

Abstract of

“Thomistic Reflections on Stasys Šalkauskis’ Philosophy of Culture”

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In her provocative *Culture and the Thomist Tradition after Vatican II* (Routledge, 2003), Australian Tracey Rowland castigates her fellow Thomists for failing to develop a philosophy of culture. This *desideratum* would acknowledge the formative role, for good or for ill, that cultures play in the lives of persons. For Rowland, Thomists must become less rational and realize that their ideas presuppose cultural factors. Following Alasdair MacIntyre, Rowland proposes a tradition-dependent rationality.

I think that Rowland’s indictment of Thomists fails to apply to the inter-war Lithuanian Thomist, Stasys Šalkauskis. Not only does Šalkauskis offer a philosophy of culture but also one that does not surrender its rationality. To present my thesis I will consider the claim of Arunas Sverdiolas in his article, “Stasys Šalkauskis: Contours of His System,” that Šalkauskis’ philosophy of culture is not strictly rational but presupposes the Christian world view in which a divinely instilled teleology to the free and conscientious individual runs through all nature. From what I have studied, nowhere does Šalkauskis’ philosophy of culture employ ideas that are in principle closed to genuine philosophical validation.

After summarizing Šalkauskis on culture, I offer two reflections. First, even if Sverdiolas is correct that Šalkauskis’ philosophy of culture presupposes a divinely ordered universe to the human level, it is not evident that this presupposition is exclusively religious. At the beginning of his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas maintained that the philosopher can confirm the universe’s anthropomorphic teleology. The wise man knows the end of things because the wise man knows the beginning of things. Citing the pagan philosopher Aristotle, Aquinas notes that wise man knows that the first author and mover of the universe is an intellect. Hence, the end of the universe is the good of the intellect which is truth. This argument for a teleology to the intellectual level seems to be rational through and through and can be used to support Šalkauskis.

Second, does Šalkauskis’ philosophy of culture presuppose teleology? For Šalkauskis the agent of culture is the human person. The person’s cultural activity consists in introducing new forms of the true, the good, and the beautiful by means of knowledge, morals, and art. Echoing Aquinas, whom he studied in Freiburg, Šalkauskis understands the ideals of the true, the good, and the beautiful to be perfections of being. Being, or the *ratio entis* in Aquinas terminology, is an overarching and englobing object of intellectual visualization. Unlike for Hegel, for Aquinas being does not have a content in inverse proportion to its extent. Under pain of consigning the differences of things to non-being and a resultant monism, the *ratio entis* must continue to englobe its differences

even while it makes abstraction from them. This necessity makes being the richest of our concepts and provides the basis for talking about a being as the true, the good, and the beautiful. Hence, it seems clear that Salkauskis' thinking presupposes, not a metaphysical thesis about the teleology of the universe, but the understanding of the human as an intellector of being. The very expression indicates that we are not speaking of something religious. Being has long been a topic of philosophical reflection, even into the twentieth-century with the famous writings of Heidegger and Sartre, viz., *Being and Time* and *Being and Nothingness*.

I finish my paper by illustrating the connection between the intellector of being and various elements of Salkauskas' philosophy of culture. One element is the human's striving for each of the Salkauskis' cultural ideals. As mentioned, for Aquinas the notion of being does not completely abstract from the differences of its particular instances. This behavior allows Thomists to describe being as a sameness-in-difference and as analogical. So, we intellectually visualize being, but we do so imperfectly because the intelligibility remains ensconced in the differences of things. This nuanced state of abstraction makes everything become of interest. Before you saw a hippopotamus, could you ever have imagined that being could take that form of that difference? From such experiences is not interest aroused to know what other forms of being exist? The understanding of the human as an intellector of being perfectly accommodates intellectual dynamism and so philosophically underwrites the pursuit of new truths that is one of Salkauskis' marks of culture.

A second cultural striving is the realization of new forms of the good. It also can be integrated with the intellector of being. As mentioned, as keeping the differences of things to itself, being is not an intelligibility whose content is in inverse proportion to its extent. Rather, being is understood as an eminently rich commonality. This insight is a basis for calling being the good and calling being's instances goods. But the notion of being is more intense in some instances than in others. Through intellection of being, the human, has the good in an especially intense manner. Before such a particular instance of the good we are free, but we are also morally constrained to be respectful and solicitous. Yet how that respect and solicitude will be realized will vary in each time and place. Consider the Christian saints. As saints none were liars, murders, adulterers, or thieves, yet they all were so different from one another. A similar analogical array assembles on the moral plane occupied by the intellector of being. Fidelity to the intense presence of the good in the intellection of our fellows will lead us to create identities by realizing unheard of new forms of the good.

A final cultural striving is the realization of new forms of the ideal of beauty. Again, this task pertains to the intellector of being. By intellectually presenting new forms, being is a veritable lesson in creativity. Being is an inspiration to artists to mimic the creativity of being and to fashion still other forms. Intellectuals seek to know more truths, artists seek to fashion more beautiful things. A fascination with being explains both behaviors.

Another element of Šalkauskas' thinking on culture is the subordination of culture to religion. The conception of the intellector of being clarifies philosophically this subordination. In Aquinas' metaphysics the notion of being attains its fundamental description. For Aquinas, that fundamental description is *habens esse*, i.e., to be a being or an existent is to be a haver or possessor of *esse*. "Esse" denominates an *actus*, or attribute, of the thing other than the substantial or accidental forms. For Aquinas the *actus* of *esse* is in a special relation to the thing, or subject. *Esse* is *prius*, *primus*, *profundius*, and *magis intimum*. As such *esse* cannot be accounted for by the thing whose *actus esse* is. *Esse* leads to another thing that has *esse* not as an *actus* but as its very self – it is subsistent *esse*. As cause of what is more profound in an existent, subsistent *esse* is also of creative magnitude. But as instantiating the key component of the *ratio entis*, subsistent *esse* also instantiates the *ratio entis*. This metaphysical conclusion is of momentous import. The conclusion shows that reality is such that the dream of an immediate contact with the *ratio entis* is not a fantasy but a real possibility. The human is not in principle condemned to the frustration of knowing more about being only by knowing more beings that by their differences hide being at the same time as manifesting it. Since human intellectual knowing is by nature abstractive, then this genuine possibility of a direct contact with subsistent *esse* can be realized only if the creator initiates the contact. Does it? Here the pursuer of culture confronts the possibility of religion – the creator reaching into human history. So, the intellector of being thesis gives way to the possibility of religion and underwrites culture's ordination to religion as mentioned by Šalkauskis.

I conclude my paper with explaining how the intellection of being since it is an abstractive affair can occur in confusing ways. Hence, as Šalkauskis also maintains, not all cultures are automatically open to the possibility of Christian theism. So Šalkauskis can admit with Rowland that cultures can be a challenge for Christianity. But Šalkauskis does this without giving up on reason and collapsing into sociology as Rowland seems to do. Being cannot be eliminated from the human heart.

In conclusion, because of supposed theological premises in Šalkauskis' reasonings, Lithuanian philosophers need not keep Šalkauskis in the closet. By introducing new forms of the three perfections of being, the cultural agent shows itself to be an intellector of being. The intellector of being is a genuine philosophical thesis and, in my opinion, a resilient one. Šalkauskis is not a quaint piece in a museum of ecclesiastical thought. The blood of a philosophically vibrant Thomism courses through his thinking on culture. Hence, *contra* Rowland, Šalkauskis witnesses that in the past century Thomism did not lack a philosophy of culture. One should not be ashamed to introduce him as a living voice into the wider philosophical discussion on culture.