechanical philosophy, over its disregard of physical phenomena and acceptance in toto of Aristotelian physics. He would do away with all "idols" of this kind and approach nature absolutely independently. Having done away with all assumptions, except of course the validity of experience, he would build up his system on the basis of experiment. He sets out to discover the processes of nature, obey her laws and thus rules.

In this he again differs from the scholastic philosophy which he calls a barren Virgin.

He plays nature's laws and compels her in order to supply man with infinite commodities. He is a utilitarian and has no use for philosophy or philosophic discussion for its own sake. He may emphatically forswear upon the scholastic discussions for yielding nothing.

Hobbes follows closely in line with the empiricism and natural observation of Bacon. His philosophy of Government is steep one of conflict. He finds in natural laws the history of Government. To avoid continual war and to obey the natural law of self preservation, man formed the absolute state. His method of observation of natural law, and this in an independent fashion is opposed to the mechanical method.

His materialism forces him to deny the mechanical conception of innate ideas. All knowledge is brought about through the senses. Ideas are just words given to experiences which we remember. The universal "man" is just a name given to the sum total of particular men. His nominalism conflicted with the dominant mechanical medium of the scholastics.

Hobbes came personally and philosophically into conflict with one Descartes. René Descartes was the leader of the Dogmatists. This whole school conflicted in some ways with the Empirical school, and in other ways with the scholastic tradition. The three exponents of this philosophy also conflicted with one another on certain minor aspects.

Descartes, as well as the Dogmatists, conflicted with the empiricists in their belief of innate ideas. This particular philosopher had a thorough grounding in the scholastic philosophy. Personally he never really broke with the Catholic church. There are places where he compromises for of conflicting too strongly with the faith of his fathers. His method is a scholastic one and yet, due to his mathematical leanings is also

well disciplined and reminds me of the Baconian method. He begins with an axiom based on inner certainty and proceeds by deduction. In this he is Augustinian. However he along with Bacon would avoid all wishful thinking, his town "planning" encompasses a clearing away of all the disorder which has accumulated in a haphazard way in the history of knowledge. His analysis which precedes the ordering of things suggests Bacon's elimination of the negative instances. Hence he conflicts with scholasticism.

His belief in innate ideas however, and his syllogism "I doubt therefore I am" which proves the existence of the "I" as a thinking being, are in direct conflict with the epistemology of Hobbes materialism.

Descartes agrees with his closest follower Spinoza in his repudiation of final causes. He absolutely denies teleology. In this he conflicts as we shall see with Leibniz who followed later. The two former philosophers, saw no reason for things existing, except that they arose out of the necessity of their own being. Any idea of a final cause arises out of man's own wishful thinking.

In his two relative substances of mind and body, Descartes opened a problem the solution of which caused these exponents of Rational Dogmatism to conflict. Leibniz himself makes them both relative to the absolutely substances - God. But cannot explain their interaction. By definition they are opposed. He attempts to find a physical explanation but in no way solves the problem. He leaves it to his followers who disagree with each other as well as with him.

Benedict Spinoza was a follower of Descartes. He himself was a Rational dogmatist. He conflicted with both the scholast and empiricist schools of philosophy as well as with Leibniz on some minor issues. Although to agree with the scholastic

method of assumption and deduction, he nevertheless disagreed entirely with its substance. He actually broke with the faith of his fathers in a determined sort of way. He conflicted with their whole notion of God.

In this connection Spinoza thought it was human bondage to believe in an afterlife of reward and punishment. The belief in a God to whom it was necessary to pray and make supplications in order to avoid punishment was offensive to him. The teleological conception of God was also an unfaithful representation of him. The creation of the universe was a logical necessity. It was a consequence of the character of God.

To the Problem of mind and Body, Spinoza brought a different solution from that of Descartes. There were two of the infinite attributes of the one substance God. Being attributes of the same substance they paralleled one another. The conception is the same as that one which sees the corner of two axes of a circle as the same, not because they intersect but because they are determined so by the character of the circle. Thus we can know the material world because it is co-relative with the world of thought. Although not directly in conflict with Robert Descartes, it differed from his solution of the problem.

On the explanation of the problem of error he conflicted with Descartes. The latter, out from somewhere in his system, discerns the will. It is imperceptible and makes mistakes. It really sees on ideas which are not true. For Spinoza, the ideas are entangled in the mind. Our thoughts never express the whole nature of ourselves or the universe. The intuition sees at a single glance the whole system of ideas. This intellectual vision is attained by reason alone. It takes a lot of thinking to see the whole system. An inadequate vision is error.

SPK

When this it would seem that Spinoza cleaves to his system with thought as the infinite attribute of God. Whether or not Spinoza explained the phenomenon of error and remained within is system is not under discussion here however. The point is, that at this instance he conflicts with Descartes.

Leibniz quarrels with both Descartes and Spinoza although he remains a Rational Dogmatist. Leibniz also was influenced by his Christian background and it conflicted with his calculus which was supposed to be the basis of his Philosophy. When criticizing the last of the Rational Dogmatists says that causality does not explain the nature of things. The fact that creation is a logical consequence from the character of God or Reality explains nothing for him. Therefore he relies, for his common denominator and explanation of things on force.

He also conflicts with Spinoza on his explanation of the interaction of mind and Body. He disagrees with Spinoza's substance or which thought and matter are attributes, because to him it is just a name given to something which can be known only by its attribute. When matter, the very fact of space, he finds inevitable or force. When thought, even before consciousness, he finds force. Energy then is the common denominator of the two. Matter in space is the perception of the mind of part of the whole system within itself is matter. This activity occupies space. The apprehension of a mind of a larger part of the whole system within itself is thought. The interaction between mind and body which is apparent is due to the fact that in the mind there resides an intellect which reflects the whole system.

(1)

SP18

This entelechy within the monad, which is seeking the highest conception of the system which is in itself and of which it is a part, admits of a Teleological conception. In this he again disagrees with his fellow Dogmatists. Freedom was the absence of obstructions to the realization of this telos.

In this early part of modern Philosophy, we find many problems raised. The answering of some of them caused conflicts among the philosophers. Differences of opinion as to the method of philosophical approach were present. The situation led to a further conflict with the philosophy which was to follow. The critical approach questioned the faith of both the Empiricists and the Dogmatists. In this school of modern philosophy, the heights of philosophical insight was reached.