

A REVIEW OF 'INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY'

By Mattei, L. (2007). Nairobi: Consolata Institute of Philosophy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reverend Father Luciano Mattei-IMC is an Italian Consolata Missionary Priest with vast experience in Roman Catholic Missionary Priesthood as well as in academic scholarship. He was the head of Philosophy Department and Dean of Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. He is the author of 'Guide to Research Work: For Humanistic studies', 'Philosophy and Early Christianity', 'Sapientia Christiana: Origins and African Contribution to Christian Philosophy', the controversial 'Saint Augustine: The last African Christian Philosopher' and 'Introduction to Philosophy'. This review occupies itself with 'Introduction to Philosophy'. Mattei indicates that 'Introduction to Philosophy is meant for students who intend to pursue Philosophical studies as a *Propaedeutic* to their theological formation, and as such he lays out two objectives for the book namely: i.) To offer an initiation into the activity of Philosophizing, and ii.) To show the importance of philosophizing in the pursuit of Catholic Religious Studies.

2.0. GENERAL OUTLINE

'Introduction to Philosophy' is a 146-page book divided into 10 interconnected and consistent chapters. These are; An *Avant Propos* titled 'Before Starting (Chapter One) in which Mattei lays ground for his book from an experiential and personal **vantage**. This is followed by an Exposition on 'What is Philosophy?' (Chapter two). The third chapter is titled 'Philosophy and Philosophical Life'; It is a synthesis between Philosophy and the *Practical* life. Chapter four deals with three categories of 'Philosophical

Problems'. These are: the world, man and God. The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters outline 'The Origin and Development of Philosophy', *The Relationship between 'Philosophy and Christian Religion'* and 'Scholasticism and Thomism' respectively. Mattei elucidates 'Contemporary forms of Thomism' in Chapter eight while a final analysis of the 'Branches of Scholastic Philosophy' is located in chapter nine. The book ends with a very concise conclusion by quoting of Socrates' last words on the need to cultivate the soul.

3.0. CHAPTER SUMMARIES

3.1. Chapter One; Before Beginning. In this chapter Mattei opens up the door of Philosophy by first opening himself up. He defines himself as a project only known to himself, unknown to second and third parties. He states "Even my mother does not know me" (p.1). As a strange and an unknowable project he alone can competently speak of his person. Commutatively, no single person can define the self of another. Self-Definition is a complex process that requires transcending the Pre-reflexive, low-level thinking used mostly by people who are victims of their lives. This transcendence should lead to reflexive thinking (the thinking of people who are masters of their lives). The chapter ends with an observation that Self Knowledge is the most difficult task because unlike other branches of knowledge, self-knowledge cannot be taught not even by Philosophy itself. However, he notes that Philosophy is at the best place in facilitating the journey towards self-knowledge.

3.2. Chapter two; What is Philosophy?: This is the only chapter that is presented in form of a question, possibly with the intention of expressing the openness

and skepticism of Philosophy even at the level of definition. It is an attempt to implicitly say that even Philosophy does not have a certain and exclusive definition of 'Philosophy'. Nonetheless, the book introduces an *attempt towards* the definition of philosophy *via negativa* (Saying what philosophy is not) and *via Positiva* (saying what philosophy is). Philosophy is neither a subject matter nor a doctrine. It is rather an act of love for wisdom, an active pursuit of wisdom. But wisdom, in its fundamental sense is the pursuit of truth. Logically, Philosophy can, therefore, be considered as the pursuance of and the consequent abiding in truth. It is also the study of things in their deepest and most general aspects with the intention of overcoming illusions as illustrated by Socrates' dictum '*examining sham knowledge is a virtue*' and Plato's allegory of Gyegy and the allegory of the cave. In a further elucidation Mattei differentiates philosophical search for truth from scientific and religious search for truth by indicating the Methodological difference. Philosophy uses dialectical arguments while religion in its raw state uses indoctrination. Philosophical arguments are *maieutic* –a kind of midwifery that should help a person to discover truth which is inherent in all humans. Philosophical knowledge is therefore fundamentally metaphysical, universal and judgmental. Finally, by appealing to Locke, Kant, Wittgenstein, Bacon and Aristotle, Mattei postulates three functions of Philosophy namely: Contemplative, Practical and Analytic functions, presents and analyses his personal and most preferred definition of Philosophy as "... *the intellectually critical activity of man by means of which he wants to understand and explain things as he experiences them and as they are in themselves*" (pp25-27)

3.3. Chapter three; Philosophy and Life: This is a synthesis of philosophy and life. The chapter considers philosophy as an activity, a better form of life, a sign on how human beings should think a vocation and a service on behalf of the society. As such real philosophy is not alienated from practical life, neither is it a form of escapism. He posits that the minimum requirement for a person to be a philosopher is the desire to pursue truth at all cost, be contemplator of truth, and an executor of contemplated truth. These requirements can be achieved first by detaching from childhood, family, societal and even educational pressures. Lastly, the chapter points out one major benefit of Philosophy; *Metanoia*, which is observed to be

growth from totally conditioned state to totally Free State. It is the achievement of inherent freedom through actualisation and practice. *Metanoia* is dialogical rather than dogmatic, inquisitive rather than satisfied. As an emphasis, Mattei asserts that a person who wants to become a Philosopher and live a philosophical life must first *fall in love* with Truth unadulterated (p.42)

3.4. Chapter Four; The problems of Philosophy:

All philosophical problems can be reduced into three categories; the world, man and God. Regarding the world, Mattei points out that the first Greek Philosophers, the Monist Cosmologists, that is: Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes, in their pursuit of the fundamental principle that underlies physical reality approached physical reality from the Metaphysical point of view without experimentation while Anaxagoras indicated that reality is made up of *spermata*, an infinite germ that pervades everything. He inferred that because of *spermata*, everything is in everything. Democritus of Abdera posited that reality is made up units called atoms (which are invisible, indestructible, internally solid, homogeneous and consubstantial)

Regarding Man, Mattei posits two views: Religious view in which man is considered a special creature that shares the nature of God and Philosophical perspective in which Man is considered a rational being. Actually, according to Socrates, man is his Soul (and Intellect). Nonetheless He is not born readymade. He has the responsibility to seek happiness by overcoming ignorance, bodily pleasure and emotions. Man is also a decision maker in the constant actualisation process.

The Problem of God; Mattei divides the conception of God into; Mythical God/ the God of believers and the Reviewed God/the God of Philosophers in relation to the world order, moral order and divine order which can either be monotheistic or polytheistic. He notes that speculation on God has led to natural theology which began by demythologising God, the progressive destruction of polytheism and the demonstration of the Unity of God which holds that God is not only one, but also supreme, unchanging and Omnipresent. Unity of God was first postulated by Xenophanes of Colophon who is considered the first Philosopher of Religion and theologian. He was against the anthropomorphic view of God. He asserted that the world is not a theophany. For Epicurus, God exists but is unconcerned, and as

such should be left alone and because of this, it is foolish to fear him.

Finally, Mattei outlines the practical aspects of religion by indicating how it offers the cosmic map for man and comfort during the turmoil. The chapter ends with an exposition of God's existence in which Mattei identifies two major categories of arguments for God's existence. These are: *a priori* arguments like that of St. Anselm who states that God is "that than which no greater can be thought..." and *a posteriori* arguments of Thomas Aquinas like arguments from motion, from efficient cause, from contingency of being, from degrees of perfection and ordering of the world. The Chapter ends with an exposition on the concept of evil. He posits two kinds of evil: Natural evil and moral evil. Natural evil is not real evil because it is part of cosmic reality. Moral evil is the real evil.

3.5. Chapter Five; Origin and Development of Philosophy: Mattei indicates that man has always been a philosopher to the extent that he is a thinker. However, Positive History of Philosophy begins with written philosophy. He points out that Africa has no written record of Philosophy and notes that African thinking is based on ecological existence which is religious and as such pre-philosophical "As long as human thinking remains embedded in religion it cannot become critical because of its foundation in revelation" (p.68)

Actual Philosophy, according to Mattei begins in Greece. He observes that earlier Greek thinkers were poets and interpreters of traditional religion. Two major re-known poets were Homer and Hesiod. He enlists pre-Socratic thinkers, who were mostly concerned with Terrestrial measurements, Astronomy, analysis of physical reality and analysis of motion. He then considers Plato who asserts that wonder is the feeling of a philosopher. In their parlance of Motion, they identify four types of motion: Local motion, Quantitative motion (Augmentative/diminutive), Qualitative motion (Alteration) and Substantial Motion (Generation and decay). The most perturbing and most radical of all motion these motions is Substantial motion.

3.6. Chapter six; Philosophy and Christian Religion: Mattei asserts that the Christian Doctrine is accepted and believed by faith and that Christian faith is not a blind surrender of reason but reason transcending itself in the ultimate acceptance of mystery. As such faith and reason are not separable. The most crucial point in

this chapter, however, is Mattei's consideration of the foundations of the philosophy of the Christians. It states '*Credo ut intelligam*' (I believe in order to understand). From this theory, an act of faith is prior to the construction of Metaphysics or to the acceptance of a philosophy of life. But this should not be confused with Ideology which to him is accepted uncritically. Christianity is not an ideology.

3.7. Chapter Seven; Scholasticism and Thomism: defined Scholasticism is defined by Mattei simply as special knowledge cultivated in the schools of ancient Europe. It is mainly theological and philosophical. He observes that it promoted precise methods of teaching and investigation such as *Lectio* in which texts are read and commented on, *Disputationes* which consists in debating issues. These methods led to the development of *Commentaria*, *Quaestiones*, *Opuscula* and *Summae*. Thomas Aquinas is one of the greatest figures of the Scholastic era. He was a prolific author for twenty years with his classic masterpiece being *Summa Theologiae*. Thomism thus refers to followers of Saint Thomas Aquinas over time like Capreolus, Cajetan, Banez, John of St. Thomas, Carmelites of Salamanca, Pope Leo, Garrigou Lagrange among others.

3.8. Chapter Eight; Contemporary forms of Thomism. In four pages, Mattei outlines the different forms of contemporary Thomism, namely: The Gilson Maritain School, The Participation School, The Phenomenological School and the Transcendental school. The Gilson Maritain School recognizes the truth of Aquinas' Metaphysics of realism in opposition to the idealism of both Descartes and Kant. The Participation School has its roots in the thoughts of Geiger and Fabro who outline the Platonic influence on Thomism. The phenomenological school propounded by De Petter and Luijpen interpret Thomas Aquinas from Phenomenology and naïve realism in which reality is not immediately concealed. The transcendental school is a dialogue between Phenomenological schools and idealism. Some of the proponents of this school are Karl Rahner, Lonergan, Coreyth, Marechal, Rousselot. They agree that the concept of essence is truly Thomistic but that there is a need to explore subjectivity.

3.9 Chapter nine: branches of scholastic philosophy: In regards to Branches of Scholastic philosophy, Mattei enlists Logic, Cosmology, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Natural theology and Ethics. He defines Logic as a discipline that prepares the mind for the

study and practice of Philosophy, the art of sound discourse and a *propaedeutic* process to Philosophical studies. In correspondence to different levels of mental operations, Mattei identifies three general categories of Logic, namely Logic of term, Logic of Judgment and Logic of Reasoning. The logic of term deals with Concepts and terms. Concepts can be Univocal, Equivocal and analogical. They are based on simple Apprehension; Logic of Judgment, according to which the mind asserts or denies an object and it, is based on judgment. Lastly, Logic of Reasoning is whereby the mind moves from one proposition to another, consequently leading to argumentation, which is the highest mental operation.

Cosmology, as defined by Mattei, is the philosophy of nature. It studies being of bodies as three-dimensional entities perceivable by senses. Appealing to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, Mattei observes that cosmology considers Matter as *Hylemorphic*; that is, consisting of *Prime matter* and *substantial form* which are manifestations of Potency and act, accidents and substance, Essence and existence. He also observes that Cosmology addresses issues of motion, Time and place. In regards to motion, Mattei maintains that for it to occur three conditions must be fulfilled: First there must be a Distinction between the Mover and the Moved, secondly, the Mover and the Moved must be in contact and thirdly the Mover and the Moved must actuate each other simultaneously.

Psychology and Epistemology; The Psychology discussed by Mattei is called Philosophical Psychology which is different from experimental psychology. It is an investigation into man's Spiritual nature. He observes that Man as the highest form of living organism possesses intellection in an exceptional type of substantial form called the soul. The soul is the first actuality or *Entelechy* of a natural body having life potentiality in it, as such soul is that primary principle by which we live, sense, move and understand (The highest activity, proper to man). It is from Philosophical psychology that Philosophical anthropology is derived. Epistemology: The book indicates that Epistemology is a branch of Metaphysics devoted to the study of knowledge and its problems. It also considers it as *Criteriaology* and *Gnoseology*.

Metaphysics and Natural Theology; He observes that Metaphysics is philosophy in the most proper sense of the term. It is the search for the most ultimate cause in the absolute sense of the term. He also observes that metaphysics is also ontology because it studies being

qua being. Being as investigated in Ontology has transcendental properties like Unity, Truth and Goodness. It also has what is referred to as Properties of being like potency and act, essence and existence, Causality and participation. Most importantly he mentions seven principles of Metaphysics, namely Principle of Non-Contradiction, Principle of Identity, Principle of the Excluded Middle, Principle of Intelligibility, Principle of Sufficient Reason, Principle of causality and Principle of Finality. Natural theology is part of metaphysics and that Metaphysics transforms itself into natural theology through four steps: 1. The Discovery of being as an intelligible value of the experienced reality (metaphysics), 2. The Realisation that things need to be evaluated as they are existent 3. The Discovery that things are imperfect and limited and not self-explanatory 4. The Search for explanations of imperfect things in their dependence on the first cause. He enlists Aquinas approaches to understanding the nature of God as *Via negativa*, *Via Positiva* and *Via Analogica*. The last section is ethics which is the philosophy of conduct and the most practical aspect of philosophy because it requires practices.

4.0. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

This review analyses Mattei's work using Elements of Critical reasoning as elucidated by Paul and Elder (2012). These are: *Purpose, Key Questions Discussed, Key Concepts, Points of View used, Implications, and Assumptions*.

Purpose: As indicated at the beginning of this review, in the preface and on the Back cover of the book, Mattei sets out to achieve two goals: First, to offer an initiation into the activity of philosophizing and secondly to show the importance of Philosophizing in the (Catholic) Religious studies. Therefore we can infer that Mattei's fundamental purpose is to guide and form the student clergy.

Key Questions Discussed: The two goals of Mattei give rise to two Questions that beg for answers. First, how ought Philosophy be done? Secondly, Can Philosophy be Christian? The Second question is actually the central question because the book is meant to widen the scope of Roman Catholic Seminarians.

How ought Philosophy to be done? Mattei ably answers this question in the first section of the book which covers chapters one to Five (pp1-102). He begins inductively in chapter one by investigating

himself, his experiences and his person. This investigation emerges into a generalization on how to philosophise as observed in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5. This kind of debut may easily be confused for a biography or an exciting story rather than being a Philosophical Master Piece. This approach is deliberate and serves the purpose of shunning dryness and boredom that is so common in many philosophy books which more often than not begin with jargons and many abstractions. Secondly by indicating that he is a priest and a teacher of Philosophy (p.1) Mattei is directly penetrating the hearts of his intended readers- Catholic seminarians, who also intend to become Priests and scholars, and by this, the objective of identity is achieved. We can thus infer that in chapter one Mattei sees in his reader what he was before becoming a priest and he intends the readers to see in him what they will be in a few years to come. This kind of rich contextualization can also be observed in his other books especially in '*Sapientia Christiana*' and 'Guide to Research work for Humanistic Studies' both Published by Consolata Institute of Philosophy.

Further answers to this question are extrapolated in the remaining chapters where he postulates that Philosophy is more of a method of investigation than a doctrine. As a method, it is reflexive(p.2), contemplative (P.22), pragmatic (p.22) and *Metanoic* (p.40). As such, a Philosopher is one who thinks critically, contemplates what he thinks, applies what he contemplates and strives for a total liberation from all forms of conditioning (p.38). To do philosophy is to undergo Existential and Intellectual Conversion almost similar to Intellectual Conversion posited by Bernard Lonergan. The Philosophy Method, therefore, is a Conversion Method and the tool for this conversion is Reason.

Can Philosophy be Christian? Put in other words this Question can also be "Can Christianity be philosophised?" Are there Philosophical tenets underlying Christianity? Is there any connection between faith and reason? In chapter six (pp. 107-108) Mattei responds to this question by affirming the positive relationship between Faith and Reason. He asserts that Faith and Reason are complementary to each other and not adversarial. He appeals to Several Christian Philosophers like Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and Anselm. He also points out the movement of the mind from simple belief through reason which launches the mind onto Metaphysical locus, which then propels the mind onto Theological pedestal, then onto the being of God. In the whole of

this process Mattei advises that where there is an apparent conflict between faith and reason (apparent because there is no real contradiction between faith and reason) faith takes precedence because reason is limited. This *point de vue* seems to conflict the standard epistemological stance that faith is the primordial germ in the pursuit of knowledge. Knowledge begins with faith, but reaches its peak when there is supporting evidence and when it is justified, for Knowledge is defined as 'Justified True Belief'. This conflict is however beneficial to Mattei's objective of 'Philosophized' Theology which begins with faith but ultimately returns to faith.

Conceptual Analysis: Concepts play a key role in the attempt to understand the reality behind any narration. They are expressed in terms and the terms used in Mattei' 'Introduction to Philosophy' point out the Philosophical Competence of the author. He uses them with precision and in context. A few selected concepts are scrutinised herein: 'Human being as a *project*', 'Thinking' 'Intellectual *Midwifery*', '*Metanoia*' and '*Credo ut intelligam*'.

A Human being as a project: Mattei's position that man is a project and master of his life paints him as an existential Philosopher. The concept of Project has a connotation of infinitude. In existential Philosophy Man is considered by Sartre as a Project that is ever unfinished and that can never be finished because a human being is an infinite being. Since humans are unfinished they cannot be known entirely; only tentatively, and in that case, they cannot be defined (Mondin, 2016). Since human beings cannot be defined they must liberate themselves from all forms of definitions and conditioning. Throughout the book, Mattei approaches several aspects of Philosophy and Christianity from Existential perspectives" (pp. 1-10, p2, pp 56-60). In fact his discussion of Christianity and Christian theology fits well into liberation theology which is partially an existential theology (pp, 134-141).

Thinking: Thinking is considered by Mattei as an act proper to human beings. It is a mental process of Cognition that only human beings are endowed with. Every human being is, therefore, a philosopher, albeit in the general sense (Akinpelu, 1981). For Mattei a Philosopher must have Reflexive thinking, must be interested in seeking for Truth and must strive to achieve truth with the focus of conversion (*metanoia*) (pp.35-44). As such for Mattei, general thinking cannot

be appropriately considered as Philosophy, however, articulate it is.

The Concept of Midwifery: This concept is derived from Socratic Method of teaching in which the teacher's role is to facilitate the birth of knowledge already inherent and potential, in the learner (Russell, 1985). Mattei holds the same position that Philosophy is not overbearing and dictating. This rhymes with his view of Philosophy as an activity as opposed to Philosophy as a dogma, or Philosophy as an ideology.

Metanoia is another Concept with very deep meaning used by Mattei (pp.40). Its Greek etymology posits that it's a state of purification of the mind necessitated by grace. Its Philosophical usage by the author however does not appeal to its religious setting. This means the change of mind requires an effort and human input. Philosophy of Metanoia is thus a non esoteric or mystical contemplative but the will to power.

Credo ut intelligam; This is Latin translation for, "I believe" (Credo) to Understand (Intelligam). It also means I believe in order to understand which means without believing I cannot understand. Direct implication of this term squarely lies in Theology which begins with faith and return to faith, as indicated earlier.

Assumptions: Two assumptions are clear in Mattei's book; first, that it is possible to know oneself and that Christianity not theologized is not a philosophy. He Observes that "to know oneself is wisdom" (p.4). This means that without knowing self no one qualifies to be a philosopher. Several questions arise: What is this self? Do all persons so called philosophers know their selves? How do we know that we know the self? Is it possible to know other things other than the self and still be a philosopher? The discussion on the self is basically a philosophical anthropological question. We come to know what we mean by self through anthropology, religion and even psychology. Yet Mattei posits that "you cannot acquire knowledge of the self by going to the library or by reading textbooks" (p.5). This sounds a bit presumptuous and limiting the epistemological process that operates in all directions. Sometimes we come to know self through knowing others and through academic studies (reading books). The second Assumption is that Christianity is not a Philosophy, it is a religion" p.78. This dichotomy means that Philosophy is an activity that we apply to Christianity rather than an activity we look for in Christianity. It also contradicts the substantial

consideration of Jesus as a Philosopher and defeats the logic that Mattei intends for his book, at least to some extent.

Points of View used: From the ten chapters it is vivid that Luciano Mattei propagates Thomism, but with a *point de depart* of existentialism. Harmonization of philosophy with theology is characteristic St. Aquinas philosophy. Mattei proposes philosophy as *propaedeutic* to theological formation, intimating that philosophy as an intellectual process grounds the employment of emotional faculties in the pursuit of knowledge of the Divine. His definition of philosophy as an "Intellectually critical activity of human beings by means of which they seek to understand and explain things as they experience them and as they are inherently" is also grounded on a realist perspective. This definition implies that the objects exist independent of the subjects' conceptual scheme. It thus will connote that Mattei strongly advocates for the correspondence theory of truth in knowledge acquisition which describes his point of view as one that is inclined to realism.

Implications; From Mattei's two assumptions namely; it is possible to know oneself and that non-theologized Christianity is not a philosophy, we can observe that Mattei's proposition encourages the pursuit of self-knowledge which is only possible with philosophy as a midwife. By Mattei propagating the possibility of acquisition of self-knowledge, he intimates that self-knowledge is a continuous process that should always be pursued. Pursuit of this knowledge makes one a philosopher. However, possibility is contingent while human beings are both contingent and transcendental and thus self-knowledge cannot be contextualized in the realm of human beings. This makes self-knowledge a potential that cannot be exhaustively actualized but nonetheless, it should necessarily be sought by all. Finally, Self-knowledge symbolizes the knowledge of the microcosm which is requisite in the endeavor to pursue the knowledge of the macrocosm.

4.0. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

'Introduction to Philosophy' is a worthy read for beginners in Philosophy. Its language is simple, and its content is not only appropriate but also eclectic. Apart from a few questionable insinuations like Mattei's consideration of African thought being Pre-philosophic and his gender insensitive tones, it is plausible to infer that this book is veritably philosophical in form and religious-oriented in matter; and being so it fulfils its

dual objectives of offering an initiation into the activity of philosophizing and showing the importance of philosophizing in the pursuit of Catholic religious studies by a significant margin.

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