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Metaphysical Telos and Dialectical Dialogue in Peter A. Redpath: A Structural Exploration in Aristotelian- Thomistic Philosophy. Tracing the Recovery of Wisdom as the Architectonic End of Philosophy and Science

Abstract: This manuscript undertakes a systematic examination of the philosophical project of Peter A. Redpath, focusing on his diagnosis of the severance of Western philosophy from its proper end – wisdom (sapientia) – and his constructive program for its recovery through genuine dialectical dialogue grounded in Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysical realism. Drawing upon Redpath’s *Wisdom’s Odyssey: From Philosophy to Transcendental Sophistry* (1997) and *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (2012), the manuscript traces the concept of telos across its three interlocking registers – the individual human being, the discipline of philosophy, and the enterprise of science – before examining how the Cartesian revolution of the seventeenth century severed each of these from its proper end. Through comparative analysis of six major thinkers – Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Hegel, and Redpath – the manuscript argues that Redpath’s project constitutes a genuinely countercultural philosophical intervention: the recovery of wisdom as the architectonic end of all inquiry and of genuine dialectical dialogue as the communal form in which that wisdom is partially and progressively realized.

Keywords: Peter A. Redpath, Aristotelian-Thomistic Philosophy, Philosophy and Science, Metaphysic, Wisdom, Telos.

Introduction: The Wound in Western Philosophy

There is a peculiarity in the intellectual life of the modern West that is at once pervasive and largely invisible: the complete disappearance of any serious, publicly recognized end for philosophy and science. Contemporary academic philosophy concerns itself with an extraordinary range of specialized problems – philosophy of mind, metaethics, formal logic, philosophy of language – yet seldom asks what, in the end, all of this is for. The sciences, for their part,

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produce knowledge of staggering precision and technical power, yet they are structurally incapable of answering the question that philosophy was classically charged with answering: what is the good for which all inquiry ultimately strives? The thesis of this manuscript is that this peculiarity is not accidental. It is the predictable and traceable consequence of a philosophical rupture that took place in the seventeenth century, one whose depth and scope Peter A. Redpath has devoted his scholarly career to diagnosing, tracing, and remedying.

The rupture Redpath identifies is, at its core, the severing of philosophy and science from their proper end – wisdom, or *sapientia* – a wound inflicted most decisively by René Descartes but prepared by centuries of accumulated confusion stretching back to the sophists of ancient Greece¹. Descartes did not merely revise a few philosophical doctrines; he inverted the classical order of inquiry. By making the isolated, doubting subject (*cogito ergo sum*) rather than the real order of being the foundation of all knowledge, and by expelling final causation from his account of nature, Descartes amputated the very structure that had given philosophy and science their intelligibility, their unity, and their dignity. What remained was a powerful tool – mathematics applied to matter – but a tool without a master, a method without a *telos*.

The pathologies that flow from this rupture are, for Redpath, three and deeply interlocking. The first is the expulsion of final causation – *telos* – from scientific inquiry. In the Aristotelian tradition, understanding a thing required understanding what it is for: the four causes, of which the final cause was architectonic, ordered all explanation toward purpose and perfection. Cartesian and post-Cartesian science replaced this purposive structure with a mechanistic and mathematical one, in which nature is a system of quantifiable forces operating without intrinsic direction. This was not a neutral methodological adjustment; it was a metaphysical decision with enormous consequences, for it made it impossible, at the level of scientific principle, to ask what anything is for². Science became, in Redpath's terms, ungoverned power – enormously capable, yet structurally blind to its own end.

The second pathology is the replacement of genuine dialectical dialogue with what Redpath calls transcendental sophistry: forms of discourse that preserve the external structure of philosophical reasoning while abandoning its essential orientation toward truth. Genuine dialectical dialogue, as Socrates practiced it and as Aristotle theorized it, is ordered toward wisdom; it is self-correcting, communal, and grounded in the real order of things. Transcendental sophistry, by contrast, is discourse in service of rhetorical, ideological, or methodological ends that are not truth. It constructs categories that immunize conclusions against contradiction. It mistakes the appearance of depth for the reality of

¹ P.A. Redpath, *Wisdom's Odyssey: From Philosophy to Transcendental Sophistry*, Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1997, 1-15.

² P.A. Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, Manitou Springs, CO: Socratic Press, 2012, 3-22.

wisdom. And because it retains the vocabulary of philosophy, it is far more dangerous than mere ignorance – it is error wearing the garb of inquiry.

The third pathology, which both generates and is reinforced by the first two, is the fragmentation of the disciplines of learning into sealed specializations incapable of genuine communication with one another. When wisdom – the architectonic science of first and highest causes – is displaced as the governing end of inquiry, there is no longer any principle of unity by which the various sciences can be related to one another or to the whole of reality. Each discipline develops its own methods, its own vocabulary, its own criteria of success, and its own internal standards of prestige; and the question of how they all fit together, or what they are all ultimately for, simply goes unasked. This is not merely an organizational inconvenience. For Redpath, following the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, the fragmentation of the disciplines is the institutional expression of the loss of wisdom – the wound made visible in the architecture of the modern university.

It is against this background that Redpath's philosophical project must be understood. His work is not primarily negative – a catalogue of errors – but constructive: an effort to recover, on the basis of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, the metaphysical and methodological conditions under which genuine philosophical inquiry, and genuine science, become possible again. The present manuscript undertakes a systematic exposition and analysis of that project, examining the concept of telos in its classical formulation, tracing the historical stages of its corruption, and articulating the structure of Redpath's proposed recovery. The argument that emerges is that this recovery is not an academic exercise but a civilizational necessity.

The Architecture of Telos

To understand what was lost in the Cartesian revolution, one must first understand, with precision, what telos means and how it functions within the Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysical framework. The concept is frequently rendered in English as “purpose”, “end”, or “goal”, but these translations, while not incorrect, fail to convey the full metaphysical weight of the term. For Aristotle, telos is not merely a subjective aim or intention; it is an intrinsic, objective principle of order inscribed in the real structure of things, by which each being is directed toward its proper perfection. The acorn is ordered, from within its own nature, toward the oak; the eye is ordered, from within its own structure, toward sight; the human intellect is ordered, from within its own constitution, toward truth and wisdom. To understand any natural thing, one must understand its telos – and to expel telos from inquiry is therefore to make genuine understanding of natural things impossible³.

³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1.1-2 (981a-982b), trans. W.D. Ross, in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.

Telos operates, in Redpath's analysis, on three interlocking registers that cannot be properly separated without distorting each of them. The first register is that of the individual human being. For Aristotle, the telos of the human person is eudaimonia – a term conventionally translated as “happiness” but which more precisely designates the flourishing of the rational and virtuous life. The human being is not merely driven by appetite or custom but is ordered, by virtue of its rational nature, toward a determinate perfection: the full and excellent exercise of those capacities that are distinctively human, above all the intellectual and moral virtues. This ordering is not imposed from without; it is intrinsic to what the human being is. The loss of telos at this register means the loss of any objective standard by which human life can be evaluated as more or less fully realized – a loss with consequences not only philosophical but deeply practical and political.

The second register is that of philosophy as a discipline. Here, Redpath's analysis follows Aristotle's account of sophia – wisdom – as the highest intellectual virtue and the architectonic science. Philosophy's proper telos is not method, not utility, not the production of publishable results, but wisdom: unified, certain knowledge of all things under their first and highest causes. Aquinas articulates this with characteristic precision:

Wisdom is the most certain of all the sciences, because it is concerned with the highest causes (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 1).

The significance of this claim cannot be overstated. For Aquinas, following Aristotle, sapientia is not a vague aspiration or a sentiment of reverence for deep questions; it is a precise metaphysical destination – a determinate intellectual perfection – that orders all inquiry by reference to first and highest causes⁴. It is the science that judges all other sciences, not by invading their proper domains but by situating them within the whole of knowable reality. When philosophy loses this orientation – when it mistakes method for end, or when it abandons the question of first causes entirely – it does not merely become less ambitious. It ceases to be philosophy in the classical sense and becomes something else: a sophisticated form of technique, or, in Redpath's darker diagnosis, a form of sophistry.

The third register is that of science itself. This is the register most dramatically affected by the Cartesian revolution, and it is therefore the one on which Redpath's diagnosis is most urgent. In the Aristotelian framework, science (episteme) is ordered toward the demonstration of real natures and causes, grounded in first principles that dialectic has examined and wisdom judges. Scientific understanding, properly so called, is not mere accurate prediction or technically useful generalization – it is knowledge of why things are as they are, knowledge of causes, culminating in knowledge of first causes⁵. Science without telos

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981.

⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 57, a. 2; II-II, q. 45, a. 1.

becomes, in Redpath's phrase, mere technique: immensely powerful, capable of reshaping the physical world, but structurally ungoverned – it cannot say what it is for, because it has amputated the very principle that would allow the question to be asked⁶.

What makes Redpath's analysis distinctive is his insistence that these three registers are not merely analogically related but genuinely interlocking: the telos of the individual human being, the telos of philosophy as a discipline, and the telos of science as a form of inquiry are aspects of a single, coherent metaphysical order in which wisdom (*sapientia*) serves as the architectonic end. When one register is disrupted, the others are necessarily distorted. The Cartesian expulsion of final causation from science did not merely change how scientists thought about nature; it disrupted the ordering of philosophy toward wisdom and, ultimately, the ordering of the human person toward genuine flourishing. It is this systemic, architectonic character of the loss that makes Redpath's recovery project so demanding – and so important.

Plato's Dialectic: Ascent to the Good

The roots of the concept of dialectic as ordered inquiry lie in the dialogues of Plato, and any serious engagement with Redpath's account of genuine dialectical dialogue must begin there. For Plato, dialectic is not a technique among others; it is not even primarily a method in the modern methodological sense. It is the movement of the philosophical soul toward its proper end – the ascent of the mind from the flux of appearances to the stability of truth, from opinion to knowledge, from the shadows of the cave to the light of the Form of the Good. This movement is simultaneously epistemic, ethical, and teleological; it is the whole philosophical life compressed into a cognitive and existential journey⁷.

The most systematic presentation of this ascent in the Platonic corpus appears in the celebrated image of the Divided Line in the *Republic* (Books VI–VII). Plato there delineates four stages of cognition, arranged in a hierarchical ascent from the lowest to the highest. The first stage, *eikasia* (image-thinking), corresponds to the apprehension of mere shadows and reflections – the lowest level of cognitive engagement with reality. The second, *pistis* (belief), corresponds to perception of visible, physical objects. The third, *dianoia* (mathematical reasoning), operates through hypotheses and reaches conclusions about mathematical objects by descending from hypotheses rather than ascending to a first principle. The fourth and highest, *noesis* (intellection or dialectic proper), moves upward from hypotheses to the unhypothetical first principle – the Form of the Good – and then descends again, using Forms alone and no sensible images. This fourth stage is what Plato means by dialectic in its most precise sense.

⁶ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 4567.

⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 509d–511e, trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992.

The Form of the Good – described by Plato as the “unhypothetical first principle of everything” – plays in the *Republic* the structural role that the concept of *telos* plays in Aristotle: it is the end toward which the entire cognitive ascent is directed, the principle that gives intelligibility and value to everything else⁸. Plato’s account is not, of course, identical to Aristotle’s – the Form of the Good is not a cause in Aristotle’s technical sense, and the metaphysical differences between the two philosophers are real and significant. But the teleological structure is functionally analogous: just as Aristotle’s *sapientia* is the knowledge of first and highest causes that orders all other knowledge, Plato’s Form of the Good is the ultimate object of dialectical ascent that confers intelligibility on the entire hierarchy of knowledge. The philosopher, for Plato, is defined precisely by this orientation – this *eros* for the highest truth.

Crucially, Plato insists that truth at this level cannot be passively received. It must be actively and communally pursued through rational exchange – through the living process of question and answer, refutation and revision, that Socrates exemplifies in the dialogues. This is why Plato chose the dialogue form for his philosophical writing: the form of the work enacts its content. Dialectic is not reading; it is not the passive reception of a doctrine delivered by a teacher; it is a shared movement of minds toward truth through the discipline of reasoned exchange. The interlocutor who is shown that his initial opinion is self-contradictory is not merely corrected – he is initiated into the dynamic of genuine inquiry, which requires that one submit one’s views to the scrutiny of reason and be willing to revise them in light of contradiction.

The Allegory of the Cave, one of the most celebrated passages in all of Western philosophy, adds a further dimension that is directly relevant to Redpath’s concerns. The philosopher who ascends from the cave to the sunlight outside does not remain there in solitary contemplation; he descends again into the cave, to the world of shadows and illusions, and attempts to lead his fellow citizens toward the light. This return is not optional, nor is it a condescension; it is the completion of the philosopher’s *telos* in community. Genuine dialectical dialogue, on this Platonic model, is never merely a private cognitive achievement. It is always also a communal practice – a form of shared inquiry that partially realizes wisdom in the very act of seeking it, and that takes seriously the obligation of the one who has seen more clearly to engage honestly with those who have seen less.

For Redpath, the Platonic legacy is essential but incomplete. Plato identifies the teleological structure of genuine inquiry with unparalleled clarity, and his insistence on the communal, dialogical character of philosophy is a permanent contribution to the tradition. But his account of the Forms – of the objects toward which dialectic ascends – leaves the relationship between the intelligible world and the sensible world unstable, and this instability becomes a source of

⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 532a-535a.

confusion in the subsequent tradition. It is Aristotle who, by grounding the formal structure of things in the things themselves rather than in a separate realm, provides the metaphysical framework within which the teleological account of inquiry can be most fully and precisely articulated.

Aristotle's Refinement: Dialectic and Demonstration

Aristotle inherits from Plato the insight that genuine philosophical inquiry is ordered toward wisdom – the knowledge of first and highest causes – and that this ordering is not incidental to inquiry but constitutive of it. But Aristotle's philosophical temperament is more systematic, more attentive to distinctions, and more grounded in the analysis of natural things than Plato's; and it is Aristotle who provides the most precise and structurally complete account of the two modes of reasoning that together constitute the path to wisdom. These two modes – dialectic and demonstration – are complementary rather than competing, each performing an indispensable function in the rational journey from ignorance to sapientia.

Aristotle's account of dialectic appears most fully in the *Topics*, a work that has often been underestimated in the history of philosophy but that Redpath, following a number of twentieth-century scholars, regards as philosophically central. Dialectic, in the *Topics*, is characterized as reasoning from endoxa – from reputable opinions, that is, from the views of the wise or the many that carry a presumption of truth in their favor⁹. It does not reason from premises known to be necessarily true but from premises that are received and plausible. The function of dialectic is therefore not to produce scientific knowledge – that is the function of demonstration – but to examine, test, and refine the candidate first principles on which science will eventually be built. Since first principles cannot themselves be demonstrated (a demonstration requires prior premises, and the regress must eventually terminate), they must be arrived at by a different route; and it is dialectic that provides that route, by examining reputable opinions from every angle, pressing them to their limits, exposing their contradictions, and progressively winnowing them toward what is genuinely true and first.

The function Aristotle assigns to dialectic in this connection is logically irreplaceable. As he argues in the *Topics*, dialectic is useful for philosophical inquiry precisely because it enables the philosopher to raise difficulties on both sides of a question, thereby perceiving more readily what is true and what is false. Without this preparatory and critical function, no first principles can be securely established – and without securely established first principles, no science can begin. Dialectic is, in the strictest sense, the *sine qua non* of all scientific inquiry: not itself science, but the indispensable condition of the possibility of science. This insight is one that post-Cartesian philosophy largely forgot – or, more precisely, never adequately replaced after having implicitly rejected it.

⁹ Aristotle, *Topics*, 1.1 (100a18-b23), in: *Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Barnes.

Demonstration, which Aristotle analyzes in the *Posterior Analytics*, is the mode of reasoning that takes over where dialectic leaves off – once first principles have been secured through dialectical examination of endoxa and the direct intellectual apprehension of self-evident truths (nous)¹⁰. Demonstration reasons from premises that are necessary, primary, better known by nature, prior to, and causative of the conclusion; and its product is episteme – scientific knowledge in the strict sense, which grasps not merely that something is the case but why it is necessarily the case through its causes. The demonstrative syllogism converts examined opinion into certain knowledge – it moves, in Aristotle’s own terms, from endoxa to episteme, from the plausible to the known.

What is essential to Redpath’s appropriation of this Aristotelian framework is the insistence that both dialectic and demonstration are ordered to the same ultimate telos: wisdom as the architectonic science of first causes. Neither is an end in itself. Dialectic is not merely a pedagogical exercise; it is the living process by which first principles are won from the surface of opinion through rigorous communal examination. Demonstration is not merely a formal procedure for generating theorems; it is the movement by which the intellect comes to possess, with certainty and necessity, the causal structure of reality. And both are oriented, in their different ways, toward the crowning achievement of sophia – the comprehensive, unified knowledge of all things under their highest causes that Aristotle identifies as the highest perfection of the human intellect. This teleological unity of dialectic and demonstration – their joint orientation toward a single, determinate end – is precisely what the Cartesian revolution disrupted.

Redpath’s reading of Aristotle also emphasizes a dimension of the dialectical process that is easily overlooked: its essentially communal and conversational character. Even in the *Topics*, which is in some respects the most technically formal of Aristotle’s logical works, dialectic is presented as a practice that takes place between interlocutors – a gymnastic of the intellect that requires the discipline of actual exchange with another mind. The person who engages in dialectic must formulate his views clearly enough to be challenged, must respond to objections with precision, and must be willing to revise his position in light of contradiction. This is not merely a social nicety; it is epistemically essential. The communal structure of dialectic reflects the fact that the examination of first principles requires the sustained attention of more than one mind, that error is more easily exposed through the friction of honest disagreement than through solitary meditation, and that wisdom – even when ultimately appropriated by a single intellect – is sought and approached through shared inquiry.

Wisdom’s Odyssey: Five Historical Stages

One of the most significant and original contributions of Redpath’s philosophical scholarship is the detailed historical narrative he constructs in

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 1.1-2 (71a-72b), in: *Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Barnes.

Wisdom's Odyssey, tracing what he calls the progressive corruption of philosophy's telos across the history of Western thought. This is not a standard history-of-philosophy narrative in the sense of a chronicle of positions and their relationships; it is a diagnostic history – an account of how philosophy lost its way, by what stages and through what confusions, from the Greeks to the modern period. Five stages are identifiable in this account, each characterized by a distinctive mode of deviation from the classical orientation toward wisdom¹¹.

The first stage is that of ancient Greece itself – not the entire tradition, but the tension within it between philosophical realism and sophistic rhetoric. Plato and Aristotle are the champions of realism: the intellect can genuinely contact reality; the real order of things is knowable; wisdom is possible. Against them stand the Sophists – Protagoras with his claim that “man is the measure of all things”, Gorgias with his argument that nothing exists, or if it does, it cannot be known, or if it can be known, it cannot be communicated. These are not merely clever paradoxes; they are radical challenges to the possibility of philosophy itself, and to the orientation toward wisdom as its proper end. The Sophists do not seek wisdom; they seek persuasion, rhetorical victory, the appearance of wisdom. In Redpath's terms, they are the first practitioners of what he will eventually call transcendental sophistry – discourse that appropriates the form of philosophical inquiry while abandoning its essential telos. Plato and Aristotle respond with the full force of the philosophical tradition; but the seed of confusion, once planted, proves remarkably persistent.

The second stage is the patristic and early medieval period, in which Christian theologians absorbed both the genuine philosophical inheritance of Greece and, alongside it, a sophistic strain they did not always clearly distinguish from it. The result was a tendency to mystify wisdom – to associate sapientia with visionary or allegorical illumination rather than with the rigorous, ordered inquiry into real natures and first causes that Aristotle had described. This mystification was not without its own profound insights – the patristic tradition produced works of extraordinary depth and beauty – but it had the philosophical consequence of dissociating wisdom from the dialectical and demonstrative disciplines that were its proper cognitive preconditions. Wisdom became something that descended upon the contemplative soul rather than something that the active intellect achieved through disciplined inquiry; and philosophy, understood as rigorous rational inquiry, was accordingly subordinated to or absorbed by a theological mode of apprehension that was not always clearly distinguished from it.

The third stage, which Redpath regards as the high-water mark of the entire Western tradition, is the thirteenth-century synthesis achieved above all by Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas undertook the most ambitious and most successful integration of philosophical rigor with theological wisdom in the history of Western thought. With extraordinary precision, he distinguished among sacred

¹¹ Redpath, *Wisdom's Odyssey*, 45-158.

doctrine, philosophy, and wisdom; he recovered the full technical power of Aristotle's logic, metaphysics, and natural philosophy; and he showed how these could be ordered, without confusion or reduction, toward the theological sapientia that is the ultimate perfection of the human intellect in this life and the anticipation of the beatific vision in the next. The scholastic quaestio – the form of inquiry that structures the *Summa Theologiae* – is itself a form of genuine dialectical dialogue: objections are stated with full force, the truth of the matter is articulated, and the objections are answered one by one, in a process that enacts, on the page, the communal and self-correcting character of philosophical inquiry¹².

The fourth stage is the Renaissance, and it represents, in Redpath's analysis, a decisive step backward from the Thomistic achievement – not through malice or stupidity but through a kind of cultural forgetting combined with a new ambition. The humanists of the Renaissance inherited a deformed picture of both the ancient philosophical tradition and the scholastic tradition. Scholastic philosophy, caricatured as arid and pedantic, was set aside in favor of a return to classical rhetoric – to Cicero, to the art of eloquent and persuasive speech, to the cultivation of humanitas understood as refined and eloquent learning. The consequence, philosophically, was that style displaced science as the governing ideal of intellectual life. Philosophy became eloquent discourse about deep matters rather than rigorous inquiry into real natures. The form of philosophical language was cultivated; its substance – the orientation toward wisdom through dialectic and demonstration – was progressively abandoned. This rhetorical turn prepared the way for the more decisive rupture that followed in the seventeenth century.

The fifth and most catastrophic stage is the seventeenth century, and its decisive agent is René Descartes. The Cartesian revolution is not merely a new philosophical position to be set beside others; it is the systematic dismantling of the metaphysical and methodological conditions under which the classical orientation toward wisdom had been maintained. By grounding all certainty in the solitary doubting subject rather than in the real order of being, by expelling final causation from his account of nature, and by making mathematical-mechanistic analysis the model of all genuine knowledge, Descartes produced a philosophical revolution of the first magnitude – one whose full consequences have still not been adequately reckoned. In Redpath's diagnosis, the Cartesian moment is the moment at which transcendental sophistry – discourse that has fully lost its orientation toward wisdom – becomes enthroned as the dominant mode of Western philosophical and scientific culture.

The Great Severance: Descartes and the Loss of Telos

The philosophical revolution inaugurated by René Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) is, from the perspective of the Aristotelian-

¹² Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 88-134.

Thomistic tradition that Redpath recovers and defends, best understood not as a new beginning but as a catastrophic severance – the moment at which Western philosophy definitively parted ways with its classical telos¹³. The genius of Descartes is beyond question; no serious historian of philosophy denies his originality, his rigor, or his influence. But it is precisely because his influence was so deep and so pervasive that the metaphysical consequences of his foundational decisions have been so difficult to identify and to resist. One does not easily see the wound when one is wholly inside the culture that the wound produced.

To appreciate the depth of the Cartesian rupture, it is necessary to understand, in at least outline, the integrated order that existed before it. In the classical and scholastic tradition, final causation – telos – was intrinsic to all natural inquiry. To understand a living thing, a human action, or a social institution, one had to understand what it was ordered toward – its proper perfection, its natural end. Real natures were knowable by the intellect precisely because they had a determinate formal structure oriented toward a determinate end; and the intellect, in knowing a natural thing, genuinely contacted the real order – it was not imprisoned within its own representations but opened onto being. Wisdom (*sapientia*) governed this entire enterprise as its architectonic end: the science of first and highest causes that ordered all other inquiry within a unified hierarchy of truth. Philosophy, science, and theology were related, not confused – each with its proper domain and method, but all ordered to a single, coherent vision of reality.

The *Meditations* systematically dismantled this integrated order, step by step. Descartes begins with methodic doubt – a decision to treat as uncertain everything that can conceivably be doubted – and discovers his first certainty in the *cogito*: *cogito ergo sum*, I think, therefore I am. The significance of this starting point is not merely epistemological. By making the isolated, doubting, thinking subject the indubitable foundation of all knowledge, Descartes implicitly inverted the classical order of inquiry. In the classical tradition, knowledge begins with being – with the real order of things that the intellect encounters and appropriates. In Descartes, knowledge begins with the subject's certainty of its own existence. The mind is no longer primarily open onto being; it is primarily certain of itself, and the question becomes how and whether it can reach the external world from within its own representations. This is a revolution in the very structure of inquiry, one that privileges interiority, subjectivity, and self-certainty over reality, objectivity, and the givenness of being.

The expulsion of final causation from science is the complementary and equally consequential aspect of the Cartesian revolution¹⁴. Descartes was explicit about this: in his account of the natural world, only material extension and mathematical relations among its parts constitute genuine scientific explanation. To

¹³ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Med. I-II, trans. J. Cottingham, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

¹⁴ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 88-134.

appeal to purposes, ends, or natures in accounting for natural phenomena is, for Descartes, to introduce anthropomorphism into physics – to project human intentions onto a mechanical system that has no intentions. Nature, on the Cartesian model, is pure mechanism: a system of particles in motion, governed by mathematical laws and explainable without remainder in terms of efficient and material causation. This is an extraordinarily powerful framework for certain kinds of prediction and technological application; and its successes, culminating in Newtonian mechanics and all that followed, are undeniable. But it is purchased at an enormous metaphysical price: the price of making it impossible, at the level of scientific principle, to ask what anything in nature is for.

The following table summarizes, in comparative form, the integrated order that preceded Descartes and the fractured order that followed from his foundational decisions:

Dimension	Before Descartes (Classical-Scholastic Order)	After Descartes (Post-Cartesian Order)
Final Causation	Intrinsic to all natural inquiry; nature is purposive	Expelled; nature is mechanism, telos banished
Knowledge Foundation	Real natures genuinely knowable; intellect contacts being	Only mathematical extension is truly real; mind enclosed in representations
First Principle	Being (ens) as the proper object of the intellect	The cogito: isolated thinking subject as foundation
End of Science	Wisdom (sapientia): architectonic knowledge of first causes	Mathematical certainty; precision purchased at cost of telos
Philosophy's Role	Telos-ordered discipline ordered toward wisdom	Methodology; a tool, not a telos-ordered discipline
Mode of Inquiry	Dialectical dialogue – communal, self-correcting, grounded in realism	Solo methodic doubt; sophistry enthroned

Redpath's central thesis, stated with all the philosophical precision the subject demands, is that the expulsion of telos is not merely a scientific revision – it is a metaphysical wound that severs philosophy from its proper end. The consequences of this wound are not confined to the philosophy seminar room; they pervade the entire intellectual culture of the modern West, shaping how universities are organized, how public discourse proceeds, how science understands its own authority and its own limits, and how human beings understand their own

nature and vocation. To say that Descartes caused all of this would be an oversimplification – the causes are multiple, and the historical process is complex. But to say that the Cartesian revolution was a decisive moment in the progressive loss of telos from Western intellectual culture is, for Redpath, a diagnosis of the first importance.

Genuine Dialectic vs. Transcendental Sophistry

The most important diagnostic distinction in Redpath's philosophical project – the one on which his entire analysis turns – is the distinction between genuine dialectical dialogue and what he terms transcendental sophistry. This distinction is not, it must be emphasized at the outset, a merely stylistic or rhetorical one. It is not the difference between polished and unpolished argument, between clear and obscure writing, or even between good and bad philosophical technique. It is a teleological distinction: the difference between discourse ordered toward truth and wisdom as its proper end, and discourse that appropriates the external form of philosophical inquiry while abandoning its internal orientation toward truth. The first is genuine philosophy; the second, however sophisticated its vocabulary and however elaborate its argumentative machinery, is a form of sophistry – and the more elaborate and sophisticated the form, the more dangerous and the more difficult to detect¹⁵.

Genuine dialectical dialogue, on Redpath's account, is characterized by a cluster of related and mutually reinforcing features. It is ordered toward truth and wisdom as its proper telos – this is not merely a stated aspiration but a genuine structural orientation that governs the practice of inquiry from within. It is self-correcting: the genuine dialectician submits his views to contradiction, takes seriously the force of objections, and is willing to revise his position when the better argument reveals it to be mistaken. It is grounded in philosophical realism: the assumption that there is a real order of things that inquiry is attempting to reach, and that the standards of correctness are given by that real order rather than constructed by the inquiring subject. It is communal and dynamic: truth is sought through honest rational exchange between interlocutors, each of whom brings partial insight and each of whom is enlarged and corrected by the other. And it partially realizes wisdom in the very act of seeking it – the genuine dialectician is not merely trying to arrive at wisdom after the inquiry is complete; the disciplined, honest, self-correcting process of inquiry is itself a form of intellectual virtue, a beginning of the wisdom it seeks.

Transcendental sophistry, by contrast, presents an entirely different set of features, though it frequently masquerades as genuine inquiry. It is ordered not toward truth and wisdom but toward rhetorical victory, ideological closure, or the maintenance of a precommitted methodological framework. It is self-immunizing: where genuine dialectic submits to contradiction, transcendental sophistry

¹⁵ Redpath, *Wisdom's Odyssey*, 120-158.

constructs categories – whether linguistic, transcendental, or methodological – that make contradiction impossible. The Kantian move of placing certain categories beyond the reach of metaphysical examination, the Hegelian move of incorporating contradiction into the dialectical process itself, and the postmodern move of dissolving standards of correctness into power relations – each of these is, for Redpath, a different species of self-immunizing discourse, a way of ensuring that the inquiry cannot be challenged from outside its own presuppositions¹⁶.

It is important to understand that Redpath's use of the term "transcendental sophistry" is not a polemic in disguise – it is a philosophical diagnosis with a precise theoretical content. The "transcendental" component of the term refers specifically to the post-Kantian philosophical move of grounding philosophical analysis in the structures of the knowing subject rather than in the real order of being. This move, which Descartes initiated and Kant systematized, has the effect of confining the mind within its own categories – of making the mind's own structures the ultimate court of appeal in philosophical disputes. The result is that philosophy becomes circular: it can describe the categories through which it apprehends reality, but it cannot step outside those categories to ask whether they genuinely correspond to the real order. This is the transcendental dimension of sophistry – the aspiration to absolute philosophical authority achieved by making the knowing subject, rather than being, the ultimate arbiter of truth.

The contrast between the historical exemplars of each mode is instructive. Genuine dialectical dialogue is exemplified, for Redpath, by Socrates – who professed ignorance, submitted everything to questioning, and accepted refutation as the gift of reason – by Aristotle, who developed the formal theory of dialectic and practiced it with extraordinary rigor, and by Aquinas, whose scholastic *quaestio* is the most systematic institutionalization of genuine dialectical dialogue in the history of Western philosophy. Transcendental sophistry, by contrast, is exemplified by the post-Cartesian idealist tradition in its various forms: by the way in which successive post-Kantian philosophies each claimed to have arrived at an absolutely secure starting point, only to generate new confusions that required yet another absolutely secure starting point. This is the philosophical equivalent of the Sisyphean labor – and its endless repetition suggests that the starting point is always mislocated, because it is always the *cogito* or some variant of it, rather than being.

The contemporary manifestations of transcendental sophistry that most directly concern Redpath are those found in academic philosophy and in broader cultural discourse. In academic philosophy, the self-immunizing tendency appears in the proliferation of technical vocabularies that make philosophical positions expressible only within the framework that generates them, and therefore impossible to challenge from outside. In broader cultural discourse, it appears in the reduction of public argument to rhetorical performance – the replacement of

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, 1 (164a20-b27), in: *Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Barnes.

genuine dialectical exchange aimed at truth with strategic communication aimed at persuasion, image management, and the mobilization of sentiment. In both cases, the form of dialogue is preserved while its essential orientation toward truth is abandoned; and this is precisely the combination that makes transcendental sophistry so dangerous and so culturally corrosive.

Redpath's Remedy: The Path of Restoration

A diagnosis, however precise and comprehensive, is not yet a cure. Redpath's philosophical project would be of limited significance if it consisted only in the identification and historical tracing of the wound inflicted on Western philosophy by the Cartesian revolution. What distinguishes his work, and what gives it its genuine philosophical ambition, is the constructive program articulated most systematically in *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (2012) – a program for the recovery of wisdom as the architectonic end of philosophy and science, through a series of interconnected steps each of which presupposes and enables the next¹⁷.

The first and most fundamental step in Redpath's recovery project is the recovery of philosophical realism: the reassertion that the intellect genuinely contacts the real order of things, and that being – not the cogito, not mathematical extension, not the transcendental subject – is the proper foundation of all inquiry. This is not a naive claim that knowledge is without presuppositions or that the mind simply mirrors reality passively. It is the claim that the act of understanding is genuinely an act of appropriating the intelligible structure of things as they are – that the intellect in knowing is in real cognitive contact with being. Without this foundational reassertion, nothing else in the recovery project is possible: if the mind cannot genuinely reach being, then neither telos, nor wisdom, nor genuine dialectical dialogue can be recovered, for all of these presuppose that the mind is genuinely open onto a real order that it can progressively, through disciplined inquiry, come to know.

The second step is the restoration of final causation to science – the reintegration of telos as intrinsic to the intelligibility of natural things. This step is directly demanded by the first: if the intellect genuinely contacts the real order of things, and if natural things genuinely have purposes – if they are ordered, from within their own natures, toward determinate ends – then a science that expels final causation is not merely incomplete but is, in a precise philosophical sense, inadequate to its objects. It cannot account for the phenomena most distinctive of natural things: life, growth, reproduction, behavior, and above all the characteristic activity of rational beings – all of which are intelligible only in light of the ends toward which they are ordered. Science that expels purpose can predict and manipulate; it cannot understand. And a civilization that possesses

¹⁷ Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 165-210.

enormous technical power but no capacity to understand what it is for is one that has severed its own capacity for self-governance.

The third step is the reclamation of sapientia as philosophy's proper telos – the restoration of wisdom as the architectonic science that orders all other disciplines and gives philosophy its distinctive identity and dignity. This step is both a consequence of the first two and a new and irreducible commitment. To recover philosophical realism and to restore final causation is to reopen the question of what philosophy is ultimately for; and the answer, in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition that Redpath recovers, is that philosophy is ordered toward wisdom: the comprehensive, certain, ordered knowledge of all things under their first and highest causes. This is not a modest ambition. In the contemporary academic context, where philosophy has largely settled for technical precision on narrow questions, the claim that its proper end is wisdom of the most comprehensive kind will seem grandiose. But Redpath's point is not that any individual philosopher or any single philosophical tradition has achieved this end; it is that without this orientation, philosophy cannot achieve anything worth the name – that wisdom, precisely as an architectonic end, gives philosophy its unity, its coherence, and its capacity to govern the other disciplines.

The fourth step is the most concrete and the most practical: the practice of genuine dialectical dialogue as the living, communal form in which philosophy's telos is approached. This is not merely a methodological recommendation; it is the enactment of everything that has gone before. To practice genuine dialectical dialogue is to embody philosophical realism (by treating the real order of things, rather than one's own categories, as the standard of correctness), to honor final causation (by ordering the inquiry toward truth as its proper end), and to seek wisdom (by engaging in the kind of honest, self-correcting, communal inquiry through which wisdom is progressively approached). James V. Schall, in his review of *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, noted that Redpath's project achieves something rare in contemporary philosophy: it connects metaphysical rigor with genuine philosophical life – with the lived practice of inquiry as a human vocation¹⁸.

It is essential to understand that these four steps are not a merely sequential program – not a recipe that can be followed by first completing step one, then moving to step two, and so on. They are mutually presupposing and mutually enabling aspects of a single, integral recovery. The recovery of philosophical realism is impossible without the practice of genuine dialectical dialogue, because it is only through the self-correcting process of genuine inquiry that the mind can win its way back from the enclosure of its own categories to genuine openness onto being. The restoration of final causation requires the recovery of philosophical realism, because telos is a feature of the real order of things, not

¹⁸ J.V. Schall, *Review of A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, by Peter A. Redpath, "Modern Age" 55(2013), no. 3, 78-80.

a projection of the mind. The reclamation of wisdom as philosophy's telos requires all three of the preceding steps, and in turn gives them their unity and their direction. Together, they constitute the integral recovery of the philosophical tradition – not an antiquarian retrieval of a dead past, but a living response to a genuine and urgent present need.

Comparative Analysis: Six Thinkers on Telos and Dialectic

Redpath's philosophical synthesis does not emerge in a vacuum; it is a response to, and a retrieval of, a tradition that extends from ancient Greece to the present. To understand the distinctive character of his contribution, it is illuminating to compare his account of telos and dialectical dialogue with those of five other major figures in the tradition – Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, and Hegel – each of whom represents a distinctive position on the nature and function of dialectic and on the question of what the highest end of inquiry is. What emerges from this comparison is not merely a map of philosophical positions but a diagnosis of where, in the history of ideas, the critical decisions were made that shaped the intellectual culture of the modern West.

Plato's position has already been analyzed in some detail in Section III. His account of dialectic as the ascent of the philosophical soul toward the Form of the Good – the unhypothetical first principle that functions as the ultimate telos of all cognitive ascent – establishes the teleological framework within which all subsequent thinking in this tradition operates¹⁹. Plato's dialectic is both the highest method and the highest form of philosophical life; it is a communal, dynamic, self-correcting movement toward the truth that can only be approached through the sustained discipline of genuine rational exchange. The formal strength of Plato's account is its clarity about the teleological character of inquiry; its limitation, from the perspective of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, is the instability of the metaphysical framework in which it is set – the Forms, separated from sensible things, leave the relationship between the intelligible and the real insufficiently articulated.

Aristotle's account, as analyzed in Section IV, refines and grounds Plato's teleological insight by embedding the formal and final structures of things in the things themselves rather than in a separate realm. His distinction between dialectic (as examination of endoxa toward first principles) and demonstration (as scientific knowledge from first principles) provides the most precise and technically complete account of the cognitive path to wisdom in the ancient world. The telos of both modes of inquiry is the same: sapientia as the architectonic knowledge of first causes. Aristotle's account also preserves the communal and dialogical character of genuine inquiry while giving it a more rigorous formal structure than Plato provides. It is Aristotle who, for Redpath, provides the

¹⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit, Preface*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

essential framework for the recovery project – and it is the abandonment of key Aristotelian insights by later thinkers that Redpath diagnoses as the progressive corruption of the tradition.

Thomas Aquinas represents, in Redpath's historical account, the high-water mark of the tradition – the moment at which the teleological orientation toward wisdom was most fully and most precisely articulated. Aquinas inherits both the Platonic and the Aristotelian traditions and integrates them within a theological framework of extraordinary systematic power. His account of *sapientia* operates on multiple levels simultaneously: as the highest natural intellectual virtue (following Aristotle), as infused wisdom that is a gift of the Holy Spirit (following Scripture and the theological tradition), and as the anticipation of the beatific vision that is the ultimate telos of the human person (following Augustine and Christian theology). The *quaestio* format of the *Summa Theologiae* institutionalizes genuine dialectical dialogue in the most rigorous form it ever achieved: objections are stated with maximum force, the *respondeo* articulates the truth of the matter with precision, and each objection is answered individually – a process that models, at the level of textual form, the communal and self-correcting character of genuine inquiry.

The following comparative table summarizes the six thinkers' positions on telos, dialectic, and the grounding of inquiry:

Thinker	Telos of Inquiry	Role of Dialectic	Grounding of Inquiry
Plato (Ancient Greece)	Form of the Good; the unhypothetical first principle of everything	Ascent of the soul through questioning toward the highest truth; the highest philosophical method	Intelligible Forms apprehended through dialectical ascent; participatory realism
Aristotle (Ancient Greece)	Episteme via first principles; ultimately <i>sapientia</i> as architectonic science	Examination of <i>endoxa</i> to secure first principles for demonstration; <i>sine qua non</i> of science	Real natures in things; intellect in genuine cognitive contact with being
Aquinas (13th Century)	<i>Sapientia</i> / <i>Beatitude</i> ; wisdom culminating in the beatific vision	Scholastic <i>quaestio</i> as institutionalized dialectical dialogue in service of wisdom	Being as the proper object of the intellect; metaphysical realism within a theological horizon
Descartes (17th)	Mathematical certainty; clear and distinct ideas	Solo methodic doubt replaces communal	The thinking subject; interiority; mathematical

Thinker	Telos of Inquiry	Role of Dialectic	Grounding of Inquiry
Century)	immune from doubt	dialogue; the cogito supplants being	extension as the sole real quality of matter
Hegel (19th Century)	Absolute Spirit; the self-realization of Geist through historical process	Dialectic (thesis-antithesis-synthesis) becomes the telos itself; wisdom is process, not end	The self-unfolding of Absolute Spirit; a self-enclosed and self-referential system
Redpath (Contemporary)	Sapientia recovered; wisdom as architectonic end of philosophy and science	Genuine dialectical dialogue as the living enactment of philosophy's telos; partially realizes wisdom in seeking it	Philosophical realism; being as the proper foundation; intellect open onto the real order

The cases of Descartes and Hegel deserve particular attention in this comparative context, because they represent the two most important post-classical forms of philosophical self-immunization. Descartes' methodic doubt – the decision to treat as certain only what can survive the test of radical skepticism – is, as a matter of logical structure, a technique for closing the mind against the real order: by resolving in advance to accept only what is clear and distinct to the isolated thinking subject, Descartes ensures that the outcome of inquiry will be determined by the subject's own criteria rather than by the real order of things. Hegel's dialectic represents a different but equally consequential transformation: by making dialectic itself the telos of inquiry – by identifying wisdom with the ongoing process of Geist's self-realization through contradiction and its resolution – Hegel produces a philosophical system that is, as it were, perpetually arriving at its destination without ever actually reaching it. The telos is always already the process; the process is always already the telos; and the result is a philosophical system of extraordinary internal coherence that is, from a realist perspective, radically unmoored from the real order of things²⁰.

Redpath's position, in this comparative light, is both a retrieval and a genuinely contemporary philosophical contribution. It retrieves the teleological framework of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition – wisdom as architectonic end, dialectic as the communal and self-correcting path to wisdom, being as the proper foundation of all inquiry. But it does so in full awareness of the post-Cartesian and post-Hegelian intellectual context, and in explicit response to the philosophical pathologies that context has generated. His is not a naive return to

²⁰ Redpath, *Wisdom's Odyssey*, 160-200.

a pre-critical philosophical innocence; it is a recovery achieved through a full reckoning with modernity's deepest temptations and most consequential errors.

The Broader Stakes: Why This Matters Now

There is a temptation, in reading a work of Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical recovery, to regard it as primarily a contribution to the internal debates of academic philosophy – interesting to those already engaged with the tradition, but of limited significance to the broader cultural situation. Redpath's own work, and the diagnosis it advances, explicitly resists this temptation. The loss of telos is not merely a problem for philosophy seminars; it is a civilizational problem – one that manifests in the structure of universities, in the character of public discourse, and in the relationship between science and human well-being²¹. To see this clearly is to grasp why Redpath's project, however scholastically demanding its idiom, is in fact urgently contemporary.

The first and most visible manifestation of the loss of telos in contemporary culture is the fragmentation of the university – the institution that was, in its medieval and early modern form, explicitly organized around the idea of a unified order of knowledge ordered toward wisdom. The modern research university has largely abandoned any such organizing principle. The disciplines are sealed from one another by the specialization of their methods and vocabularies; the question of how they all fit together, or what they are collectively for, is not asked – or, when it is asked, it receives purely procedural answers (interdisciplinary collaboration, general education requirements) that address the organizational surface rather than the philosophical root of the problem. This is not accidental. It is the institutional expression of the loss of wisdom as the architectonic end of inquiry. When there is no governing telos to which all disciplines are ordered, there is no principle of unity – and the fragmentation of the disciplines follows as necessarily as the fragmentation of a building whose load-bearing structure has been removed.

The second manifestation is the character of contemporary public discourse. What passes for debate in the media, in politics, and in the broader culture is, in the overwhelming majority of cases, a form of rhetorical performance that bears only a superficial resemblance to genuine dialectical dialogue. Positions are stated not to be examined and refined but to be defended against all comers; the strongest objection to one's own position is never the one that is engaged most seriously; the goal of most public argument is not truth but the appearance of having won. This is not merely a failure of individual virtue – a deficit of intellectual honesty or courage – though it is that too. It is the structural consequence of a culture that has lost its orientation toward truth as the proper end of discourse, and that has substituted for it a range of substitutes – power, identity, narrative, solidarity – each of which is in some way valuable but none of which

²¹ Redpath, *Wisdom's Odyssey*, 175-205.

can perform the function that truth alone performs: the function of being the standard by which all claims are assessed and all arguments are ultimately evaluated.

The third and perhaps the most consequential manifestation is the relationship between science and wisdom – or rather, the absence of that relationship – in contemporary intellectual and public life. Science, as it is practiced and as it is publicly understood in the twenty-first century, has achieved a degree of technical power that would have been unimaginable to any previous generation: it can manipulate the genome, produce artificial intelligence, reshape climate systems, and extend human life in ways that would formerly have seemed miraculous. Yet it is, at the level of its own self-understanding, incapable of saying what any of this is for. This is not a failure of nerve on the part of individual scientists; it is a structural consequence of the Cartesian decision to expel final causation from science. A science that has amputated telos from its account of nature cannot, without violating its own principles, ask what scientific achievement is for. It can report results; it can offer predictions; it can produce technologies. But it cannot govern itself – cannot decide which inquiries are worth pursuing, which technologies should be developed, which applications of scientific knowledge serve genuine human flourishing and which undermine it – because these questions require an account of the human telos that post-Cartesian science has declared outside its proper domain²².

The consequences of ungoverned scientific power are not merely theoretical. The biotechnological manipulation of human reproduction and the human genome, the development of autonomous weapons systems, the algorithmic organization of social relationships and of the information environment – each of these represents a form of extraordinary technical power exercised without any adequate philosophical framework for determining its proper limits and its proper ends. The standard responses to these challenges – regulatory frameworks, ethical guidelines, public consultation processes – are valuable as far as they go, but they are, in Redpath's terms, symptomatic treatments that do not reach the root of the problem. The root is the philosophical wound: the loss of the account of human telos that would make it possible to say, on principled grounds, what science and technology are for and where they must stop.

The closing thesis of this section is one that Redpath would, with some modification, endorse – and it is the thesis that gives the entire manuscript its ultimate significance: the recovery of genuine dialectical dialogue – ordered to the telos of wisdom – is not an academic exercise. It is the form of civilization itself. A civilization that possesses genuine dialectical dialogue – that practices, in its institutions of learning, its public discourse, and its scientific culture, the communal, self-correcting, truth-oriented inquiry that Socrates exemplified and Aristotle theorized – is a civilization capable of governing itself. A civilization that

²² Redpath, *A Not-So-Elementary Christian Metaphysics*, 200-215.

has replaced that practice with transcendental sophistry – with rhetorical performance, with self-immunizing ideological discourse, with technical expertise un-governed by wisdom – is one that has lost the very cognitive capacity it most urgently needs.

Conclusion

The argument of this manuscript has traversed a large and demanding territory: from the teleological metaphysics of Aristotle and the dialectical ascent of Plato, through the scholastic synthesis of Aquinas and the catastrophic rupture of Descartes, to Redpath's diagnosis of the contemporary condition and his carefully articulated program for philosophical recovery. It is now possible to draw these threads together and to state, with the clarity the subject demands, what Redpath's project achieves and why it matters.

The first and most fundamental achievement of Redpath's analysis is the recovery of the concept of telos as the structuring principle of all genuine philosophical inquiry. By demonstrating, with sustained philosophical argument, that the expulsion of final causation from Western philosophy and science was not a neutral methodological revision but a metaphysical decision with enormous and largely unexamined consequences, Redpath reopens a question that most of contemporary philosophy assumes to be settled: the question of what philosophy is for. His answer – that philosophy is ordered toward wisdom, understood as the architectonic knowledge of all things under their first and highest causes – is not a nostalgic retrieval of a medieval position but a principled response to the most pressing intellectual deficits of the contemporary world.

The second achievement is the elaboration of the distinction between genuine dialectical dialogue and transcendental sophistry – a distinction that has both philosophical and cultural significance of the highest order. Genuine dialectical dialogue, ordered toward truth, grounded in philosophical realism, self-correcting, and communal, is not merely a philosophical method; it is the form of intellectual life that the recovery of wisdom requires and that, conversely, the dominance of transcendental sophistry has made progressively more difficult to practice. Redpath's insistence on this distinction, and his tracing of the historical process by which transcendental sophistry came to displace genuine inquiry at the center of Western intellectual culture, is a contribution that extends far beyond the boundaries of academic philosophy.

The third achievement is the construction of a genuinely integrative philosophical narrative – a reading of the history of Western philosophy from ancient Greece to the present that is organized around a single, coherent diagnostic question: how did philosophy lose its proper end, and what is required to recover it? This narrative is not a simple story of decline; it acknowledges the genuine achievements of the modern philosophical tradition while insisting that those achievements have been purchased at an unacceptable metaphysical price. And

it does not merely diagnose the problem; it identifies, with philosophical precision, the steps required for its remedy.

Redpath's project represents, finally, a genuinely countercultural philosophical intervention – countercultural in the most precise and demanding sense of that term. Against the drift of modernity toward the isolation of the knowing subject, the mechanization of nature, the fragmentation of knowledge, and the displacement of truth by rhetorical performance, he recovers the Aristotelian-Thomistic insight that philosophy has a proper end – wisdom – and that the recovery of that end is the condition of possibility for genuine philosophical discourse, meaningful science, and civilizational coherence. This recovery does not require the simple repetition of medieval formulas or the wholesale rejection of modern achievements. It requires something far more demanding: the intellectual honesty to ask what inquiry is ultimately for, the philosophical courage to pursue that question wherever it leads, and the disciplined practice of genuine dialectical dialogue as the communal form in which wisdom is progressively, laboriously, and imperfectly approached.

In an age that has all but lost the very concept of a proper end for intellectual life, and that therefore mistakes productivity for wisdom, technical precision for understanding, and rhetorical sophistication for truth, the recovery of telos is not an academic luxury. It is the most urgent philosophical task of the present moment – and Peter A. Redpath has devoted his scholarly career to showing both why it is necessary and how it might begin.

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