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# Philosophy and Theology in the Early Philipp Melanchthon<sup>1</sup>

Jon S. Bruss

What position does philosophy hold in relation to Lutheran theology? Students of Lutheran dogmatics might be quick to point out that despite the plethora of Latin terms that pepper our systematic theology, those quasi-philosophical terms like the oxymoronic and therefore philosophically untenable phrase *modus praesentiae illocalis* (“the non-local mode of ‘being there’”) are often the invention of orthodox Lutheran scholastics (and others) working out a language that as closely as possible maps over biblical data points without making any philosophical claim whatsoever. And they would be correct in saying so. They might be just as quick to mention that when the formulators distinguished between *substantia* and *accidens* (FC Ep I 23), two philosophical terms with a long history in metaphysics, they were simply setting up camp on the philosophical turf staked out by Flacius so as to argue quite literally on his own terms. And they would be correct in saying so. They might be equally ready to point to Luther’s strong anti-philosophical works in the early 1520s. And

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used in this article:

- AE *Luther’s Works, American Edition*. Vols. 1–30, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–1976; vols. 31–55, edited by Helmut Lehmann, Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986; vols. 56–82, edited by Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–.
- St.A. Robert Stupperich et al., eds. *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl [Studienausgabe]*. 7 vols. in 9. Gütersloh: Mohn/Bertelsmann, 1951–.
- PL Jacques-Paul Migne, ed. *Patrologia Latina*. 221 vols. Paris: Migne, 1841–1865.
- CR *Corpus Reformatorum*. Vols. 1–28, *Philippi Melanchthonis opera quae supersunt omnia*, edited by Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider and Heinrich Ernst Bindseil. Halle: Schwetschke, 1834–1860.
- WA *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*. 73 vols. Weimar: Böhlau, 1883–2009.
- Salazar Philip Melanchthon. *Orations on Philosophy and Education*. Edited by Sachiko Kusu-kawa. Translated by Christine F. Salazar. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999.
- Parker Philip Melanchthon. *Paul’s Letter to the Colossians*. Translated by D. C. Parker. Sheffield: Almond, 1989.
- Preus Philip Melanchthon. *Commonplaces: Loci Communes 1521*. Translated by Christian Preus. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014.

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they would be correct in doing so as well.<sup>2</sup> All these points would seem to lead to one conclusion: The handmaiden has been relieved of her duty by the queen; philosophy has been entirely ejected from Lutheran theology. This conclusion may, in fact, well represent the current popular consensus. To test this conclusion this article returns to the very inception of the Lutheran tradition and examines the oeuvre of the early Philipp Melanchthon.

The newly minted Tübingen master of arts was called to the University of Wittenberg as a professor of Greek on the philosophical faculty—the faculty of arts—in 1518. His job: to spearhead the humanistic reform of that faculty. In the reformatory environment of Wittenberg he quickly became interested in theology, earned the bachelor of divinity in 1519,<sup>3</sup> and was given a joint appointment to the faculties of the arts and theology. The first “systematic theology” of what would become the church of the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon’s *Loci Communes*, appeared in 1521. It was this inter-faculty cross-germination embodied in the person of Philipp Melanchthon along with the *ad fontes* orientation of both the Wittenberg Reformation and the Northern European Renaissance that proved to be so fruitful for him—and for the Evangelical Lutheran church—in thinking through the relationship between philosophy and theology, if there was to be any at all.

Indeed, initially it seemed there might be none whatsoever. For concomitantly with his burgeoning interest in theology Melanchthon was swept up into the anti-philosophical mood of Luther. In the 1517 *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* the latter had half sunk a nail in philosophy’s coffin by stating, “It is an error to say that one does not become a theologian without Aristotle.”<sup>4</sup> For Melanchthon, the anti-philosophical moment of the early Wittenberg Reformation perhaps came to a head for him just over a year later as a witness of the mash-up at the 1519 Leipzig Debate, where he saw firsthand the clash between the biblical theology of Luther and the Aristotle-inflected theology of Johann Eck. In an open letter to Oecolampadius on the Leipzig Debate he exasperatedly cried out, “How great a distance there is

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<sup>2</sup> Even if in his maturity Luther’s position changed significantly. See Dan Liroy and Jordan Cooper, “The Use of Greek Philosophy in Early Lutheranism,” *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 26, no. 1 (2018): 1–26.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, “Annales Vitae Philippi Melanthonis,” in *CR* 1:cxlx.

<sup>4</sup> In *WA* 1:226 (= *AE* 31:12). All translations are the author’s own. See also Luther’s *Heidelberg Disputation* (1518), in *WA* 1:353–374 (= *AE* 31:35–70). And see his *Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* (1520), in *WA* 6:457–458 (= *AE* 44:200–201): In *On the Soul* Aristotle taught “things of which he had not the slightest perception;” his *Ethics* is “directly contrary to God’s will and Christian virtues” (*WA* 6:458 [= *AE* 44:201]); “the universities [are], as at present ordered, but, as the book of Maccabees says, ‘schools of “Greek fashion” and “heathenish manners”’ [2 Macc 4:12–13] . . . where . . . the blind heathen teacher, Aristotle, rules even further than Christ” (*WA* 6:457 [= *AE* 44:200]). Still, Luther can accept Aristotle’s *Logic*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*, along with Cicero’s *Rhetoric*, though in every case without the scholastic commentaries (*WA* 6:458 [= *AE* 44:201]).

between the ancient theology—the one that belongs to Christ—and the novel and Aristotelian one.”<sup>5</sup>

Distance, yes. But a far cry from what was at least *heard* as the wholesale rejection of Aristotle and philosophy by the early Luther.<sup>6</sup> In fact, Melanchthon’s early criticism of philosophy is very much a reflection of his humanist *ad fontes* orientation. In the learned, polished Latin of his inaugural address at Wittenberg in 1518, “De Corrigendis Adolescentiae Studiis” (On rectifying the studies of the youth), the problem with theology—even with Aristotle himself—was not so much Aristotle as his inept scholastic heirs. The latter worked from poor Latin translations of the Greek text, and study of Aristotle was replaced by the study of comments upon comments upon comments.<sup>7</sup> Nor was the faculty whom he addressed in “De Corrigendis” spared from Melanchthon’s critique—no choir-preacher, he—for when Philipp arrived in Wittenberg in 1518, philosophy was taught in the attenuated manner he outlined in “De Corrigendis.” Three competing schools of Aristotle interpretation were, confusingly, represented on the one faculty—the ways (*viae*) of Thomas, Scotus, and Gregory of Rimini.<sup>8</sup> With that speech began a continuous reform of the philosophical faculty. The lectures according to the three *viae* were at first gradually reduced and ultimately done away with, to be replaced by lectures on Aristotle’s *Organon*. By 1523 and the issuance of a new *Studienordnung*, even the lectures on the *Organon* were eliminated in deference to the study of “the three languages” (*trium linguarum studium*—Hebrew, Greek, and Latin), rhetoric, classical literary authors, and Pliny’s *Natural History*.<sup>9</sup> Three years later there arrived another—for our pursuit important—change. The *Studienordnung* for the philosophical faculty of January 10, 1526, maintained the curriculum in roughly the same form, though with the important addition of dialectic.<sup>10</sup> This *Ordnung* remained in place until 1545, when, once again under Melanchthon’s leadership, a new curriculum for the philosophical

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<sup>5</sup> “inter veterem et Christi theologiam ac noviciam et Aristotelicam quantum intersit.” Philipp Melanchthon to Johannes Oecolampadius, July 21, 1519, in *CR* 1:88 (no. 43).

<sup>6</sup> Luther’s venom toward Aristotle seems to be at least partly, if not mainly, what instigated the student rebellion against the arts faculty in the early 1520s. See below, n. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, “De Corrigendis Adolescentiae Studiis,” in *CR* 11:15–25; *St.A.* 3:30–42. Available in English in Ralph Keen, trans., *A Melanchthon Reader* (New York: Lang, 1988), 47–57.

<sup>8</sup> Heinz Scheible, “Die Philosophische Fakultät der Universität Wittenberg von der Gründung bis zur Vertreibung der Philippisten,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 98 (2007): 12–13; on the *viae*, see also Heiko Oberman, “*Via Antiqua* and *Via Moderna*: Late Medieval Prolegomena to Early Reformation Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987): 23–40.

<sup>9</sup> Scheible, “Philosophische Fakultät,” 23–29.

<sup>10</sup> Scheible, “Philosophische Fakultät,” 31.

faculty was adopted. This time Aristotle is specifically mentioned: his *Physics* and *Ethics* are to serve as the basis for courses in those areas.<sup>11</sup>

These changes seem to map over what was happening in the intellectual world of Philipp: for from 1519 through 1526 or 1527 he was working gradually through a doctrine of philosophy and theology. In the prefatory letter to his 1521 *Loci Communes* to Tilemann Plettener, Philipp decries “Aristotelian sophistries” (*Aristotelicae argutiae*).<sup>12</sup> Here Philipp of course has in mind much the same sentiment as he communicated to Oecolampadius in 1519—the wide gulf between biblical theology and Aristotle-inflected theology.<sup>13</sup> But another implicit comparison adumbrates his sense of how the scholastics “have fallen into delirium” (*hallucinati sint*): their infatuation with Aristotle has led them to take their eye off the ball. Thus, unlike the prodigious output of the scholastic theologians, prodigious because its development relied upon Aristotle, Melanchthon’s treatment of theology will (a) be sparing and brief; (b) do nothing more than introduce a list of topics with brief adumbration; and, most importantly, (c) *serve as a foundation for reading and understanding the Scriptures*. Melanchthon’s purpose in the *Loci Communes* is clear: his little tome should provide its reader with an entrée into the Scriptures. Even the secondary literature of the Wittenberg Reformation is oriented *ad fontes*. Indeed, “whoever seeks the shape of Christianity elsewhere than from Scripture in its canonical role is deceived” (*Fallitur quisquis aliunde christianismi formam petit, quam e scriptura Canonica*).<sup>14</sup> What governs theology is the Holy Scriptures, not the dictates of philosophy.

This notion gets an airing in the first locus of the *Loci Communes*, “De Hominis Viribus Adeoque de Libero Arbitrio” (On the powers of man, including free choice).<sup>15</sup> Here, Melanchthon asserts that philosophy, integrated with theology, has twice over made a wreck of the biblical teaching. First, it was Platonism. Early on, in Philipp’s account, Christian theology began to mix Platonism with Christian doctrine. This “brought in the . . . dangerous word ‘reason’ from the philosophy of Plato” (*Additum est e Platonis philosophia vocabulum Rationis . . . perniciosum*).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, in the Lutheran reforms of the University of Tübingen undertaken by Melanchthon’s friend Joachim Camerarius, Aristotle was awarded a much greater role. See Susan Mobley, “Making a University Lutheran: Philipp Melanchthon and the Reform of the University of Tübingen in the 1530s,” *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 21, no. 2 (Eastertide 2012): 41–45.

<sup>12</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, dedicatory letter to Tilemann Plettener, in *Loci Communes Rerum Theologicarum seu Hypotyposes Theologicae*, in CR 21:82 (= Preus, 20).

<sup>13</sup> Preus, 20n4.

<sup>14</sup> Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, in CR 21:82–83 (= Preus, 20–21).

<sup>15</sup> Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, in CR 21:86–97 (= Preus, 26–36).

<sup>16</sup> Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, in CR 21:86 (= Preus, 26–27). On the humanistic element of this critique, see Adolf Sperl, *Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation: Eine*

In the tripartite Platonic soul, reason outranks the spirit and the appetite. Knowledge of the Forms—that is, true knowledge—lies within the grasp of only the rational part of the soul. The philosophical task—here one may think of the Allegory of the Cave in Plato’s *Republic*—is twofold: (a) to free the soul from its dependence upon appearances so that (b) the reason, having espied the Forms, might rule and govern the spirited and appetitive parts, which operate on the basis of opinion and sensory perception based upon appearance. Salvation, according to Plato, is thus predicated upon intellectual attainment, and there is no need for Christ; in Platonically modulated Christianity, salvation is a sort of gnosis.<sup>17</sup>

Second, somewhat simpler but related is Aristotle’s distinction between the intellectual part of the soul and the appetitive. Just as in Plato, the intellect has the ability to rule the appetites. When played out in the theological anthropology of medieval scholasticism, it became entirely permissible, in fact perhaps it was demanded, that it be within the power of the intellect to come to what the schoolmen called “unformed faith” (*fides informis*), derided by Melanchthon as “mere knowledge of the history” (*mera notitia historiae*) and no faith at all. In medieval theology, such *fides informis* “merited the first grace of justification . . . preeminently by the good work of believing God with his unformed faith.”<sup>18</sup> This is the famous scholastic *facere quod in se est*: the one who gains a *notitia historiae* has done what

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*Untersuchung über den Wandel des Traditionsverständnisses bei Melanchthon und die damit zusammenhängenden Grundfragen seiner Theologie* (München: Kaiser, 1959), 92, esp. n. 125.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Osborn, *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 159–181.

<sup>18</sup> David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1986), 37. To see this worked out in scholastic theology, see Helmut Feld, ed., *Wendelini Steinbach Opera exegetica quae supersunt omnia*, vol. 1, *Commentarium in epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1976), II.12.97.1–4, III.15.118.16–20, 16.131.6–10, 17.136.5–9, 21.176.13–21. See also Peter Lombard, the famous “Master of Sentences,” *Sent.* III. d. 23, c. 4 (PL 192.805):

What is it (a) to believe *in God* [*in deum*], or (b) to believe *God* [*deo*], or (c) to believe *God* [*deum*]? It is one thing to (a) believe in God, another to (b) believe God, and another to (c) believe God [to be]. To (b) believe God is to believe that the things he says are true, which even the wicked do. Even we believe a man, but not in a man. To (c) believe God [to be] is to believe that God himself exists, which even the wicked do. To (a) believe in God is to love by believing, to come to him by believing, to be joined to him by believing and to be incorporated amongst his members. Through this faith the unrighteous is justified so that finally the faith itself begins to work through love. Indeed, only those works are called good which come to fruition through the love of God. For this very love is called a work of faith. Therefore, the faith which the demons and false Christians have is a quality of the mind, but “unformed,” since it is without charity. For the Apostle shows that even the wicked have faith, even if they lack charity, when he says, 1 Corinthians 12 [13:2], “If I have all faith, but do not have charity, etc.” This faith, however, can also be said to be a gift of God, since some gifts of God are even in the wicked (Augustine, t. 8, *Enarratio* on Psalm 67).

is within himself. He has earned a *meritum de congruo* (“congruous merit”).<sup>19</sup> And with the powers of the intellective part of his soul enlightened he may now proceed to meritorious works of love, a “faith formed by love” (*fides caritate formata*) that produces the condign merits (*merita de condigno*) that sanctify him—making him righteous in himself—before God in heaven. Just as with Plato, so here, it is in the power of the intellective part of the soul to overcome the “lower,” appetitive part.

Philipp rejects such an injection of philosophy into theology. And yet, surprisingly, to erect his own anthropology, he deploys the following argument:<sup>20</sup>

- (1) Major premise: the human soul is bipartite.<sup>21</sup>
- (2) The bipartite soul comprises the “power of knowing” (*vis cognoscendi*) and the “will” (*voluntas*), which is both the seat of the emotions and controlled by them.
- (3) Minor premise: the soul is like a state in which there is both a senate and tyrant.
- (4) According to this analogy, the tyrant is the will and its affects, and the senate is the “power of knowing.”
- \* *Implicit: in such a state the tyrant will always rule the senate.*
- (5) The soul so formed must therefore always go as such a state does.
- (6) Therefore, it is not the “power of knowing” that subdues the will and its affects; it is the will and its affects that bring the “power of knowing” under their thumb.<sup>22</sup>
- (7) But the scholastics dream that the “power of knowing” has the power to control the will.
- (8) Based upon this control of the affects, the scholastics deduce that man has “free choice” (*liberum arbitrium*).
- (9) But the situation is actually the other way around. The affects control the “power of knowing.” Therefore, *liberum arbitrium* is a dream.

The argument is entirely naturalistic.<sup>23</sup> Melanchthon offers no explicit appeal, for example, to Romans 7:19, “the good that I would, that do I not do,” which would

<sup>19</sup> Gabriel Biel, *In secundum librum sententiarum* (Tübingen: Meyer et Otmar, 1501), dist. 27, qu. un., art. 3, dub. 4. For a brief summary of merit theory, see Carl L. Beckwith, ed., *Martin Luther’s Basic Exegetical Writings* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), viii–x.

<sup>20</sup> Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, in CR 21:86–87 (= Preus, 27–28).

<sup>21</sup> The distinction can be traced to Jean Gerson, *De Theologia Mystica Lectiones Sex*. Philipp Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521: Lateinisch-Deutsch*, trans. and ed. Horst Georg Pöhlmann (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerhard Mohn, 1993), 26–27n36.

<sup>22</sup> On the Scotist background of the subjection of knowledge to will, see Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1521: Lateinisch-Deutsch*, 28n37.

<sup>23</sup> This, despite the fact that “Die *Loci* 1521 arbeiten mit der einfachen, von Luther übernommenen Schau des totus homo” and that “Melanchthon nennt dies das ‘Herz’ und identifiziert es mit den psychologischen Kategorien ‘Wille’ und ‘Affekte.’” Peter Fraenkel,



well illustrate the strength of a wicked will. But it is difficult not to hear in the *vis cognoscendi* echoes of Paul's final salvo, "But I myself serve the law of God with my *mind*, but with my flesh, the law of sin" (Rom 7:25). Indeed, later in this locus Melanchthon's argumentation appeals directly to human experience. While external works (*externa opera*), such as greeting someone or not, are fully subject to human freedom, "by experience" (*experientia usuque*) we find that "the will, of its own, is unable to set aside love, hatred, etc.: when someone is spurned by one he loves, for example, he ceases any longer to love."<sup>24</sup> Even the works of the ancients that appear noble and virtuous are will driven. When a conflict of affects arises, it is not knowledge that informs the final choice but the relative strength of the competing affects. Alexander the Great, for example, "loved toil." But his love of toil was only an apparent virtue: although he also highly desired sensual pleasure, he desired glory even more, and toil, not sensual pleasure, was the factor of glory.<sup>25</sup> Similar arguments regarding the so-called virtuous pagans, largely philosophers, are brought to bear later in a discussion of the power of sin and its fruits. There, a whole battery of philosophers comes in for a licking: Socrates (twice), Xenocrates, Zeno, Marcus Tullius Cicero, and Plato, all of whom possessed "shades of virtue" beclouded by vicious motivation. And yet, even here, Melanchthon's derivation of their actions from *φιλαυτία* simply uses Epicurean doctrine to explain their motivation.<sup>26</sup>

Let me sum up my observations from the 1521 *Loci Communes*.

(1) To Melanchthon's mind, philosophical *doctrine* corrupts theology. When theologians adopt and then mesh Plato's and Aristotle's assignment of undue powers to the reason or the intellectual power of the soul into theology, the teaching of Scripture (in this case, scriptural anthropology) is corrupted or entirely destroyed.

(2) Reason, or the *vis cognoscendi*, can know what it is given to know. When Melanchthon declares that the law is pertinent to the *vis cognoscendi*, he means to say that, as a datum or set of data, the law is available to the mind.

(3) The doctrines of philosophy may be put to apologetic use. An insightful observation emanating from the Epicurean school may be used to critique apparently virtuous actions.

(4) If philosophy is teaching about things observable apart from the revelation of God, in theology philosophical arguments may be brought to bear against

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"Fünfzehn Jahre Melanchthonforschung: Versuch eines Literaturberichtes," in *Philipp Melanchthon: Forschungsbeiträge zur vierhundersten Wiederkehr seines Todestages dargeboten in Wittenberg 1960*, ed. Walter Elliger (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), 39. For the former claim, Fraenkel cites Bengt Häggglund, *De homine: människouppfattningen i äldre luthersk tradition* (Lund: Gleerup, 1959), esp. 181–214.

<sup>24</sup> Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, in CR 21:90 (= Preus, 32).

<sup>25</sup> Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, in CR 21:91 (= Preus, 33).

<sup>26</sup> Melanchthon, *Loci Communes*, in CR 21:99 (= Preus, 41–42).

philosophical doctrines. Above, I have called Melanchthon's counterargument to the scholastic interpretation of the intellectual powers of the soul "naturalistic." He argues, just as the philosophers do, on the basis of what is given—the data of the created world.

(5) Whether he has proven the primacy of the *voluntas* over the *vis cognoscendi* in the question of the *liberum arbitrium*—the free choice—to the standards of philosophy is up for debate. But this may be debated philosophically. We may ask: Are his (naturalistic) premises correct? Does his argument unobjectionably follow from his premises? Are his conclusions warranted? However, whether he has proven the primacy of the *voluntas* to the standards of theology is not up for debate. The answer is clear. He has not. What, then, is the value of philosophy within a work that purports to be theology?

It appears that we are no closer to an answer on the role of philosophy in theology, at least as far as Melanchthon is concerned, than when we first started. He appears to give with one hand and take away with the other. The question before us is really this: Is there any reconciliation between the pessimistic evaluation of philosophy in his foreword to Tilemann Plettener and his apparently unashamed use of philosophy in the locus on the *liberum arbitrium*? I argue that there is. But it will take time for Melanchthon to uncover it.

Indeed, over the course of the next several years Melanchthon's understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology both becomes clearer (to him) and comes into sharper focus (for us). In fact, I will argue, the way philosophy is handled in the 1521 *Loci Communes* actually represents (or comes to be represented by) a fully developed doctrine of the relationship between the queen and her handmaiden.

But the establishment—the articulation—of this relationship did not come easily, or immediately. The Wittenberg aversion to philosophy was hard to shake. In a 1520 letter to Amsdorf Melanchthon took up a Scripture passage that was to exercise him for the next six or seven years. Pointing to Colossians 2:8, "See to it lest anyone take you prey through philosophy and vain deceit," Philipp averred, "If [Paul] vehemently attacks the other doctrines of men, he emphatically, frankly, and loudly commands us to be on our guard 'lest anyone take us prey through philosophy.'" According to Philipp, "Saint Paul foresaw that all of Christianity [*rem Christianam*] would be toppled [*labefactandam*] by philosophical traditions." This is no wonder, according to Philipp, since by an astonishing consensus even the ancients themselves had condemned philosophy. To demonstrate this, Philipp promises Amsdorf to publish the text with commentary of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, in which Socrates is

ridiculed and pilloried, “lest our youth be unaware of the place to which antiquity had assigned [philosophy].”<sup>27</sup>

But 1520 was the same year in which *The Freedom of a Christian* was published. There, Luther brought a certain clarity on the distinction between law and gospel that had been in the works since 1518’s “Two Kinds of Righteousness.” This distinction between law and gospel would not only prove theologically fruitful for the Wittenberg Reformation but would also bear fruit in the educational and theological-educational culture that developed around Wittenberg. In a famous distillation, Luther puts the distinction like this: “a Christian is a perfectly free lord over all things and subject to no one; a Christian is a dutiful servant of all things, and subject to everyone.”<sup>28</sup> *Coram deo*, the gospel; *coram mundo* or *coram hominibus*, the law. Melanchthon’s 1521 or 1522 (the date cannot be determined) “Unterschiedt zwischen weltlicher und Christlicher Fromkeyt” (Distinction between worldly and Christian righteousness) demonstrates how he had assimilated this teaching. Echoing Luther’s sermon on twofold righteousness, Melanchthon also asserts two kinds of righteousness (*Fromkeyt*). The godly righteousness is the one that Christ along with the Holy Spirit works in us. Moved by the Holy Spirit to terror before God’s wrath over our sin, it grasps the grace and forgiveness of sins in Christ, gains a cheerful and hearty confidence in God, gives itself over to him in the expectation of every good, and in this way is renewed and enlightened.<sup>29</sup> The other righteousness, which is really our interest in this paper, is the “worldly” righteousness.

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, calls worldly righteousness *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* [Col 2:8, 2:20], “the order of the world” [*der Welt Ordnung*]. This consists in outward discipline, honorable conduct, good behavior, customs and usages; and reason [*Vernunft*] can grasp it. Yes, it has been implanted in the reason by God. Just as it has been implanted in a tree to bear this or that fruit, so has the understanding been implanted in man that we ought not to harm another, that we ought to maintain the common peace, that we ought to demonstrate self-discipline and self-restraint toward everyone.<sup>30</sup>

But that, his opening salvo in “Unterschiedt zwischen weltlicher und Christlicher Fromkeyt,” is as far as it goes for reason (*Vernunft*). He continues, “Human reason [*vernunft*] is incapable in and of itself of concluding anything certain vis-à-vis God.” Instead, he writes, reason underestimates God on two scores. It observes that in this life men get off for their sins scot-free and deduces that God is not so angered

<sup>27</sup> Philipp Melanchthon to Nikolaus von Amsdorf, December 1520, in CR 1:274–275 (no. 96).

<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), in WA 7:21.1–14 (= AE 31:344).

<sup>29</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, “Unterschiedt zwischen weltlicher und Christlicher Fromkeyt,” in St.A. 1:173; CR 1:525.

<sup>30</sup> Melanchthon, “Unterschiedt,” in St.A. 1:171–172; CR 1:523–524.

against sin, that hell cannot be so hot. It can therefore all the less grasp that God wishes to forgive sins and be so kindly toward us as to take up our cause.<sup>31</sup> Those are the limits of reason.

Still, though this passage may seem entirely unremarkable to those practiced at the art of understanding the two kinds of righteousness, three important points stand out. First, Melanchthon glosses *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* (Col 2:8, 2:20) as *der Welt Ordnung*, “the order of the world.” Second, this order can be grasped by reason (*Vernunft*). Third, it has been implanted upon man’s reason by God. The *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* are thus the creation of God. They exist both within man, in his reason, and outside of man, in the created world, so that there is a correspondence between the “implanted” *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* and the external *στοιχεῖα κόσμου*. As such, the external *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* are not only observable but also comprehensible—or, as Melanchthon puts it, “within our grasp.” Finally, the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* constitute an order, probably implied for Melanchthon in the term *κόσμος*. In other words, there is an orderliness, a tidiness, in all this, and the divinely established order is mapped upon mind and world reciprocally. It is within this reciprocal relationship that philosophy works.

Within five years, indeed, this insight has become fully developed with his 1526/1527 *Scholia in Epistolam Pauli ad Colossenses*.<sup>32</sup> There Melanchthon returns to that passage that much exercised his mind, Colossians 2:8, using it as a launchpad once again to take up his elaboration of the relationship between philosophy and theology.<sup>33</sup> His comments in the *Scholia* represent a significant amending or tempering of the views he had expressed as late as the 1520 letter to Amsdorf.

Melanchthon first places his entire discussion on Colossians 2:8 within the context of what he had developed in “Unterschiedt” (1521/1522). Paul’s dictum, “See to it that no one take you prey through philosophy and vain deceit,” establishes, according to Melanchthon, a comparison between human righteousness and Christian righteousness. Under or as part of human righteousness Melanchthon lays philosophy.

But now Melanchthon advances his argument beyond what he had written in “Unterschiedt.” Not reason but philosophy itself is “a true and good creature of God, for it is, itself, the judgment of reason which God has given to human nature as a true and certain thing in matters having to do with nature and society.”<sup>34</sup> To support

<sup>31</sup> Melanchthon, “Unterschiedt,” in St.A. 1:172; CR 1:524.

<sup>32</sup> In St.A. 4:210–303 (= Parker, 27–119). Perhaps as early as 1524; see Peter F. Barton, introduction to *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:209.

<sup>33</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:230–244 (= Parker, 46–57). The importance of his treatment of philosophy here is underscored by the fact that the “excursus” appeared already in 1527 as a monograph in Basel. Barton, introduction, in St.A. 4:209.

<sup>34</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:230 (= Parker, 46).

his attribution of the gift to God, he adduces Romans 2:15: “They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts.”

Still, he maintains the same caveats: “Insofar as philosophy is the science of speaking and [the science] of things having to do with nature and [the science] of social customs—and only about things having to do with nature and social customs, at that—it affirms and teaches what it grasps by certain reasoning.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, philosophy remains philosophy when it troubles itself with what is within its purview. And yet, its purview is large. In an incomplete list, Melanchthon mentions as philosophy’s range of expertise social customs, communicating (*loquendi*; literally, “speaking”), natural science, number, measurement, building, and the cure of disease. Indeed, “since you hear that these gifts have been bequeathed to nature by God you should all the more venerate this philosophy which God has given as a bulwark for life.”<sup>36</sup>

Before we get to some further distinctions, it is worth pausing for a moment to notice the breadth of what Melanchthon means by philosophy. We noticed, in “Unterschied,” that where for Luther the operative oppositions are gospel and law, *coram deo* and *coram hominibus*, righteousness of *faith* and righteousness of the *law*, for Melanchthon the opposition is *godly* righteousness and *worldly* righteousness, and the realm of worldly righteousness is that of reason—and now, in the 1526/1527 *Scholia*, of philosophy.<sup>37</sup> For Melanchthon, this is, of course, grounded in Romans 2:15, “they demonstrate that the work of the law is written on their hearts.”

To his way of thinking, however, the law was not simply the Decalogue and its scriptural elaborations. Nor did it include, in addition, merely the civil and ceremonial law of the Old Testament—though it did include them. The law was, to put it one way, that creature by which the Lord governed the rest of his creation. This applied to the natural world no less than to the social world, and in a way that extended

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<sup>35</sup> “Philosophia, quatenus est scientia loquendi et rerum naturalium et civilium morum et ea tantum de rebus naturalibus ac moribus civilibus, affirmat ac docet, quae certa ratione comprehendit.” Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:230. Here my translation differs greatly from that of Parker, 46: “Philosophy, to the extent that it is the skill of speaking about natural affairs and social customs, declares or teaches as much of natural affairs and social customs as it can understand by plain reasoning.”

<sup>36</sup> “quia audis haec dona Dei esse tradita naturae, multo magis debes hanc philosophiam venerari, quam Deus dedit ad vitae praesidia paranda.” Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:231. I deliberately part with D. C. Parker’s translation at this point, as well (Parker, 47), which reads “our nature” for my “nature.” The *nostra* is certainly not in the text, and it is likely that Melanchthon’s reciprocity notion underlies this: the natural world possesses number by God’s ordering; the human mind is capable of discerning number due to the divine gift of philosophy.

<sup>37</sup> See also Philipp Melanchthon, *De Discrimine Evangelii et Philosophiae* (1527), in CR 12:690 (= Salazar, 24).

beyond what was obvious because revealed.<sup>38</sup> Thus, for example, sun, moon, and stars move predictably in their courses according to the word of God (Gen 1:14–19); vegetative life grows according to predictable patterns: a celery seed will always produce a celery plant (Gen 1:11–13); and when two horses mate, a foal is born, not a puppy (Gen 1:24–25). As such, “that I might pass over the other parts, if the sun has been created in such a way that it constitutes and governs the year, observation of the sun’s course is necessary, for without observing its motions there are no distinctions between seasons and years. Wherefore it is not difficult to reach the conclusion that the observation of heavenly movements is both commended and commanded by God.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, if the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* outside of me are to have any of the value for me assigned them by God’s design, they must find within me some correspondence. The Lord has also stitched into his creation things not quite so obvious, such as space and number. Space and number, too, are governed by divine law.  $2 + 2$  is always 4 and never 5; the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is always equal to the sum of the square of the triangle’s two legs; the volume of a cylindrical space is always  $\pi$  times the radius squared times the height of the cylinder. Today we may consider all those truisms merely to be deductive observations about how space and number operate. But Melanchthon glosses Plutarch’s *θεὸν ἀεὶ γεωμετρεῖν*—“God is always doing geometry”—like this: “He governs all things and rules the heavenly courses and all nature *by a most certain law*.”<sup>40</sup> It is by divine law—the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου*—that those things are that way.

That being so, the study of all such things, of the ways in which the Lord governs the world—whether that study be called geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, natural philosophy, rhetoric, dialectic, ethics, grammar, even history and the *trium linguarum studium*—was the naturally demanded living out of the reciprocity and correspondence between the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου*, the divine law, internal and external to man, and it was the province of philosophy. In other words, philosophy, reason, the external *στοιχεῖα κόσμου*, and the law of God go hand in glove.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “Quod autem philosophia sit lex Dei, hinc quoque intelligi potest, quia est noticia causarum et effectuum naturalium, quae cum sint res ordinatae ex Deo, sequitur philosophiam esse legem Dei, quae est doctrina de illa divina ordinatione.” Melanchthon, *De Discrimine*, in CR 12:690 (= Salazar, 24).

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Philipp Melanchthon, “Praef. in Arithmeticon” (“Preface to Arithmetic”) (1536), in CR 11:289 (= Salazar, 94).

<sup>40</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, “Praefatio in Geometriam” (“Preface to Johannes Vogelin’s *Book on the Elements of Geometry*”) (1536), in CR 3:114 (= Salazar, 104).

<sup>41</sup> “These precepts of moral philosophy have been dug up from nature or gathered from the laws of nature which God has written in our minds. Nor did he wish those laws to be held less sacred than those which he engraved on stone for Moses.” Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:234 (= Parker, 50).

That said, in a fallen world, philosophy can—and often does—err. As Philipp takes up the errors of philosophy two more lines of thought can be discerned. The first we have already noted: philosophy has its realm—it is not more than “the science of speaking and of things having to do with nature and of social customs.” The second way philosophy goes awry is when it is pushed out along school lines. In Melanchthon’s estimation, the second is a derivative of errors in the first, transgressing the boundaries of philosophy.

To begin with the first, philosophy goes beyond its realm when it speaks of that of which it is not permitted to speak. “I say that philosophy is no more than this. It is that which proves nothing except by certain reason [*certa ratione*] or what has been observed by experience [*experientia animadversum*].”<sup>42</sup> “Observation by experience” speaks for itself. Whenever I put two things together with one thing I end up with three things. But it is specifically such observation that is the ground for “certain reason.” If two things added to one thing has always yielded three things and never a different amount of things, I am warranted on the basis of “certain reason” to declare that  $2 + 1 = 3$  and that this has been, is, and always will be true as long as this creation exists. It is among the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου*, a created law governing the creation, and it cannot be broken.

But when my observations are of an incomplete data set, or my inferences are unwarranted, or I speculate as to the existence of things I have never observed, I have gone beyond what philosophy, as Melanchthon thinks about it, allows. Three examples of this follow. (a) Every time I walk into the ocean, the further away from the shore I go, it gets deeper. I have also had the privilege of seeing the Appalachians (on land), the Rockies (on land), the Alps and Apennines (on land), and the Black Hills (on land). Mountains go up; the seabed goes down. I have never seen a mountain in the sea. I might therefore (incorrectly) deduce that there are no suboceanic mountains. This is due to an incomplete data set. (b) The world is the most stable object I know of. It has been here ever since I was born (and, to hear it told, long before), and it will be here after I die (which I deduce from the fact that the world continues on after others die). I might therefore (incorrectly) deduce that the world is eternal. This is due to an unwarranted inference. Finally, (c) noticing the color red in many things, and reasoning that red cannot be a thing if it has no essence, since “to be” implies the possession of an essence, I may (incorrectly) conclude on the basis of the predication in the phrase “being red” that there is an essence of red somewhere that is all red and nothing else—just perfect redness in itself. This is Platonism—and the fruit of mere speculation. In each of these cases, according to Melanchthon, I have been up to something other than philosophy, whose job is limited

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<sup>42</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:235 (= Parker, 50).

to “prov[ing] nothing except by certain reason or what has been observed by experience.”  $2 + 1 = 3$  is the conclusion of a true philosophy and a law stitched into the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου*. But, “There are no mountains under the sea,” “the world is eternal,” and “red *qua* the essence of red exists” are conclusions of a faulty philosophy and not laws.

And yet this is exactly what philosophy driven along school lines has a propensity toward. Indeed, says Melanchthon, “many questionable opinions have been mixed in with teachings true and certain.” But “to assent to uncertain and unverified things and to affirm them as verified, which does not happen infrequently, is most unworthy and most shameful for a philosopher.”<sup>43</sup>

This is precisely where philosophy collides with theology. It is also the fruit of philosophy driven along school lines. Melanchthon gives the following examples: Aristotle attributed eternity to the world; the Epicureans’ thoroughgoing materialism—ascribing a physical, atomic structure even to the soul of man—gives rise to and even demands Epicureanism’s self-absorbed pleasure ethic;<sup>44</sup> equally self-absorbed is the Stoics’ ethic of *apatheia*, not to mention inimical to such Christian virtues as mercy;<sup>45</sup> and the fact that all material things are a result of the random atomic swerve (a pillar of Epicureanism) comes to mean, in Epicureanism, that God—or rather, the gods—have no concern for or involvement in the created world.<sup>46</sup> While none of these philosophical doctrines were, *prima facie*, directed against Christianity (as yet unknown to these schools), the third-century Plotinus, according to Melanchthon, developed the doctrine of the emanation of the *λόγος* from the *νοῦς* “so as to frustrate Christian dogma concerning the Son of God.”<sup>47</sup>

Whether deployed directly against Christianity, as in the case of Plotinus, or not, in Melanchthon’s estimation all such philosophizing fails on two counts. First, it obviously contradicts what God has revealed about the same things. But even more, it fails to be philosophy by his definition: “In the disquisitions of the philosophers there are many things that are not only hostile to religion but even false and militate against natural reason, since many of them have been written down *without firm reasoning by those who are hardly level-headed [a parum prudentibus sine certa ratione]*.”<sup>48</sup>

To summarize things thus far in the *Scholia*:

(1) Philosophy falls within the realm of the law.

<sup>43</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:235 (= Parker, 50–51).

<sup>44</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:235 (= Parker, 50).

<sup>45</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:235 (= Parker, 50).

<sup>46</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:241 (= Parker, 55).

<sup>47</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:241 (= Parker, 55).

<sup>48</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:235 (= Parker, 50), emphasis added.



- (2) By reciprocity and correspondence between the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* internal and external to men, philosophy is that capacity of the reason that allows one to make proofs and teach things concerning the world under the realm of the law.
- (3) The realm of the law extends far beyond the moral, civil, and cultic law revealed in Scripture, and includes “the laws of nature” and laws governing human interactions.
- (4) Philosophy should be exercised only within this realm.
- (5) Philosophy has a propensity to transgress this realm.
- (6) Such transgression often creates, or is driven by, school interests.
- (7) Such transgression cannot rightly be called philosophy.

Thus far we have observed philosophy only in its manifestations—only as it is applied to the *realia* of the created order and its results. And we have seen that it may reach both true and false conclusions. But there are two further philosophical tools—to use a contemporary phrase, I might call them “meta-philosophical” tools—that have much and everything, in Melancthon’s mind, to do with true and false philosophy: dialectic and rhetoric.<sup>49</sup> In Melancthon’s thought the two are held together under the concept of eloquence: “our ancients saw amongst themselves that these two things belonged together by nature, the knowledge of speaking well and the judgment of the mind; wherefore it was not silly in the least for them to say that speech is the exposition of the reasoning of the mind.”<sup>50</sup> If rhetoric is the means by which truth is communicated, dialectic, a divine gift, is “the true way of teaching and reasoning.”<sup>51</sup> His 1520 *Compendiaria Dialectices Ratio* explains the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric like this:

Dialectic is the skill of making an apt and proper examination of any subject whatsoever. For it simply demonstrates the nature and components of any subject; and it explains whatever is laid before it in such certain terms that the truth or falsehood concerning whatever is under consideration cannot not be discerned. It differs from rhetoric in this, that while rhetoric creates a speech that is brilliant and aimed at captivating the people, dialectic provides the sure and precise direction, or rule, for rhetorical speech. . . . No one should think that dialectic is anything else than, as it were, the thread of human reason by which, in a certain order, we trace out the nature and components of a matter under

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<sup>49</sup> Melancthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:236 (= Parker, 51).

<sup>50</sup> Philipp Melancthon, *Encomium Eloquentiae* (1523), in CR 11:55 (= Salazar, 65). See also Melancthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:235–236 (= Parker, 51).

<sup>51</sup> “veram docendi et ratiocinandi viam sciamus Dei donum esse.” Philipp Melancthon, dedicatory letter to Johannes Camerarius, September 1, 1547, in *Erotemata Dialectices*, in CR 6:656 (no. 3992) (= Salazar, 87).

consideration and by which we investigate what is true and what is false in any matter whatsoever.<sup>52</sup>

Melanchthon makes some big claims here: dialectic applies much more broadly than philosophy to “any subject whatsoever,” “whatever is under consideration,” “any matter whatsoever.” Does that include theology?

A quick, unscientific survey of the 1520 *Compendiaria* demonstrates that the preponderance of authorities and examples are classical: Cicero; Demosthenes; Socrates; Plato; the Quirites (that is, citizens of Rome); the Roman gods; Chian, Smyranean, and Campanian wine; the Peripatetics; Themistocles; Orestes; Horace; Virgil; Quintilian; Ethiopians (i.e., Black Africans); and others. As for dialectic’s specifically theological application, it receives scant attention. To Paul in Romans 8 are credited rhetorical comparisons and amplifications;<sup>53</sup> Christ is credited in his use of parables with argumentation by example; Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:33 argues by means of a γνώμη or *sententia*;<sup>54</sup> in a discussion of coacervation, “heaping up,” in syllogisms, Philipp lays out the syllogism of “Paul” in Hebrews 6 and 7 for the preeminence of Christ:

- (1) The Mosaic priests are less than Abraham.
- (2) Abraham is less than Melchizedek.
- (3) Minor conclusion/minor premise: therefore, the Mosaic priests are less than Melchizedek.
- (4) But Christ is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek.
- (5) Major conclusion: therefore, the Mosaic priests are less than Christ.<sup>55</sup>

Now, dialectic is basically that branch of philosophy laid down by Aristotle in the so-called *Organon*: his *Categories*, *On Interpretation*, *Prior and Posterior Analytics*, *Topics*, and *On Sophistical Refutations*. In fact—though much later in a dedicatory epistle for what was the outgrowth of this early and first work on dialectic, the *Erotemata Dialectices*—Melanchthon expresses to young Johannes Camerarius his preference for students to take up dialectic not through a secondary work like the *Erotemata* but by using the *Organon* of Aristotle itself—in Greek. His only concern has to do with some passages that appear to have been distorted by copying. Otherwise, “[the works of the *Organon*] hand down dialectic correctly and can be understood by those who are refined by liberal teaching.”<sup>56</sup> In fact, in that letter Melanchthon himself claims to “profess the true, untarnished, and original dialectic, as we

<sup>52</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, *Compendiaria Dialectices Ratio*, in CR 20:711.

<sup>53</sup> Melanchthon, *Compendiaria*, in CR 20:722.

<sup>54</sup> Melanchthon, *Compendiaria*, in CR 20:747.

<sup>55</sup> Melanchthon, *Compendiaria*, in CR 20:748.

<sup>56</sup> Melanchthon, dedicatory letter, in *Erotemata Dialectices*, in CR 6:657 (no. 3992) (= Salazar, 88).

have received it from Aristotle and some of his other unimpugnable interpreters, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias and Boethius.”<sup>57</sup>

But to return to the question at hand, to Melanchthon’s way of thinking, does dialectic have any role in theology? Perhaps to put it in starker terms, is it permissible for the *Organon* of Aristotle to be applied to the study of theology? And if permissible, is it obligatory?

If Philipp’s answer in the 1520 *Compendiaria* is hesitant—exploratory at best—by 1526/1527 his answer is a resounding yes. In fact, in a sense, the *Scholia* on Colossians 2:8 is an extended argument for the indispensability of dialectic for the theological task. Early on in the excursus on philosophy he denounces those “infamous humbugs” who “still dare to say that condemning all this knowledge is godliness.” If civil society has contrived penalties for those who steal others’ food, it should also have contrived penalties for those who “steal men’s minds from the study of these arts”—that is, the means of cultivating the internal and external correspondence of the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου*.<sup>58</sup>

The vehemence of his tone here is understandable against the backdrop of the student rebellion against the arts curriculum in the 1520s and the subsequent battle for its restoration and, connected with the student rebellion, the rise of theological fanaticism in the same period.<sup>59</sup> Neither group was a-theological in the sense that they had no concern to busy themselves with the word of God. In fact, the students just wanted to get on with taking theology from Wittenberg’s rock-star theologians. It is simply that they could see no good use for the arts curriculum, and dialectic with it, in the theological task. So, for good measure, to round out this portion of his argument, Melanchthon adduces Augustine’s plundering of Egyptian gold—his deliberate “claiming” of their goods from the philosophers as unjust owners—declaring that “without the knowledge of the languages and without these arts that teach one how to speak correctly and clearly, Scripture cannot be explained.”<sup>60</sup>

Indeed, dialectic, the first and foremost part of *eloquentia*, Melanchthon claims, is the New Testament “gift of tongues or, if you like, of interpreting tongues” (1 Cor 12:10, 14:5). If a bishop should, according to 1 Timothy 3, be *διδασκλικός*, he has to be skilled in dialectic.<sup>61</sup> Melanchthon sees a twofold use for dialectic in the

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<sup>57</sup> Melanchthon, dedicatory letter, in *Erotemata Dialectices*, in CR 6:655 (no. 3992) (= Salazar, 86), emphasis added.

<sup>58</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in CR 4:231 (= Parker, 47).

<sup>59</sup> On this and for further bibliography, see Jon Steffen Bruss, “Melanchthon and the Wittenberg Reception of Hellenism, 1518–1526: *Bonae Literae et Renascentes Musae*,” *Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology* 17, no.4 (Reformation 2008): 7–12, esp. 11.

<sup>60</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:232 (= Parker, 47–48); Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 3.40.60 (PL 34.63).

<sup>61</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:236 (= Parker, 51).

theological task. First, it must be applied to the study of Scripture itself. Since Scripture is “full of the most subtle arguments,” “the sacred text can in no way be understood” without dialectic. Philipp even brings up the matter of ἀμφίβολα—ambiguities—and the discernment of the coherence of arguments in this connection.<sup>62</sup> That is what I will call its readerly use. It also has a teacherly or doctrinal use, which has a twofold task. First, it must explain the teaching of Scripture straightforwardly, clearly, and in an orderly fashion. Second, dialectic is to be used in settling ecclesiastical disputes. It is an indispensable aid in ascertaining the extent and areas of disagreement and, in tandem with the teaching task, in settling these disputes decisively.<sup>63</sup>

This commendation of dialectic is where Melancthon’s favorable judgments in the 1526/1527 *Scholia* on the use of philosophy in theology come to an end. It is limited to the use of dialectic, that “meta-philosophy,” as I called it, the engine that makes philosophy work. When he picks up the thread of philosophy per se, there is a discernible shift in judgment. Philosophy goes astray when it attempts to ascertain the will of God. While it may grasp God as creator, it cannot grasp his ongoing governance of the world. Furthermore, it errs when it creates an account of justification. And finally—and related to the last point—it is mistaken in arriving at the opinion that reason has the power to resist vice.<sup>64</sup> In each of these instances—and Melancthon indicates that it would be possible to go through all the articles of the faith and arrive at the same conclusion—he demonstrates, from the Scriptures, that “here Christian doctrine teaches something different.”<sup>65</sup> And his judgments against philosophy are strong: “Philosophy, or the formation of judgements according to the reason, cannot make reliable statements about the divine will. It can only form correct judgements about the nature of reality and about social morals. . . . To make judgements about Christian doctrine on the basis of philosophy is as insane as basing them on the principles of cobbling.”<sup>66</sup>

### Concluding Unscientific Postscript

This pessimistic view of philosophy raises the question whether, if philosophy must always err in the things of God, a part of philosophy must also always err in the things of God. In other words, in the 1526/1527 *Scholia* Melancthon has created a schema whereby dialectic, Aristotle’s *Organon*, may be safely—even profitably—

<sup>62</sup> Melancthon, *Scholia*, in St. A. 4:237 (= Parker, 52).

<sup>63</sup> Melancthon, *Scholia*, in St. A. 4:237 (= Parker, 52).

<sup>64</sup> Melancthon, *Scholia*, in St. A. 4:238–240 (= Parker, 52–54).

<sup>65</sup> “Hic doctrina Christiana diversum docet.” Melancthon, *Scholia*, in St. A. 4:238 (= Parker, 53).

<sup>66</sup> Melancthon, *Scholia*, in St. A. 4:240–241 (= Parker, 55).

used in Christian theology, and should be. But what is to prevent dialectic from running amok in theology? If theology is the product of dialectic applied to the Scriptures, and dialectic is a part of philosophy, which may and often does err, what is to prevent an errant, corrupt theology? Melanchthon does not ask—much less answer—this question.

But perhaps we can begin to build a jar from a few shards. First, Melanchthon argues, the “vain deceit” Paul speaks of in Colossians 2:8 is the “arguments about the divine will gathered from philosophy,” the conclusions arrived at by philosophy driven along school lines that have transgressed the boundaries placed upon philosophy. One should recall here Melanchthon’s admonitions on the Epicurean deduction from the atomic swerve that the gods have no concern for the world, or on Stoic determinism. As such, he can call judgments on the divine will formed by reason not philosophy, but empty dreams.<sup>67</sup> Another possible clue comes a bit later: error in reason (i.e., in philosophy) “happens when it is not governed by the word of God.”<sup>68</sup> To this point Melanchthon adduces Romans 1:21 and 1:28, and by the examples he supplies he seems to have in mind pagan philosophy driven along school lines.

The question remains: In Melanchthon’s mind how is it possible for dialectic to participate in the theological act? He has shown that it is necessary. But what, in the nature of the task, allows it? I think an answer is available in what we have noted above: the “correspondence” between the internal and external *στοιχεῖα κόσμου*. Man can read the created order because the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* have been mapped upon his mind. Language, itself a divine creature, works because of this internal-external correspondence; and God has specifically placed himself under the constraints of language in order to reveal himself. Indeed, in the 1523 *Encomium Eloquentiae*, Melanchthon foregrounds the specifically verbal revelation of God:

There are things in sacred matters which no one would ever behold without God revealing them; nor does Christ become known to us, unless the Holy Spirit give instruction. Thus indeed Christ Himself says that it is by the Spirit *δοξασθῆναι* (that he is glorified). But beyond the matter of prophecy, the power of words must be known, in which the divine mysteries are stored up as if in a shrine. For what would happen if you were, in the way of magic, to speak forth words that were not understood? Is that not like telling a story to a deaf man?<sup>69</sup>

But God speaks not as a magician—his word is not hocus-pocus and other unintelligible gobbledygook. Nor does he speak to his creatures as to the unhearing.

<sup>67</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:241 (= Parker, 55).

<sup>68</sup> Melanchthon, *Scholia*, in St.A. 4:242 (= Parker, 56).

<sup>69</sup> Philipp Melanchthon, *Encomium Eloquentiae*, in CR 11:64 (= Salazar, 75–76).

Instead, analogously to his enfleshment, by which he has subjected himself to and made himself known (John 1:14, 1:18) within the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου*—“of a woman, under law” (Gal 4.4)—in his inscripturated word he has likewise subjected himself to the very *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* he created. The ineffable word of the governor of the universe, the eternal intra-trinitarian dialogue, he makes to be governed by the very laws of the universe he created. He thereby creates a “sacred discourse,”<sup>70</sup> emphasis on “discourse,” so that by the external-internal correspondence of the *στοιχεῖα κόσμου* he himself created he might make himself known to the crown of his creation.

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<sup>70</sup> Philipp Melancthon, *De Studio Linguarum* (1533), in CR 11:232 (= Salazar, 30).