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The Possibility of Theology After Kant: An Examination of Karl Rahner's *Geist in Welt*

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I

THE QUESTION "How is theology as a discipline yielding knowledge of God possible?" has had a vexing history in theology and philosophy over the past two hundred years. Some would maintain that Kant had decisively answered the question when he argued that theology as traditionally conceived is not a possible inquiry, for its possibility is completely negated by the fact that theological concepts "totally break with experience."¹

In his critical examination of the nature and extent of reason, Kant argued that reason, either in its a priori or a posteriori form, cannot demonstrate the existence or nature of an unconditioned Being. He sought, moreover, to show in detail how reason in its theological employment breaks totally with experience.² Reason initially seeks the idea of the sum-total of all possible predicates, containing a priori the data for all particular possibilities. It finds that it cannot place such a sum-total in the aggregate of empirical possibilities, for this unconditioned unity can never in its totality be exhibited *in concreto*. The reason, then, moves beyond, or transcends, the conditioned and seeks "a transcendental substrate that contains, as it were, the whole store of material from which all possible predicates of things must be taken."³ This is the idea of an *ens realissimum*. From this point, the movement of reason is natural and swift: "This idea of the *ens realissimum*, although it is indeed a mere representation, is first *realised*, that is, made into an object, then *hypostatized*, and finally, by the natural progress of reason towards the completion of unity, is, as we shall presently show, *personified*."⁴

In its theological employment, then, reason passes through four stages: transcendence, objectification, hypostatization, and personification, and in

1. *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics Which Will be Able to Come Forth as Science*, Part III, Section 55 (ed. Lewis Beck [New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1950], p. 96).

2. See *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1958), especially I, Part II, second division, Chap. III, "The Ideal of Pure Reason," and in particular Section 7, "Critique of all Theology Based upon Speculative Principles of Reason."

3. *Ibid.*, A575/B603.

4. *Ibid.*, A583/B611a.

so doing, passes beyond possible experience, and so gives rise to the transcendental illusion, God, or the Absolute as so conceived. We have no right to assert that there is an Object corresponding to the representation of a sum-total of all possible perfections.

Not only are all attempts to prove God's existence futile, but also any talk of God in a metaphysical sense is devoid of meaning, for we have no means by which to interpret language drawn from the phenomenal world but yet allegedly used of the noumenal world. Certainly for Kant some talk about God is permitted, but only in a difficult-to-interpret, non-metaphysical sense as a necessary "postulate" for a system of morality.⁵

The Kantian critique of supposed knowledge of God is thus rooted in a critical examination of the extent of man's knowing powers and in the exploration of the bounds of man's metaphysical range. Talk about God breaks with experience, and hence concepts used in this way lack content. Man cannot be said to know God, and theology as such is not possible.

Given Kant's criticisms, can we in any sense pursue theology? Suppose that we feel motivated to theologize; how do we go about it in the post-Kantian period? What are the conditions that our theology must meet if it is to be cognitively valid? Can we stipulate a set of criteria that must be met in order that we may proceed to theologize? These are some of the questions that any post-Kantian theologian *must* take into consideration.

Before Karl Rahner's approach to these questions—our concern in the present study—is examined, the options open for post-Kantian theological method should be considered. Karl Barth, in his essay on Kant,⁶ points out that there are three ways in which a post-Kantian theologian can consider the possibility of theology.

First of all, one could take the Kantian position on reason and the nature of man just as it is as the norm of theological inquiry. We could then assume the division between the noumenal and phenomenal, with all that this implies, and proceed to construct a theology which would not go beyond the range of possible experience as so conceived. One could perhaps write a Kantian-type theology within the limitations set by Kant. One could, with Fichte and many nineteenth-century Protestant theologians, present Christianity as solely a moral way of life.⁷ One could, with Hans Vaihinger, retain belief in God *as if* he were. One could, with Feuerbach, the prophet of the "new theology," interpret theology as a disguised anthropology and translate God-talk into man-talk.⁸ One could adopt Comte's positivism and produce a humanistic form of Christianity fashioned to meet man's "coming

5. Yet one might ask: What precisely is the status of this "postulate" Kant calls "God"? Is metaphysical ontology really circumvented?

6. Cf. K. Barth, *From Rousseau to Ritschl* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1959), pp. 150-96.

7. Cf. also R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1955).

8. Joseph C. Weber points out that Paul van Buren's first principle (cf. P. M. van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* [New York: Macmillan, 1963]) sums up Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*. Cf. J. C. Weber, "Feuerbach, Barth and Theological Methodology," *Journal of Religion*, 46 (1966), 24-36.

of age." All these ways, so pervasive in theological thought since Kant, are in effect theologies produced within the limits of Kant alone.

Or, secondly, one could subject the Kantian position to a critique "from within" (so to speak). One could undertake to enlarge and enrich the concept of reason, or of the nature of man, so as to open up the possibility of knowledge of God. One might argue that the concept of reason which undergirds the Kantian position is inadequate to express the a priori necessities and actualities of the human person. Schleiermacher tried to do something akin to this in developing his notion of "feeling" as an a priori potentiality in man for apprehending the Divine. This approach is also to be found in the Maréchal school of neo-Thomism, which adopts the Kantian standpoint and works from within it in order to find a way out of the impasse by showing that the Kantian standpoint is limited—that in fact even by using the transcendental method it can legitimately be extended to allow for knowledge of God.

Or, thirdly, one could follow Barth's own method and refuse to play into the hands of the dictator, philosophy. As Barth describes it, this third method of coping with the Kantian problem for theology would consist in "theology resigning itself to stand on its own feet in relation to philosophy, in theology recognizing the point of departure for its method in revelation, just as decidedly as philosophy sees its point of departure in reason, and in theology conducting, therefore, a dialogue with philosophy."⁹

Barth notes that Kant in his late work *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone* tried to produce a church dogmatic on the basis of reason alone.¹⁰ But this procedure had drastic consequences for the content of theology, as Barth hastens to point out: "What Kant does dispute is the idea that the reality and possibility of revelation, its availability as data for human reason, and its perception by human reason, are things which can be accounted for by philosophical means."¹¹ Barth says that he agrees with Kant: reason is not a sufficient basis for a church dogmatic. What one should do, then, in order to avoid the Kantian impasse, is to leave reason for the domain of philosophy and build a church dogmatic upon revelation. No other basis will suffice for theology.

This third approach, however, delineated and advocated by Barth, is not without its complications. If revelation and reason are so carefully allocated to different domains, how then is the desired "dialogue" between theology and philosophy supposed to occur? Moreover, it is scarcely possible to construct a theology of revelation without also implicitly presupposing and manifestly involving some theological employment of reason; and if this is so, is not such a theology merely postponing the inevitable confrontation with the Kantian criticisms?

These, according to Barth, are the three options open for a post-Kantian

9. Barth, *From Rousseau to Ritschl*, p. 191.

10. Barth's interpretation of Kant is largely based on this work and also on Kant's *Der Streit der Facultäten*.

11. Barth, *From Rousseau to Ritschl*, pp. 193, 194.

theological method. All of them have been tried, with varying results. On this basis, one might well ask: What is there to justify another attempt? Perhaps part of the problem lies in the difficulty of setting up adequate criteria or carefully defined stipulations in terms of which *any* theological approach can be justified. The whole problem of setting up explicit criteria for evaluating theological concept-formation, explanation, and explication will not be examined here, but in order to consider Rahner's theological method, two questions will be posed, as pertinent to the basic construction of any post-Kantian theology.

First of all: How do we know whether or not man is able to receive divine revelation? Is man in fact equipped to receive divine revelation? Or is man like other organic life which, so far as we can judge, is not in a position to act as recipient of divine revelation? Barth does not consider this question, whereas for Rahner it is of prime importance. The act and nature of divine revelation cannot be conceived of as standing outside the realm of human receptivity and response, and consequently cannot stand outside the human person considered in his totality (including his rationality). How adequate is Rahner's answer to this question?

Secondly, one may ask: In considering whether or not man is in a position to receive divine revelation, can the theologian refrain from undertaking the epistemological task in the light of the Kantian criticism? Barth's approach to this problem has already been indicated. Rahner and the Maréchal school of theology would want to preserve that cognitive basis for theology which Barth seems willing to forego. If such a basis is desired, the theologian cannot prescind from the prior task of epistemology. In what sense can man be said to be in a position in which, if God does choose to reveal himself to man, man can be said "to know" God. The theologian *qua* theologian must seek to relate the act of revelation to the act of human knowing. Failure to do so results, I think, in an impoverished view of revelation, and the whole theological enterprise is weakened because it lacks a sound epistemological basis. One's epistemology largely determines one's theology. How adequate is Rahner's epistemological basis?

II

Given the necessity for a post-Kantian theologian to relate the act of divine self-disclosure to human capacities for knowing, one may reasonably ask: How does one undertake such a formidable but essential task? One might, for instance, attempt to construct a theory of language in terms of which some rule of interpretability may be given to theological discourse. This is what Paul Tillich tried to do in his understanding of symbolism, and what neo-Thomism tries to do in a revamped understanding of analogy. Or, on the other hand, one might attempt to ground the possibility of theology in the nature of man and his cognizing activities. This latter method has been adopted by several Protestant theologians influenced by Heidegger, e.g. Heinrich Ott, John B. Cobb, Jr., and James M. Robinson. Moreover,

on the Catholic side there have been the Maréchal school of theology and certain theologians influenced both by Maréchal and by Heidegger, e.g. Karl Rahner, Emerich Coreth, and J. B. Metz. Interestingly enough, if we follow Rahner's line of investigation in *Geist in Welt*,¹² this latter approach seems also to have been Aquinas's procedure, and this observation affords Rahner a perspective in which he can come to terms with the Kantian problem.¹³

The "Foreword" to the second edition of *Geist in Welt* describes some of the circumstances surrounding its publication. Karl Rahner, S.J., had been ordained priest in 1932, and in 1934 he had been sent by his superiors in the Society of Jesus to study philosophy in Freiburg, his birthplace, where since 1928 Martin Heidegger had taught. Here Rahner's previous familiarity with the thought of the Maréchal school of neo-Thomism and the whole attempt to render Kant's transcendental method fruitful for Thomist epistemology was complemented by acquaintance with Heidegger's phenomenological approach. He chose for his PH.D. dissertation topic Aquinas's epistemology, conceived not so much as a topic of historical inquiry but as a philosophical investigation in which the thought of St. Thomas was pitted in dialogue with contemporary philosophical concerns. In May, 1936, he submitted his work as his PH.D. dissertation, but his supervisor, Martin Honecker, refused to accept it. As a result, Rahner did not receive his PH.D. in philosophy, but the work was published as *Geist in Welt* in 1939 at Innsbruck, where he obtained his doctorate in theology.¹⁴ It should also be mentioned that in 1937 at the Salzburg summer school Rahner gave a series of lectures on "the Foundations of a Philosophy of Religion," material which was later presented as *Hörer des Wortes*,¹⁵ first published in 1941, and in many ways a sequel to *Geist in Welt*.

In *Geist in Welt* Rahner is chiefly concerned to express the essential insights of Aquinas's epistemological undergirding of theology in fundamentally Heideggerian terminology, in order to show that Kant's rejection of the possibility of theology is invalid. Such complexity of purpose accounts in some ways for the complexity of organization of Rahner's thought in *Geist in Welt*. In this work he seeks to do a multiplicity of tasks at once. He seeks to open up the Thomism of the 1930's; he seeks to show how Heideggerian anthropology needs for proper fulfilment the Thomistic understanding of man-in-the-world; he seeks to show how theology is possible, given Kant's criticisms. In examining Rahner's complex thought and

12. Karl Rahner, *Geist in Welt* (Innsbruck: F. Rauch, 1939); second edition revised by J. B. Metz (Munich: Kösel, 1957). All quotations are from the second revised edition.

13. This is not to neglect or underrate the importance for Aquinas of analogical understanding of discourse as providing an adequate semantical basis for the appropriate interpretation of theological language. Aquinas's theological method involves both a semantic rule and a definite ontology. In *Geist in Welt*, however, Rahner focusses attention solely on the ontology of the knowing act.

14. For details of Rahner's life, see Herbert Vorgrimler, *Karl Rahner* (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1965).

15. Karl Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes* (Munich: Kösel-Pustet, 1941); second edition revised by J. B. Metz (Munich: Kösel, 1963).

difficult terminology, two inseparable questions, which will prove indispensable to an evaluation of his answer to the two over-all questions already stated, will be kept in mind: (1) How does Rahner show that theology is possible? and (2) How does Rahner move from anthropology to theology?¹⁶

Briefly, Rahner's answer to both questions is this: The nature of man permits the possibility of theology. Man is such that he possesses the a priori possibility of knowing God if God should choose to reveal himself. As is discovered at the end of the whole inquiry, man by definition can know God.¹⁷ The act of divine self-disclosure can be correlated meaningfully with man's structure as a knowing, willing, feeling, acting person in his total environment. Man, as he actually is, is in a position to receive, understand and respond to this disclosure. In *Geist in Welt* Rahner simply attempts to establish this possibility of man's openness to an act of revelation, should God choose to grant a moment of revelation. Rahner's task, as he sees it, is essentially to construct an adequate epistemology, based on an examination of man's nature, on which theology can be built.

Consequently, he is not doing theology as such in *Geist in Welt* but is laying the foundations for theology, thereby establishing theology as a possible enterprise—not an inconsiderable task in itself. (As is not surprising, the conclusions he reaches about the nature of man enter into his understanding of how revelation occurs, and also into his presentation of its content. This can be discerned in his later theological writings.) In *Geist in Welt* he is simply investigating the fundamental issue of man's relationship to God, whether and how man is positively open to a divine revelation, without there being any necessity that this revelation should take place. In his subsequent work, *Hörer des Wortes*, Rahner deals with the further question: Given that God does in fact reveal, what theological dynamics are involved in God as revealer and man as recipient of divine revelation?

III

The words *Geist in Welt* defy adequate translation into English, for *Geist* and *Welt* are being used in specialized senses, and it will be part of this analysis to explicate them. The book's subtitle—"On the Metaphysics of Finite Knowledge According to Thomas Aquinas"—gives a more precise indication of its contents.

As in many works of German philosophy, the Introduction to *Geist in Welt* is the most valuable commentary on the work. In the Introduction Rahner makes a number of important points about his subject-matter.

First of all, Rahner begins by announcing the purpose of the work: "It

16. It would be an interesting study to compare Rahner and Bultmann on this point, and to ask each with Helmut Gollwitzer why "... it is essential to Christian faith to speak of God's independent reality and 'externality', why that is essential to it" (H. Gollwitzer, *The Existence of God as Confessed by Faith* [London: S.C.M. Press, 1965], p. 26).

17. This summary statement would be adequate if "definition" were interpreted as the act of pursuing a transcendental inquiry, "can" as possibility, and "know" as "hear" in Rahner's own sense.

is proposed in this work to present part of the Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge. Comprehension of this intention demands an introductory clarification concerning the object of the inquiry and the manner of treatment."¹⁸ By "Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge" Rahner means the work of Aquinas himself, and he comments: "We take upon ourselves here the right to seek to understand him directly without consulting commentators and the testimony of the schools."¹⁹

This means, moreover, that Rahner intends to do philosophy, not history. He is concerned, not simply with exegeting the texts of Aquinas, but with developing Thomistic notions for employment in confrontation with the problems of contemporary philosophy. He wants to connect the problematic of Thomas's philosophy with the problematic of today's philosophy,²⁰ and by "today's philosophy" he means the whole phenomenological movement of Heidegger and Husserl back through Hegel and Fichte to Kant. In fact, Rahner says: "If the reader gets the impression that the work here is a Thomistic interpretation presented in terms of modern philosophy, the author simply observes that such a performance is not a deficiency but the accomplishment of the book."²¹

How, then, does Rahner intend to pose such a confrontation? He notes initially that his special aim restricts the range of the whole enterprise. There must be a focal point, and Rahner finds this in the understanding of the possibilities of human cognition. But, he cautions, he is engaging not in a critique of knowledge, but in a "metaphysics of cognition."²² In opposition to Kant he seeks to develop a noetic hylomorphism, that is, an adequate understanding of man's knowing abilities in relation to the ontological structures of man's being and his situation in-the-world.

This is an important point, and it raises the question: Is Rahner pursuing a phenomenological task in the hope of arriving at a fundamental realistic ontology, or does he presuppose a realistic ontology right at the beginning? If the latter, then how does he come to terms with the whole philosophical tradition of "Kant to Heidegger"? If the former, then how does he accomplish the leap from the phenomenological position to the objective position implied in Thomistic realism? Rahner's interest is not just in the apprehension of the subject, but in the synthesis achieved in an act of cognition between the objective and the subjective components of the whole process of cognizing. This crucial issue will not be examined in this paper, although it is an important one, for it involves the whole question of what method Rahner in fact employs. Part of our difficulty in answering this question stems from the fact that it is extremely hard to determine where *Geist in Welt* actually begins—in Part I, or Part II, or Part III? Moreover, nowhere

18. Rahner, *Geist in Welt*, p. 11.

19. *Ibid.* Part of this seeming over-defensiveness can be interpreted in the light of the position of neo-Thomism in the mid-1930's.

20. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 13.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 13f.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

does Rahner actually state his method, or defend it, or even explain how the various parts of the book are interrelated.

The title *Geist in Welt* is explained in preliminary terms. *Geist* does not simply mean "spirit" or "mind," but is used rather to indicate the human capability or power to reach beyond the world to grasp the metaphysically real. *Welt* does not simply mean "world" or "environment," but is used rather as the name of the reality accessible to man's immediate experience:²³ "How human knowledge as described by St. Thomas can be *Geist in Welt*: that is the question with which this work is concerned."²⁴ To speak of man as "*Geist in Welt*" is simply another way of saying that man, as a hylomorphic being, has noetic possibilities that include the possibility of being a hearer or knower of God. Rahner says here that the crucial Thomistic notion that enters is the *conversio ad phantasma*, the turning to phantasms, in the activity of cognition. What this strange, yet crucial, Latin phrase refers to will be indicated subsequently.

Rahner also explains in the Introduction that Part I is a commentary on a text of St. Thomas in which the importance of the *conversio ad phantasma* is presented. This survey of Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge yields the question. Part II develops systematically the problem of the *conversio ad phantasma* as it arises in connection with the metaphysical question. Part III affords a short introduction concerning the prospects for metaphysics, its possibilities, and its limits.²⁵

IV

Part I of *Geist in Welt* is a commentary on the *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 84, a. 7. The second edition conveniently prints Aquinas's Latin on one side and the German translation on the other, thus affording a valuable aid in tracing the peculiar meanings of some of Rahner's terminology.

Rahner states that in this section he is specifically looking for three things to develop later in relation to contemporary philosophy: (1) he wants to examine intellectual knowledge, for, by showing the possibility of this, the possibility of metaphysics is opened up, and this constitutes the point of entry for theology; (2) he wants to consider *Welt* as the fundamental human source of knowing, containing and comprehending in itself the possibility of more than *Welt*; and (3) in and through *Welt* he wants to open up the possibility of a horizon beyond *Welt*.²⁶

Rahner concentrates his analysis on five main points raised by St. Thomas Aquinas, for these, he suggests, express the essential Thomistic insights in terms of which he wants to dialogue with contemporary philosophy. This analysis is contained in his commentary on that section of *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 84, a. 7, which he entitles "the metaphysics of the *conversio*

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 14f.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

25. It is to be regretted that even here Rahner does not afford a clue concerning the over-all scheme of the work or the unity of each part with the whole.

26. Cf. Rahner, *Geist in Welt*, p. 32.

ad phantasma," and, in his opinion, it represents the essential points of any adequate metaphysics of knowing. In the Latin text these five points are marked off by five *autem*'s.

The first aspect of a metaphysics of knowing is the notion that the object of knowledge is always in due proportion to the knowing function which grasps it. This means that the object of knowledge is intrinsically and a priori related to the ability of the recipient to know. What is known is known in an appropriate fashion, and what is possible for knowledge is possible only for a certain type of intellect, as thus constructed a priori. What it is possible for angels to know is related to their ability to know; similarly for man, and presumably similarly for cats and dogs. It is part of Rahner's task to investigate what it is possible for man to know on the basis of the a priori conditions of human cognition that can be uncovered ("laid bare").

Secondly, the context for human knowledge and for human being is *die Welt*, and *die Welt* signifies "the dimension of time and space and its implications for human knowing."²⁷ But, as Rahner points out, Aquinas observed that the human intellect does not simply observe things, but the nature of things, and knows them to be what they in fact are.²⁸

Thirdly, it follows that the object of human cognition is the nature of things-in-the-world. "Things" in this sense are to be interpreted not simply as objective entities that confront us in the act of cognition, but as including in addition the self-apprehension of being as being ("being present to itself") in cognitive activity.

Fourthly, we know through the processes both of sensation, in which we perceive the forms of materiality, and of imagination, which is not the faculty of inventing fond ideas but the creative aspect of the human mind as it abstracts from particular things, forming mental images of them, and abstracting general ideas from them.

Fifthly, "therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual."²⁹ This mysterious notion of turning to the phantasms is an intricate yet essential point in Rahner's exposition. He points out that, in Aquinas's thought, it is the phantasms that make possible intellectual knowledge, thus establishing a basis for metaphysical knowledge, and hence the possibility of man's being in a position to receive and interpret divine revelation.

A phantasm is basically a mental representation, in a knowing act, of an object of knowledge. It is the likeness of a sensible object, being the form of an entity as it exists in knowledge and which *qua* objective given is yet determinative of the act of knowing in so far as that depends upon sense perception. In one sense the phantasm represents *an object for* the mind in

27. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

29. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 84, a. 7; translated by Anton C. Pegis, *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Random House, 1945), vol. I, 809.

human cognition. In another sense it is *an instrument of* the mind in its activity of coming to form the conceptual representations of objects. In addition, the phantasm provides the basis for mental abstraction, in which the mind in its activity illumines or abstracts from these forms of objects to provide general, abstract ideas. In this way the phantasm, both as the mental given of sense perception and as the instrument of abstraction, mediates non-empirical knowledge on the basis of empirical cognition. This opens up a "horizon" beyond the conditions of empirical reality.

At this point in the commentary on Aquinas Rahner does not explore this topic, although he does indicate that it is the problematic of the whole work.³⁰ In fact, the role which the phantasm does play in cognitive activity is considered in 140 closely argued pages of Part II of *Geist in Welt*.³¹

Rahner concludes the commentary by saying that one cannot escape or bypass the existential conditions of knowing, of man's being-in-the-world (and this Aquinas fully recognized), but that even on this basis there is a way in which man can and does have mediated knowledge of what is beyond-*Welt*.

Part II begins abruptly by considering the starting point of the metaphysical question. The basis of the metaphysical question lies in the fact that man questions.³² "This is an ultimate and irreducible fact."³³ Moreover, man *qua* man questions necessarily: "This necessity can be grounded in the fact alone that man discovers being generally as questionableness [as being in a position to be questioned] and in that [process] he himself *qua* questioning being is an existent only in his being a being asking the question of being."³⁴ Or more simply: "Man exists as the one who asks the question of being."³⁵

In Part II Rahner adopts this stance as the starting point of his reflection on the possibility of metaphysics. That possibility lies in the self-performance of man, i.e. in the activities of man most characteristic of man—e.g. man's acts of questioning, thinking, willing. And from these "performances" or "achievements"—words indicating both the doing of an act and the accomplishment of an act—a whole metaphysics "is laid bare."

But Rahner is not simply describing an anthropology as such, seen as part from a theology, or the opposite. He wants to locate theology within an anthropology, without doing violence to either or negating either. Ordinary human experience supports the insistence of Aquinas and Rahner that man has no direct knowledge of entities other than those found in the material, sensible world on which cognition is based, and what can be abstracted from these. Man is, after all, "*Geist in Welt*," and the limiting factors of *die Welt* must be taken seriously, just as seriously as *Geist*.

30. Cf. Rahner, *Geist in Welt*, p. 63.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 243-383.

32. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 71.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

What are the a priori conditions of the possibility of human knowing? The starting point is a definite act of knowledge, such as the question: "What is that?"—by no means a simple question, as Hegel showed in the first section of *The Phenomenology of Mind*. By using the transcendental method³⁶ Rahner finds that the condition of the possibility of even asking such a question is that the questioner must be open to being as such and must attain the infinite in some way or other before each and every particular act of cognition. To know is not simply to bring together the elements of a judgment, but to judge from the point of view of being, that is, from the point of view of the totality of existents, which transcends, yet is present in, every particular existent. Rahner has already pointed out the close connection between being and knowing (*Sein und Erkenntnis*) in Aquinas's metaphysics of knowing, and with reference to the metaphysical question that has just now been brought to light in *Geist in Welt* he re-expresses this insight as follows: "Knowing is the being-present-to-itself of being, and this being-present-to-itself of being is the Being of beings."³⁷ Here is present the unthematic grasp of being, and this apperception precedes all possible knowledge, conditions it, and grounds its truth. All particular, contingent knowledge is unified by a knowledge of the Absolute.

Man is bounded by the limitations of the spatio-temporal horizon, the horizon of *Welt*. But man has also been shown to have some knowledge of being, in so far as he asks the question of being; as such he is *Geist*, transcending *Welt*. Nonetheless, he is *Geist in Welt*, where *Welt* includes space, time, and history. Man tries throughout his existence to make his dim grasp of being more intelligible, more precise—in Rahner's terms, to make his unthematic knowledge of being thematic. Beyond the horizon of *Welt* there is the horizon of openness to being, to being as such.

In man's quest for being, it is the presence of the Absolute in every moment of this quest that makes possible the recognition of limitation. This allows the mind to recognize the limited character of its cognitive acts, and in perceiving its limitations to perceive at the same time its unboundedness. Man is consequently "openness to the infinite" while yet "*Geist in Welt*." The mind in its cognitive activity can at once apprehend the individual existent, perceive its limitedness as to being, and, consequently, by turning to the phantasm, recognize its own openness to unlimitedness, to the Absolute.

The account of the dynamics of the precise operation of the *conversio ad phantasma* forms a very difficult section of *Geist in Welt*, and justice cannot be done here to the depth of Rahner's position. Rahner discovers in the operation of the *conversio ad phantasma* an a priori condition in man,

36. What Rahner means by "the transcendental method" is not explicitly made clear, nor his frequent metaphor of "laying bare" the a priori conditions of cognition.

37. Rahner, *Geist in Welt*, p. 82. Nikolaus Lobkowitz considers this to be Rahner's fundamental philosophical contribution (with all that a full exegesis of it would involve); cf. N. Lobkowitz, "Zu K. Rahners 'Geist in Welt,'" *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*, 67 (1958), 406.

enabling man to move from the grasp of being limited to the horizon of *Welt* to the transcendence of *Welt* in the horizon of *Geist*, in which man is the unity and the totality of *Geist in Welt*.

Thus in Part III of *Geist in Welt* Rahner argues that metaphysics is seen to be both possible and necessary, even for a knowing subject whose grasp of notions is confined to the nature of objects perceived by sense, because in every judgment human cognition transcends the world of space and time to apprehend, in its a priori drive, the unconditioned Absolute.

v

In answer to Kant's strictures on theology, Rahner claims to have pushed beyond the horizon of time and space by showing how man has in fact a dim grasp of what transcends this horizon. Man has this dim grasp in the apperception of being, absolute being, which is present in every act of cognition. Man is in a position to be a hearer of the word of God and, should a moment of revelation occur, theology as such is possible. The possibility of metaphysics, and hence the possibility of theology, is rooted in an ontology of the knowing person. Actual perusal of the dynamics of man's cognitive activity discloses man's openness to infinite being and his unceasing quest to make his imprecise apprehension of being clearer.

The possibility of theology, as far as man is concerned, is grounded in an anthropology. Rahner's anthropology is not set alongside of Kant's, as if one might choose one or the other as one's fancy pleased. It is an anthropology to replace Kant's, argued for by the same method as Kant employed, yet extending Kant's conclusions by means of insight into the *conversio ad phantasma*, which is presented, not as an artificial construction or a clever concoction, but rather as a way of describing how man in his cognitive activity actually operates. Does this account adequately describe our cognizing activity, or are there factors which Rahner ignores? The answer to this question will largely determine our evaluation of Rahner's anthropology.

In my view, it is surely along some such lines that Kant's criticisms are to be met. Kant's strictures on the possible range of human knowledge, with all its implications for theology as a cognitive enterprise, are neither to be ignored nor to be adopted or extended without critical inquiry. The crucial question is this: Is Kant's anthropology, and particularly his account of man's cognizing activity, totally adequate, as it stands, to account for the way in which man does in fact operate in a cognitive situation, or need it be revised in some respects, perhaps along the lines indicated by Rahner?

In basing theology upon an understanding of anthropology, Rahner tries to steer clear of the Scylla and Charybdis of Hegel and Feuerbach. Anthropology is not consumed by theology, nor is theology reduced to anthropology. Rahner's view is presented in detail in Part III of *Geist in Welt*, particularly in the section dealing with man as "*Geist in Welt*," but it is perhaps more simply stated in his article entitled "*Anthropozentrik*," in the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*:

The exteriority of theology compared with anthropology stems from the fact that man by his essence has a centre outside himself, in God. In so far as he accepts this exteriority and recognizes that his centre is in God, he is enabled to find himself in the truth. Any attempt to transcend himself in an anti-anthropomorphic way, whatever direction it may take, is inhuman and therefore against God. One draws close to God not by becoming less oneself, but through the knowledge and humble realization that it is God who has called all things into being (Wis. 1:14). This principle is even truer in the order of the Incarnation. Since the Word has been made Flesh, the opposition between man-centred and God-centred views is overcome . . . , and henceforth there is no theology, either practical or speculative, which is not at the same time an anthropology.³⁸

In many ways what Rahner has been trying to do and say in *Geist in Welt* is summed up in the last paragraph of this work, where in fact he prepares the way for the argumentation of *Hörer des Wortes*:

Aquinas as theologian is concerned with man as the point at which God shows himself in such a way that he can be heard in his revealing word: *ex parte animae*. In order to be able to hear whether God is speaking, we must know that he is; in order that his word should not reach someone who already knows, he must be hidden from us. In order that he should speak to men, his word must reach us where we are always already present, at a point on earth, in earthly time. In so far as man enters into the world, by turning to the phantasm, being as such is always already revealed to him and in it he has already acquired a knowledge of the existence of God; but at the same time also this God always remains concealed as transcending this world. Abstraction is the disclosure of being as such, which places man before God; conversion is an entry into the here and now of this finite world, which makes God the distant Unknown. Abstraction and conversion for Aquinas are the same thing: man. If man is understood in this way, he can hear whether God perhaps is speaking, because he knows that God is; God can speak, because he is the Unknown. And if Christianity is not an idea of the eternal, ever-present spirit, but of Jesus of Nazareth, Aquinas's epistemology is Christian in as much as it recalls man to the here and now of his finite world; for the Eternal also entered into it, in order that man should find him and in him once again find himself.³⁹

APPENDIX: BIBLIOGRAPHY RELEVANT TO *Geist in Welt*

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