

The Use of Classical Greek Philosophy in Early Lutheranism

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Abstract

This article is an examination of the use of classical philosophy in the Lutheran tradition from Martin Luther through Johann Gerhard. It focuses particularly on the essentialist philosophies of both Plato and Aristotle as used and modified in these Lutheran writers. The claim made in this article is that though critical of Aristotelian thought on certain points, the first generations of Lutheran theologians also incorporated certain aspects of these philosophies in a positive manner within their theological systems. The goal of this article is to demonstrate that such positive evaluations of certain aspects of both Aristotle and Plato's philosophies can be found throughout these thinkers, as well as to demonstrate the usefulness of these categories in the contemporary church.

Keywords

Metaphysics
Lutheran scholasticism
Faith and reason
Philosophy and theology
Prolegomena.

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¹ The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

1. Introduction

The Lutheran tradition has sometimes had a reputation for being opposed to philosophy, especially in view of the fondness for mystery over syllogistic reasoning that is apparent in Lutheran theological texts. It is well known that Martin Luther often spoke disparagingly about the abuses of Aristotelian thought in the medieval church. Today, there are hardly any influential Christian philosophers who identify as part of the Lutheran Reformation. This leads to a caricature of Lutheran thought which is opposed to reason and philosophy more generally. It is the argument of this paper, however, that this notion is mistaken. Though critical of Aristotelian philosophy on certain points, the early Lutheran writers were not opposed to philosophy as such, and often utilised ancient Greek metaphysical categories to explain their own thought.

This article addresses the question: did the Lutheran reformers use reason and Greek philosophy in a positive manner, or only engage in criticism of these thought forms? It is demonstrated that there is a strong tradition of a positive construction of essentialist philosophy which extends from Luther through the seventeenth-century scholastic tradition exemplified in Johann Gerhard. The paper is divided into three sections. First, Luther's relationship to both Aristotle and medieval Thomism is explained, and it is demonstrated that though he engages in critique, he also adopts reason and philosophy and useful secondary sources of authority. Second, Melancthon is discussed in relation to his adoption of scholastic categories in the formulation of his own theological system. Third, the essentialist philosophies of both Plato and Aristotle are proven to have influenced Lutheran scholasticism through the writings of Martin Chemnitz and Johann Gerhard. Following this, a conclusion is included which explains and summarises the answer to the question posed in the beginning of this article.

2. Aristotle and Aquinas in Luther

Luther was not an overly philosophical thinker, as he generally sought to utilise biblical and theological, rather than philosophical, categories when explaining his thought on various subjects. One cannot, then, find any particular text wherein Luther explains his own metaphysical system or epistemological presuppositions. This is not to say, however, that Luther had no understanding of philosophy. His grasp of the philosophical discussions in the sixteenth century are apparent throughout his works, and

especially in his early writings. When determining Luther's view of Aristotle, reason, and related subjects then, one must glean insights from his occasional statements on the subject, rather than examining one particular treatise or set of works. Because of this, a determination of his exact philosophical foundations is somewhat difficult in contrast to the Lutheran scholastic writers who lay out their views on the topic in theological prolegomena texts.

2.1. Faith and reason in Luther's writings

Much of the debate surrounding Luther's relationship to philosophy concerns his nominalist training. The question of the relationship between Luther and nominalism is an often-discussed topic. Luther scholar and historical theologian Heiko Oberman popularised the thesis that Luther is greatly influenced by nominalist thought. Through his works such as *A Harvest of Medieval Theology* and various essays published together as *Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought*, Oberman contends that following his Reformation breakthrough, Luther retained several of the ideas taught to him by his nominalist teachers. In this view, while Luther distanced himself from Ockham and Biel in various ways, he retained their rejection of Thomistic realism as well as Ockham's emphasis on divine freedom. This stands in contrast to later theologians like Gerhard and Chemnitz, who do not write so favourably about the late medieval nominalist thinkers.

One example of Ockham's influence on Luther lies in the distinction made by the nominalist philosopher between the *potentia absoluta* (absolute power) and the *potentia ordinata* (ordained power) of God (Obermann 1983:473). This distinction itself precedes Ockham, as it is found in Thomas and other medieval thinkers, but the manner in which such a distinction functions radically differs in later medieval thought. For Aquinas, God's ordained laws are a reflection of his own divine nature. Lying, for example, is inherently wrong not simply because God decreed it as such, but because it is inconsistent with God's own being. For Ockham, however, God could just as easily have decreed (according to the *potentia ordinata*) that lying is a virtuous trait, and truth-telling a sin. This position, known as voluntarism, posits a radical freedom within the divine will and rejects an eternal standard of law and justice in accord with God's nature (Ockham 1990:xlix). In this system, God does not *need* his justice to be satisfied in any sense in order for God to forgive sin. Such could be the case if God ordained it in such a manner, but God might ordain that he would simply overlook sin without justice being satisfied whatsoever. Some scholars contend that this voluntarism lies at

the root of Luther's Reformation doctrine of justification (Howsare 2005:144). In this view, God can impute the sinner as righteous apart from any actual righteousness within the individual, simply because God decreed it as such according to the *potentia ordinata*.

There are several problems with the nominalist thesis, which has generally been rejected or at least modified in recent years. It is undeniable that Ockham had an impact on Luther, as he admits as much. However, Luther's own statements about his nominalist teachers are often quite critical. The theologians Luther cites most frequently in the medieval period are not scholastic at all—whether realist or nominalist—but mystics (see Hoffman 1976; Hoffman 1998). Bernard, Tauler, and the anonymous author of the *Theologia Germanica* are the most prominent influences upon his thought. These writers, especially in drawing from the works of St Augustine, utilise Neoplatonic language more so than either Thomistic Aristotelianism or Ockhamist nominalism. This is not to say, however, that Luther simply adopts the metaphysical convictions of any particular mystical writer either. Luther was rather eclectic in his influences; one might then wonder whether one should seek to find any consistent metaphysical system at all in Luther's writings. The present writer is not convinced that this is possible. In order to explain the relationship between Luther and Aristotle, then, the best method of proceeding is not to give an exposition of Luther's philosophical system, but to examine two particular topics which appear as themes throughout Luther's career. First are the continual negative comments directed toward Aristotle, and second is Luther's view of the relationship between faith and reason.

Luther's attacks on Aristotle (and Aquinas) are most prominent from the years 1517 to 1522. A large portion of his polemical statements about the relationship between philosophy and theology appear in this era, though such ideas continue to be explained throughout his career, such as in the 1535 Galatians commentary. The roots of Luther's view of Aristotle can be found in his 1517 *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology* (Luther 1962). An examination of this text demonstrates that Luther's problem is not with Aristotle *as such*, but with the connection between Aristotle's ethics and a perceived neo-Pelagianism in the Middle Ages. The disputation begins as a defence of Augustinism and a rejection of Pelagius. Luther is concerned that the scholastics deny the impact of sin upon the will in favour of a pure libertarianism. It is important to note that Luther specifically cites Biel and Scotus as proponents of this false idea, rather than Aquinas (as in theses 10, 13, and 23). The thesis which is perhaps most relevant for the present discussion is 50, in which it is stated that

Aristotle's relation to theology is as 'darkness is to light' (Luther 1962:270). It is important, however, to note in what sense Luther rejects the work of the philosopher. The first sense in which Luther rejects Aristotle is in the utilisation of logical syllogism. For Luther, divine truth is to be accepted through revelation, rather than through logical argumentation. He notes, for example, that such a use of logic as expositor of divine truth would negate even the dogma of the Trinity as a teaching of faith, instead placing it within the realm of natural reason (thesis 49). The second reason why Luther rejects Aristotle is the use of his ethical writings. The reformer does not, however, reject Aristotle's ethical theory as such, but the imposition of virtue ethics into the category of justification *coram Deo* (thesis 40). While these ideas, if isolated from the rest of his writings, might imply a complete rejection of traditional Greek thought forms in Luther, there are two important considerations which negate such a conclusion. First, Luther's theology of faith and reason and the relationship between the two kingdoms demonstrates that logical categories are essential for the proper functioning of the human creature in society. Second, modern scholarship has demonstrated that the proposed gap between Luther and Aquinas is not quite as extensive as Luther himself seemed to think.

It is well known that Luther referred to reason as the 'devil's whore', among other pejorative terms. One might then come to the conclusion that Luther was an irrationalist or a fideist. It is said that John Wesley, though at one point quite impressed with Luther, termed him an enemy of reason after reading his 1535 Galatians commentary (Westerholm 2004:64). Such caricatures continue to be propagated, though it must be acknowledged that some of the blame is to be laid on Luther himself who was prone to overstatement. Yet, Luther did, at other times, praise reason as a great good. One might conclude then that Luther is simply inconsistent, and that one cannot put together any kind of coherent ideas of reason and faith in the reformer. However, an examination of Luther's understanding of the two kingdoms demonstrates that such is not the case, and that his seemingly contradictory statements on the topic are completely consistent within the framework of two realms.

Modern scholarship has generally acknowledged that the two kingdoms are the key to a proper understanding of Luther's thought on this topic. Though disagreeing on some particulars, Jerry Robbins, Steven A Hein, and Brian Gerrish all recognise this twofold framework as necessary to grasp Luther's view. For Luther, Christians live in the midst of two kingdoms. Though this has sometimes been described as the difference between the

church and the state, Luther never makes this identification. Instead, these two realms represent one's relation to God (the right-hand kingdom), and one's relation to others (the left-hand kingdom). The left-hand kingdom has reference to the state, culture, and vocation. The right-hand kingdom is connected with the church. Reason and philosophy, for Luther, are properly used in the left-hand kingdom, as a means to guide the state, relationships, ethics, and other aspects of external life. In relation to God, however, reason is to be surrendered to revelation which often speaks of truths which are opposed to bare reason. This is especially related to the chief article of justification, which, according to Luther, is at odds with human rationality, which reasons that reward is based on human obedience *coram Deo*, just as it is in the left-hand realm.

One of the problems in scholarship on this topic is that Luther's 1518 Heidelberg Disputation is viewed by many as central to gaining an understanding of the reformer's thought on the topic, and in particular, his distinction between the *theologia gloriae* and the *theologia crucis* (thesis 22). While this early work certainly contains themes which extend throughout his career, the late Luther never utilises such a distinction. The difference between a theology of the cross and a theology of glory, which modern Luther interpreters view as a theological paradigm which is perhaps as important as the distinction between law and gospel (Forde 1997), is never given prominence in Luther's own writings. Even in the great reformation writings of 1520, this distinction is never mentioned. The Lutheran scholastics hardly even note such a distinction, and certainly did not understand it to be somehow paradigmatic for Luther's thought. This idea was popularised by the publication of Walter von Loewenich's *Luthers Theologia Crucis* in 1929, and has since been studied by Gerhard Forde and Alister McGrath, among others. Jerry Robbins, in his essay, 'Luther on Reason: A Reappraisal' frames Luther's understanding of the topic through the *theologia crucis* in opposition to the *theologia gloriae*. While Robbins' conclusions generally agree with those of the present author, the prominence of the Heidelberg Disputation and lack of discussion of later writings lead Robbins to conclude that Luther 'rejected all natural theology', and that he held to 'contradictory propositions' (Robbins 1993:195, 203). These ideas would put Luther at odds with the previous scholastic tradition, and the idea that contradictory propositions can coexist does, essentially, make Luther an irrationalist.

Steven Hein's approach to Luther on faith and reason offers a more balanced perspective which leads to continuity with the preceding Christian tradition. One point which Hein notes, that is

particularly significant, is that even within the earthly kingdom, certain truths about God can be discovered by human reason. While the gospel, the Triunity of God, and other truths cannot be arrived at through reason alone, the existence of a good God can. Hein notes a distinction that Luther makes between a *general* and a *proper* knowledge of God (Hein 1972:140). A general knowledge of God is discovered through reason, and is evidenced through the predominance of worship in areas where the gospel has not been proclaimed. In other places, Luther can refer to this general idea of God as a 'legal knowledge', because it consists in knowledge of the moral law (Hein 1972:141). It is in this area that Luther can praise even pagan philosophers like Aristotle, whom he states, at times, had a better understanding of the law than many clergy in the church (Hein 1972:141). These facts demonstrate that Robbins is in error when he argues that there is no natural theology in Luther. While Luther certainly limits what can be known through natural revelation, he does not reject the concept altogether.

Where reason falls short, for Luther, is in its attempt to understand God's attitude toward sinners. If Aristotelian ethics are applied to one's place in the heavenly kingdom, one will conclude something akin to Pelagianism. In the earthly kingdom, one receives payment in accord with one's work. Such an arrangement, according to the law, does not apply to one's relation to God, and a confusion of these two kingdoms is what led to Rome's moralistic approach to justification. Hein notes that there are two basic problems which Luther had with Rome's utilisation of Aristotle: first, the righteousness of faith was replaced by one of works, and second, logic became a judge over revelation (Hein 1972:143). If Aristotle is used then, outside of these problematic areas, Luther's thought is not inherently in opposition to that of the philosopher. Luther himself argued that Aristotle's logic should be retained in university curriculums (Robbins 1993:196). The reformer's theology, then, is not irrational or anti-philosophical.

While it has been established that Luther views reason as a positive good within the left-hand realm, the question now arises whether there is any inherent connection then between the civil and heavenly kingdoms. Some authors have proposed that Luther's division between these two realms mirrors the later noumenal-phenomenal divide in Kantian philosophy. In this way, the two serve in a completely dichotomous relationship. Robbins states that in heavenly things, unlike in the civil realm, contradiction is possible (Robbins 1993:203). For him, the acceptance of contradictory propositions is part of Luther's *theologia crucis*. In this model of interpretation, one cannot view

Luther as anything other than an irrationalist when it comes to divine truths. Such a conclusion is not necessary for a read of Luther's own writings. While Luther often derides human reason for its misunderstanding of the truths of faith, nowhere does the reformer state that heavenly realities are in actuality contradictory to one another, or to civil realities. While Luther firmly holds onto paradox, his criticisms of Aristotle and of syllogistic reasoning do not imply that divine truths are opposed to reason *as such*, but to fallen human reason.

For Luther, reason does have a role to play even in theological discussions. While reason must not override that which is taught by revelation, it still holds a secondary function in defending theological matters. Luther's famous words at the Diet of Worms demonstrate this fact, with his insistence that his errors must be disproved by both Scripture and plain reason. Robbins notes that while Luther criticises human reason, in faith the sinful person's reason itself undergoes a change. This is called 'regenerate reason', which is used in service of divine truth (Robbins 1993:200). Robbins points out that reason is not absent when interpreting revelation, but is 'vital for pointing out logical weaknesses in destructive reasoning' (1993:196). Even in the mere reading and understanding of words on a page, one must utilise one's intellectual faculties. One example of this use of regenerate reason can be found in Luther's debates with Zwingli over Christ's presence in the sacrament. While the reformer founded his arguments first upon the text of scripture, he used categories derived from his nominalist training—especially in his differentiation between Christ's modes of presence (Osborne 2002:81). Thomas Osborne notes that philosophy is used, by Luther, only insofar as it supports the plain meaning of the biblical text (2002:82). For Luther, then, scriptural truths are to be accepted on the basis of revelation rather than human logic, but this does not negate the usefulness of reason and philosophy as a secondary source of authority, even in spiritual matters.

Luther's thought on the relationship between theology and philosophy can be summarised in three points. First, in the civil sphere, reason is an absolute necessity. It has the ability to interpret natural law, and even to determine the existence of God as well as his desire for worship and obedience. This is a general knowledge of God which cannot bring one unto salvation. Second, the truths of the gospel are inherently opposed to fallen human reason—especially the doctrine of justification. There are, thus, many truths which cannot be grasped other than through revelation. In the matters where God speaks, in the spiritual realm, reason must submit to God's word. Third, faith leads to a

new heart and a new reasoning faculty. The believer can, and should, use reason, though only in a secondary sense. Philosophy is only useful insofar as it submits itself to revealed theology.

2.2. Luther and Aquinas

In light of these conclusions, the relationship between Luther's thought and that of scholasticism can be defined. In particular, some conclusions can be drawn regarding the relationship between Luther and Thomas Aquinas, who sometimes bears the brunt of Luther's criticisms of the use of Aristotle. While older scholarship emphasised discontinuity between these two figures, ecumenical dialogues in the twentieth century brought about a renewed consideration of areas of agreement between the reformer and the angelic doctor. The author who has done the most extensive writing on the relationship between these two figures is Denis Janz, who has published two books and several articles on the topic. While Janz does not claim that these two figures had an identical theological method, he demonstrates that discontinuity has been overstated. With this being the case, it is demonstrable that the Lutheran scholastic method does not differ in any substantial way from the theological method of Luther, even though the presentation might be more akin to that of Aquinas and other medieval writers in certain particulars.

The argument that there are commonalities between Luther and Aquinas is demonstrated in two ways. First, it is argued that Luther misunderstood some fundamental aspects of Thomas' thought. Second, it is contended that just as Luther is not the irrationalist he is often characterised as, Aquinas is not the pure rationalist that nineteenth-century neo-scholastics portrayed. In *Luther on Thomas Aquinas* (1989), Janz evaluates all of Luther's references to the medieval theologian, and demonstrates Luther's familiarity with primary sources. In opposition to some other scholars who have argued that Luther only knew Thomas through secondary sources, Janz demonstrates that the reformer was well-acquainted with Thomas' own works. Luther's familiarity with Thomas does not, however, mean that Luther correctly understood him.

The Thomistic school continued to exist into the late Middle Ages, even with the rise of nominalism. Several prominent figures in Luther's own life considered themselves to be heirs of the angelic doctor, including Andreas Karlstadt and Cardinal Cajetan. As a continual critic of Luther, Cajetan's Thomism is particularly important for Luther's understanding of Aquinas. The cardinal vehemently opposed Luther's anthropology and view of grace, taking the position that morally good acts are possible without any

aid of any grace whatsoever (Janz 1983:135). This, for Luther, was at the heart of the errors of medieval scholasticism, as it promoted a neo-pelagianism and resulted in a denial of salvation *sola gratia*. Janz demonstrates that Cajetan misunderstood Thomas' position on the issue. For Janz, Aquinas' commentaries on the Pauline epistles demonstrate commonality between his anthropology and that of Luther (1983:138). When Luther criticised Aquinas, especially in relation to grace, it is likely that this is due largely to Cajetan's reading of Thomas, rather than the intentions of the author himself.

This leads, then, to an examination of the theological methods of Luther and Aquinas. Opponents of protestant scholasticism have often derided the seventeenth-century theological method as a reversion to Aquinas' system and rejection of Luther's purer theology. The contrast between Luther and medieval scholasticism is, then, emphasised to a great extent (such as in Paulson 2011). While critics of Aquinas have often accused him of imposing Greek philosophy on the biblical text, Janz notes that contemporary Thomas scholarship has recognised that, though certainly concerned with metaphysics, Aquinas was first and foremost a theologian rather than a philosopher (1998:3). One of the problems with older interpretations of Thomas is that he was often read through the lens of the enlightenment, as an apologist and philosopher in the modern sense who attempts to rationally prove the truths of Christianity through logical syllogism. As Janz states, one cannot read Aquinas in such a context, as the entire concept of autonomous reason is an enlightenment construct (1998:12). Instead, when Aquinas offers his five 'proofs' of the existence of God, he merely demonstrates the rationality and coherence of an acceptance of theism for the Christian. As Feser notes, Aquinas wrote his text for believers, and the *Summa* was not intended as an apologetic text (Feser 2009:63). In using these arguments, Aquinas does not imply that all truths of the Christian faith must, or even can, be rationally demonstrated. On these points, Luther does not fundamentally disagree, as he too argues that a general knowledge of God is rationally demonstrable. Similarly, as Luther notes that the proper knowledge of God is not discoverable through reason, Aquinas argues that the Trinity, incarnation, and other doctrines are believed through revelation alone, rather than logical deduction.

There are, certainly, points of departure from Aquinas in Luther. Paradox is a central theme in Luther's thought, while Aquinas has a greater concern for syllogistic reasoning. This is not to say, however, that Aquinas completely rejects the concept of paradox. Janz observes that in the majority of his answers to proposed

questions throughout the *Summa*, Aquinas usually answers with ‘a simultaneous yes and no’, which he labels a type of paradox (1998:15). He also notes that the centrality of the apophatic method in Aquinas’ writing is opposed to rationalism. Theology ultimately leads one to mystery, and on some points, it cannot speak (1998:16). Janz points to some specific passages in Aquinas’ writing where mystery is emphasised, and the great theologian acknowledges paradox (1998:19–20). These passages are, primarily, in relation to the mystery of the incarnation. While Aquinas was certainly not as fond of paradox as Luther, and was certainly much more concerned to exposit a logical system, he was not opposed to leaving his theology in the context of mystery when necessary.

Luther and Thomas are two very different thinkers whose theological concerns and presentation diverge greatly from one another. However, despite such differences, they share several areas of commonality. Both praise reason, and even Aristotle, in the civil sphere, and in relation to a natural knowledge of God. Both acknowledge that the truth of the gospel is known only through revelation. Both acknowledge that there are paradoxes in the Christian faith. What this demonstrates is that when the Lutheran scholastics borrow Aristotelian terminology from Aquinas, as well as his concern for natural theology, they are not diverging from Luther’s own thought. Even the reformer’s concern for paradox remains in those scholastics writing in his name throughout the next century. In this way, the scholastics retain Luther’s theology and concerns while simultaneously utilising beneficial aspects of Aquinas’ method.

3. Aristotle and the Scholastic Method in Melanchthon

Critics of scholasticism in seventeenth-century Lutheran thought often place the blame on Luther’s student Melanchthon for deviating from the theology of his older contemporary. While Luther taught a pure gospel-centric theology, Melanchthon instead began to impose rationalistic philosophical categories onto reformation theology. The process that began with the theologian then continued throughout the scholastic era, as writers began to revert to a pre-reformation theological scheme.

The thesis of a great divide between Melanchthon and Luther gained prominence through Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf von Harnack, who both favoured the earlier reformer as a purer source of Christian truth. This contention continued to be promoted by scholars associated with the Luther renaissance begun by Karl Holl throughout the beginning of the twentieth century. Authors

such as Werner Elert and William Lazareth continued this trajectory as well, especially as they contended that Melanchthon was influenced by Calvin on the subject of the third use of the law, which greatly differentiated him from Luther (Murray 2001:27). In some ways, such a divide is not new, as the debates in post-Reformation Lutheranism which led to the writing of the Formula of Concord depended upon two opposing schools of thought, sometimes labelled as the Philipists and the Gnesio Lutherans (Gritsch 2002:92–95). Because of this, some second-generation reformers spoke ill of Melanchthon, often giving him the label of Crypto-Calvinist and Sacramentarian. There are generally two places of proposed discontinuity between the two authors: that of theology, and of method. For the present work, the second question is more essential as it relates to the relationship between theology and philosophy.

The theological method of Melanchthon is apparent in his *Loci Communes*, which was released in a number of different editions throughout his life. The first edition, released in 1521 when Melanchthon was just 24 years old, is sometimes viewed as the first systematic treatment of Protestant theology. The work itself, however, is not intended to be comprehensive. While later editions include treatments of the Trinity and other essential doctrines, the initial edition set forth the distinction between law and gospel, the sacraments, and other Lutheran distinctives. The form of treatment here is not that of Aquinas or other scholastic writers who use an extensive systematic format of: proposition, anticipated refutation, and then response. Instead, Melanchthon divides theology into various topics, or *Loci*, and treats them through an exposition of the doctrine with an establishment of that teaching from both scripture and the church fathers. Throughout the text, Melanchthon responds to those who disagrees with his perspective. This treatment is certainly systematic, and utilises both logic and rhetoric, though it differs from the obscure philosophical discussions which are prominent in other theological textbooks of the era.

Insights into Melanchthon's place as a scholastic are found in Lowell Green's essay, 'Melanchthon's Relation to Scholasticism'. In Green's view, all of the characteristic elements of later Lutheran scholasticism are present in Melanchthon. In particular, he notes Melanchthon's utilisation of classical dialectics and rhetoric (Truemann 2005:274). Like Luther, Melanchthon was critical of philosophy, and Aristotle in particular. However, despite his negative statements regarding the Greek philosopher, he continued to use, and teach, Aristotle's logic, rhetoric, and grammar. Green argues that Melanchthon's attitude toward

philosophy can be best understood by using a twofold definition of the term 'philosophy'. On the one hand, philosophy is identified with the liberal arts including both the *trivium* and *quadrivium* (277). Especially due to Melanchthon's humanism, the reformer defends the importance of these aspects of philosophy. The other definition of philosophy, however, is derided by Melanchthon. This includes metaphysics, and specifically as it is used by medieval theologians through their adoption of Aristotle. According to Green, Melanchthon wholeheartedly rejects both the metaphysics and ethics of Aristotle (281). Despite several harsh statements of Melanchthon, however, such a total rejection is inconsistent with some of his own statements.

In his argument that Melanchthon rejects Aristotle's ethics and metaphysics, Green cites two of Melanchthon's early writings: *Didymi Faventini adversus Thomam Placentinum pro Martino Luthero theologo oratio* (1521), and *Scholia in epistulam Pauli ad Colossenses* (1527). It is worth noting that these are two earlier works, and it is apparent that when Melanchthon writes the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, he has a largely positive view of Aristotle. Green notes that in his treatment of Colossians, Melanchthon makes a differentiation between spiritual life and bodily life. Philosophy (and ethics in particular) is relevant to the bodily rather than spiritual life. It is in this way that Melanchthon approves of Aristotle as an ethicist while simultaneously rejecting those ethics as being a foundation of the gospel. Like Luther, Melanchthon functions on the basis of the framework of the two kingdoms when formulating his views of faith and reason. More particularly, Melanchthon speaks of the relationship between faith and ethics within the framework of the two kinds of righteousness. Charles Arand argues that the two kinds of righteousness serve as the framework for Melanchthon's approach to faith and works in the Apology (Arand 2001). In this framework, the Christian lives in two fundamental relationships: to God, and to others. In relation to God, Aristotle is to be rejected, because salvation arises solely by faith in the gospel promise. In relation to others, however, Aristotle's ethics give a general guide as to how ethical living in the world functions. This is not due to any inspiration given to Aristotle, but instead due to Aristotle's adherence to natural law, which is largely discoverable by way of philosophy.

Though it is clear that Aristotle is used by Melanchthon in the realm of ethics, the question of metaphysics has not yet been addressed, as will be done here. Green notes that Melanchthon argues against the notion that theology is in any way determined by philosophy. This relates especially to metaphysical questions (Green 2005:281). Philosophy, instead, is a mere handmaiden to

theology, always submitting to the truths revealed in divine revelation. Melanchthon does not reject metaphysics as such, but its abuse in the late medieval era. Regarding the doctrine of God, Melanchthon is certainly willing to speak in a metaphysical manner regarding God's being. For example, he affirms the doctrine of divine simplicity—a hallmark of Aquinas' metaphysical system—in Article I of the Augsburg Confession, which refers to God as *impartibilis* (without parts). Melanchthon does not reject extensive discussion of God's nature and attributes, or even proofs of his existence, as these are all included within later editions of the *Loci Communes*. The reformer's primary concern here is to ground knowledge of God, not in speculation, but in the person of Christ. One does not reason unto the nature of God and then consequently determine theological conclusions. Instead, the Christian is called to look to Christ, and affirm who God shows himself to be through his Son.

It is following the work of Melanchthon where the influence of Aristotle upon Lutheran thought becomes more explicit. Debates among second generation reformers often utilised Aristotelian categories of substance and accident in discussions surrounding the nature of sin and of free will (FC SD I), as well as contentions regarding causation in the application of salvation (FC SD III). God was also often described through utilising Aquinas' concept of being in which there is no distinction between existence and essence within the divine nature. Aristotle's categories, particularly of causation, are used even more extensively in the period that Robert Preus labels 'high orthodoxy' (1970:45) than in the so-called 'golden age' of the Formula of Concord. Perhaps the most explicit Aristotelian of the era is Johann Gerhard, who is generally considered the most significant Lutheran thinker following Martin Chemnitz. Even in Gerhard, however, there was no explicit *ordo salutis*, which is often regarded as a high point in the development of Protestant scholastic thought. This belongs to the final age, which Preus refers to as the 'silver age', which includes Johannes Quenstedt, Abraham Calov, and David Hollaz as its three most significant representatives (1970:45). These authors make numerous distinctions on each topic which the modern reader might find tedious. They then follow every point with a proposed refutation and response. In this manner, then, the method of Aquinas and other medieval thinkers is followed rather closely. A more recent example of this method can be found in Conrad Lindberg's *Christian Dogmatics and Notes on the History of Dogma*, first published in English in 1922. Throughout this volume, on nearly every topic, Lindberg cites the formal, material, sufficient, primary, and secondary causes, all using traditional

Latin scholastic terms. The seed form of such ideas are already present in Melanchthon's own writings.

It has been explained thus far that both Luther and Melanchthon are critical of the abuses of philosophy in the medieval period, while also using philosophical categories in a modified form. Melanchthon used Aristotle heavily in describing ethics, especially in relation to the outward acts of the body involved in active righteousness. He is critical of the magisterial use of philosophy, but instead places this field of inquiry in a secondary position, always to be judged by the truths of theology as explained in scripture. Following this explanation of the relationship between faith and reason in these two theologians, essentialist metaphysics are demonstrated to be a consistent element of the Lutheran tradition from Luther through the development of Lutheran orthodoxy.

4. Essentialism in Lutheran Scholasticism

As inheritors of the medieval theological and philosophical tradition, the Lutheran reformers and scholastics interact with the philosophical convictions of those within the previous Christian tradition. This interaction extends from Luther through the scholastic revival of the nineteenth century. In this section, first, Luther's interaction with Platonic and Aristotelian essentialism is engaged in order to compare his own philosophical convictions with previous authors. Following this, the seventeenth-century Lutheran scholastics are examined in order to explain their metaphysical convictions. Most particularly, Johann Gerhard is discussed as an exemplar of this tradition. This is then compared to the scholastic revival of nineteenth and early twentieth century Lutheran theologians. Finally, a proposal is offered for an essentialist metaphysic which is consistent with Luther and the following tradition.

4.1. Essentialism in Luther

While Luther's relationship to Aristotle has already been discussed, some observations regarding his relationship to essentialist ontology are merited. While critics of essentialism in Luther are engaged in the following chapter, some preliminary remarks must be made on the subject. While Luther does not spend an extensive amount of space writing on his views of metaphysics, and the nature of essence in particular, there is one writing which does engage the ideas inherent in both Platonic and Aristotelian essentialism: the Heidelberg Disputation. Opponents of Lutheran scholasticism often utilise the Disputation as an anti-

scholastic document, especially in the theological theses (Forde 1997). However, Luther's remarks are not merely theological, but he engages specific metaphysical ideas in his philosophical theses, and not always in a negative manner. These ideas have simply not been engaged in the majority of works on the Heidelberg Disputation, and there are a couple significant reasons for this. First, the critical edition of Luther's works did not include the defence of Luther's philosophical theses until 1979. This simply did not allow for an in-depth treatment of the issue. Second, the English edition of Luther's Works still fails to contain a translation of these portions of writing. The most important part of the theses for the present work is his eighth point, in which he argues that Aristotle wrongly condemns Plato's theory of forms. Eric Parker provides a translation of the defence of the eighth proposition which is worth quoting at length:

That the philosophy of Plato is better than the philosophy of Aristotle appears from this, namely, that Plato always depends upon the divine and immortal, separate and eternal, insensible and intelligible, from whence he also recommends that singulars, individuals, and sensible things be abandoned because they cannot be known on account of their instability. Aristotle, being opposed to this in every way, ridicules the separable and intelligible things and brings in sensible things and singulars and thoroughly human and natural things. But, he does this most cunningly:

Firstly, because he cannot deny that the individual is transient [*fluxa*], he invents a form and different matter, and so the thing is not knowable as matter, but as form. Therefore, he says that the form is the cause of knowing [*causam sciendi*], and he calls this 'divine, good, desirable' and he assigns the intellect to this. And so he frustrates every mind, while he examines the same thing in two ways.

Secondly, this 'form' is a quiddity and the sum of his Metaphysics. So, he destroys all the ideas, putting in their place his own forms and quiddities conjoined to matter, ridiculing and denying [the existence of] the ideas separable from matter, as appears in many places, especially Metaphysics and [Nicomachean] Ethics. But, it is well known by way of blessed Augustine, Iamblichus and all the Platonic disputants that the ideas of Plato are separate [from matter]. And so it is well known that the philosophy of Aristotle crawls in the dregs [*reptat in faecibus*] of corporeal and sensible things, whereas Plato moves among things separable and spiritual (Luther 2013).

Luther's comments on these matters prove to be quite problematic for interpretations of the Reformer which place him at odds with

all traditional Greek thought-forms. He rejects Aristotle's metaphysics, not for its essentialism, but for his denial of the reality of forms existent in the mind of God. It should not be surprising that, as an Augustinian monk, Luther prefers the philosophical convictions of the bishop of Hippo over that of Thomism. The specifics of Luther's criticisms of Aristotle are dealt with below, in an attempt to formulate an essentialist approach which is both scholastic and consistent with Luther.

4.2. Philosophy in the Writings of Martin Chemnitz

Following the death of Martin Luther, the leadership of the Lutheran movement eventually fell into the hands of Martin Chemnitz, sometimes affectionately labelled 'the second Martin'. A more philosophical thinker than Luther, Chemnitz' writings demonstrate a strong adherence to a classic essentialist metaphysic. Through the second-generation reformer, Aristotelian metaphysical convictions are included within the Lutheran Confessional documents, and were then transmitted to the seventeenth-century scholastic tradition. Chemnitz' thought is complex enough, especially in his exposition of Christ's two natures, to merit a full-length study, but for the present purposes, it only must be demonstrated that he utilised classical Greek philosophical categories in his construction of Lutheran thought. Thus, here, some passages in the Formula of Concord, and Chemnitz' *Two Natures in Christ* are explored to demonstrate this point, and his comments are supplemented with passages from other scholastic writers, which affirm and reiterate such convictions.

Perhaps the most important metaphysical statement in the post-reformation era for the Lutheran tradition is made in Article I of the Formula of Concord, under Chemnitz' influence, in resolution to a debate surrounding the nature of sin upon the human creature (this history is catalogued in Preus 1978:115–117). The Philipists tended to speak more optimistically about the nature of the human will after the fall than the Gnesio-Lutherans. This led to a number of disputes between representatives of both schools of thought. At the height of this controversy, a public disputation was held as an attempt to arrive at a resolution on the subject. Victorin Strigel and Matthias Flacius met in 1560 to settle the question of the role of the human will in conversion. In the dispute, Strigel argued that sin was an accidental, rather than substantial, quality. As such, Strigel argued, there was goodness intact in the human person in regard to one's substance. Not having a strong understanding of Aristotelian categories Flacius rejected the idea that sin was an accidental quality, and instead retorted that it became the very

essence of the human creature in the post-lapsarian state. In spite of several calls to recant his statement, Flacius refused, and was eventually rejected by the other Gnesio-Lutherans for his latent Manicheanism. This debate led to a Confessional statement on the subject, which rejected the positions of both Strigel and Flacius.

In Article I, the authors make two basic contentions. First, the language that sin is ‘accidental’ does not mean that it is insignificant. The corruption of sin has a radical impact upon the person, placing one under God’s wrath and devoid of spiritual freedom (FC SD I:1). It is a misunderstanding of Aristotle’s language to assume that just because something is not a substantial property that it is as inconsequential as painting a wall a different colour. A more apt illustration might be of someone driving a car into a wall, cracking and bending it while leaving the wall itself slightly intact. The second contention of the Formula is that though the impacts of sin are devastating upon the human person, they do not negate one’s humanity and essential value as a creation of God (FC SD I:26). This leads to a metaphysical discussion related to the value of utilising the Aristotelian categories of substance and accident. Were they opposed to essentialism (at least of the Aristotelian variety) the authors of the Formula had an opportunity to voice such criticisms here; yet, the opposite is the case. The metaphysical system of Aristotle, at least in some form, is adopted by the Formula.

In this discussion, the Formula notes approvingly that the church fathers often used metaphysical language, as such is sometimes necessary in academic dispute. It is argued that such language should not be used heavily in preaching for the sake of the unlearned; there is a proper place for such ideas to be expounded by theologians. A substance is defined as a ‘self-existent essence’, and an accident, in contrast, ‘does not exist by itself essentially’, but is separable from a substance (FC SD I:54). An essence is unchanging while the accidental properties of a thing are subject to continual change. This division is further described as an ‘indisputable truth’ (*immota veritas*) among all learned people (FC SD I:57). The Formula further attempts to demonstrate that Luther was not opposed to using such language, and at times did so himself (FC SD I:62). In light of the acceptance of such language, it is argued then that Flacius’ position is mistaken, and that sin is an accidental property after the fall (FC SD I:61). These statements are highly significant because they do not represent the opinion of one individual theologian, but became a standard part of the Lutheran Confessional documents as published in the Book of Concord.

The metaphysical assumptions here played a significant role in the development of the anthropology of Lutheran scholasticism. In the scholastic texts, there are two primary topics of discussion under the topic *anthropology*: the *imago Dei* and original sin. Both concepts use Aristotelian metaphysics. The early-twentieth-century scholastic writer Adolf Hoenecke explains the doctrine of the divine image as explained by Lutheran orthodox theologians. He notes that the *imago Dei* is spoken of in two distinct senses. First, there is the image *late dicta* (in a general sense), which includes man's attributes such as freedom, intellect, and dominion (Hoenecke 2009 III:320). Lindberg refers to it as the 'formal image', which consists of mind, will, and emotion (Lindberg 1922:156). This broader sense of the image includes the entire nature of man, and is thus part of the human essence. This image is not lost in the fall, because if it were, then the human essence itself would be obliterated. The other manner of speaking about the *imago Dei* is the image *stricte dicta* (in a strict sense) which is identified with spiritual righteousness (Hoenecke 2009 III:320). Lindberg uses the title 'material image' (1922:156). The narrower sense of the image refers to an accidental quality, whereby one can lack spiritual righteousness and retain a genuinely human essence. Though Lutheran theologians differ on several points related to anthropology on topics such as the propagation of the soul, the distinction between soul and spirit, and the nature of the broad sense of the divine image, all of the Lutheran scholastics are committed to an Aristotelian essentialism which accepts that there are both essential properties of the human nature, and accidental ones which are lost in the fall.

Along with the utilisation of such language regarding the divine image, the Lutheran scholastics also follow the Formula in expositing sin as an accidental quality. In his compendium of Lutheran scholastic thought *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Heinrich Schmid summarises the position of the seventeenth-century writers on the topic of the relationship between sin and nature (1899:246–249). Like Chemnitz, the scholastics guard against two primary problems in relation to original sin. First is the Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian position wherein sin does not have a fundamental impact upon man's essence at all. This is what Quenstedt refers to as, 'a mere *accident*, lightly and externally attached' (Schmid 1899:247). This is not to say that sin is not an accidental property (as Quenstedt affirms the affirmations of Article I of the Formula), but that it also has a broader impact upon human nature as such, though without eliminating the human essence. He refers to original sin as 'internally and intimately inhering' (Schmid 1899:247). Though the human essence is impacted and corrupted by sin, Quenstedt is

also quick to note that the essence of humanity remains even after the fall, in opposition to Flacius (Schmid 1899:248). Under each of these topics, the Lutheran scholastics affirm the basic Aristotelian definition of substantial and accidental qualities, and thus demonstrate the adequacy of such categories in theological formulation.

Alongside his utilisation of Aristotelian categories in the debate with Flacius, Chemnitz also utilises such distinctions in his exposition of the two natures in Christ. In Luther's debate with Zwingli over the nature of the Lord's Supper, an extensive disagreement began with the two reform movements surrounding the humanity of Christ. Zwingli argued that Christ's human nature remained only at the right hand of God the Father in heaven, whereas Luther contended for Christ's omnipresence according to both natures. At the height of this debate following Luther's death, Martin Chemnitz wrote *The Two Natures in Christ*, in which he gives a detailed scriptural and theological exposition of the theme, focusing on the question of the communication of attributes in Christ. Throughout the book, Chemnitz uses scholastic categories, and thus the entire text could be examined to demonstrate all the particularities of his philosophical convictions. For the present purposes, however, only a small section in the beginning of the text is discussed, which carries the title, 'Definition of Certain Terms' (Chemnitz 1971:29–36). This first chapter of his work is a short prolegomenon of sorts, wherein Chemnitz outlines the use of various philosophical and theological terms in discussions about Christ's two natures. In this text, it is apparent that Chemnitz is an adherent of an essentialist metaphysic consistent with that of Aquinas.

This discussion begins by citing John of Damascus on terminology related to substance, in which Chemnitz purports that substance, nature, and form are used as interchangeable terms (Chemnitz 1971:29). These terms relate to that which is common to individual members of the same species. There are, thus, essential properties which make up various genera and species. Chemnitz further states that there are individual members of each species which are described through language of subsistence, hypostasis, or person. The individual thing 'subsists in itself', and it is defined by particular attributes (1971:29). These terms are then applied to the Trinity, wherein God is described as one essence which subsists in three persons. In light of this, Chemnitz explains that the eternal begetting of the Son and procession of the Spirit include a communication of the whole divine essence from the Father (p.30). Chemnitz makes further distinctions in relation to the incarnation of Christ. In the person of Christ, a self-subsistent

divine nature is united to the human nature which subsists not in itself, but in the divine nature (p.31). In describing Christ, there is a difference between the 'abstract', and 'concrete' manner of referring to him. Terms referring to natures as natures are 'abstract', because they deal with essence as such. However, when speaking of the person, he is spoken of 'concretely' (p. 31). It is important that the terms utilised in this section arise both from the church fathers and medieval scholastic thinkers. Chemnitz does not view himself as an innovator, but as an inheritor of the previous tradition, which is highly indebted to Greek philosophical concepts.

Among these scholastic terms, Chemnitz again returns to the substance-accident distinction. He divides all attributes into two categories: essential and accidental (1970:34). All created things have both of these categories of attributes. In God, however, there are no accidental qualities. Furthermore, there is an exact identification between God's essence and attributes, so that essential characteristics of the divine nature cannot be abstracted from substance. Chemnitz reasons that God is a perfectly simple essence, because if God were composed of essence and attributes, then such attributes would improve the divine nature and thus deny God's own perfection and self-sufficiency (1970:34). This is a clear reaffirmation of the Thomistic position regarding divine simplicity. Chemnitz then concludes his discussion by noting that Christ has accidental attributes according to his human nature, as is characteristic of all created natures. The essential properties of Jesus' divine nature are never transferred to the human as *essential* attributes, as such would result in a complete dissolution of the human nature itself. Rather, divine attributes are communicated to the human nature by grace, and are thus exercised through this nature, without an essential transformation of one into the other (p.35). Throughout his exposition of terminology, it is apparent that Chemnitz self-consciously utilises the metaphysical terminology of both Patristic authors and medieval scholastic thinkers. He is followed in this regard by the later Lutheran scholastics.

The most extensive metaphysical treatment of God among the scholastics is that of Johann Gerhard. In earlier authors, there was not a lengthy treatment of God's essence and attributes, as Melancthon and Chemnitz emphasised Triunity. In his *Theological Commonplaces*, Gerhard devotes an entire volume to an exposition of God's essence and attributes, in which a Thomistic conception of deity is affirmed and defended. To understand his underlying philosophical convictions surrounding essence, his

thoughts on two subjects are explored: arguments for the existence of God, and divine simplicity.

For Gerhard, the existence of God is something which can be proved both by reason and by scripture. Apologetics, then, are an essential part of the theological task. Gerhard outlines three reasons why such an enterprise is important: first, to refute sceptics. Second, to strengthen the faith of believers. Third, it perfects one's natural knowledge of God (Gerhard 2007:56–57). The third point is important, as it establishes continuity between Gerhard and Aquinas. As addressed above, both Luther and Aquinas argue that certain truths about God are discoverable by reason alone, though God's Triunity, the incarnation, and other truths are accessible only by means of revelation. Gerhard speaks of natural knowledge of God as consisting in his being, will, power, and operation (p.57). God's unity and existence, for Gerhard, are known by way of natural reason, but God's Triunity is not. Like Luther, Gerhard also distinguishes between the knowledge of the law as natural and knowledge of the gospel as supernatural. Gerhard refers to the natural law as the 'legal will' of God which leads to external obedience on behalf of the heathen. Gerhard then uses 'grace perfects nature' type of language which is characteristic of Aquinas. He writes that natural knowledge of God is 'imperfect and weak, [and that therefore] we must surely strengthen, perfect, and complete it from the divinely revealed Word' (p.58). Gerhard's Thomistic leanings are clear here and are further demonstrated in his exposition of proofs for the existence of God.

Gerhard gives five proofs of the existence of God which are apparent by way of nature alone. First, Gerhard follows Aquinas in arguing for the necessity of an unmoved mover (2007:60). Everything that is moved is moved by another, because nothing can actualise its own potency. There cannot be an infinite progression of movers, because such would necessitate that there are only secondary causes, which is an impossibility. By definition, secondary causes are subsequent to a primary cause. Thus, there must be a primary cause, who Gerhard identifies as God. Gerhard affirms here some of Aristotle's most fundamental metaphysical claims—most particularly, the distinction between act and potency. Gerhard is so fond of Aristotle that he even, following Aquinas, gives him the affectionate title 'The Philosopher' (2007:60)! His second argument is similar to the first, as he contends that efficient causation necessitates a primary cause which is not caused by another or self-caused. Third, Gerhard uses an argument from Anselm, which is also echoed in Augustine, wherein the degrees of goodness in the world necessitates an ultimate goodness by which all things are

measured. It is in this context that Gerhard also speaks about things having either 'more being and less being'. This is significant because such a statement demonstrates that Gerhard does not rely *solely* on Aristotle's metaphysics, but he also draws from Augustinian Neoplatonism, in which being is described as participation in God, and of which there are gradations. Fourth, Gerhard returns to Aristotle and argues from final causation, that an intelligent source must be instrumental in directing things toward their particular ends (p.61). Finally, Gerhard argues from natural human instinct that God's existence is imprinted upon the human mind. In all of these proofs, it is clear that Gerhard argues from the perspective of classical metaphysics, drawing primarily from Aristotle, but also utilising aspects of Neoplatonism.

Gerhard's philosophical convictions are further seen in his treatment of that topic, 'What God Is', in which divine simplicity takes a central position (Gerhard 2011:92). The theologian defines God as 'sheer and purest act' (p.93). He defines actuality by use of the Aristotelian distinctions as filtered through Thomas. Gerhard notes that God is not composed of matter and form, genus and species, substance and accidents, act and potency, or individuated substance and nature (p.93). In using such distinctions, Gerhard confirms his commitment to the Aristotelian categories presented. Gerhard is thus a strong proponent of hylemorphism. He further distinguishes by active and passive potency, noting that God is devoid of passive potency. This distinction, which is prominent in Aquinas, distinguishes between the ability to have a potency which can be actuated by something outside of oneself (passive potency), and the ability to actuate the potency of something outside of oneself (active potency). God possesses the latter, but not the former. All of the basic elements of Aquinas' metaphysical system are affirmed by Gerhard, but he also utilises aspects of Neoplatonism through St Augustine.

From Luther to Gerhard, philosophical essentialism is affirmed by Lutheran theologians, as it was throughout the scholastic tradition even into the twentieth century. Chemnitz, the Formula of Concord, Gerhard, and later scholastics primarily utilise Aristotelian categories, especially as they relate to two topics: man's relationship to sin, and God's simplicity. It is in these two areas that a distinction between substance and accident is adopted, as well as distinctions between act and potency, and matter and form as they relate to the simplicity of God. A problem has arisen, however, in relation to Luther's own thought and that of later thinkers. Most of Luther's statements about Aristotle are rather negative, although positive affirmations about his ethics and logic can be found. Yet, Luther nowhere accepts his

metaphysical schema. In fact, in Luther's most supposed anti-philosophical phase he completely rejects Aristotle in favour of Plato. This leads then to the often-made conclusion that a philosophical chasm separates Luther from the scholastics. Is one then left simply to choose between the Platonism of Luther and the Aristotelianism of the Confessions? While such a decision might seem inevitable, there are ways in which these ideas can be synthesised. As noted, Gerhard does not avoid Platonic language, especially when derived from Augustine. Here, it is contended that a consistent Lutheran scholastic metaphysic utilises elements of both Aristotelianism and Platonism, as Aquinas himself did. Some conclusions can now be made.

5. Conclusion

This article began by posing the question: did the Lutheran reformers use reason and Greek philosophy in a positive manner, or only engage in criticism of these thought forms? This question has been answered in the affirmative. Several elements of Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy were utilised by Luther, Melancthon, and later authors. The Lutheran relationship to classical philosophy is more complicated than can be summarised by either a dismissal or *complete* acceptance of any earlier philosophy. For these theologians, scripture always remained the primary source of authority. However, in a secondary manner, they believed that arguments of philosophy can and should be utilised by the theologian in order to explain various theological truths. This occurs in Luther, Melancthon, and the Lutheran scholastic tradition.

Luther is the figure who is most outspoken in his opposition to both human reason and Aristotle's philosophy. It was demonstrated, however, that these statements are not to be understood in an absolute sense. In the context of the two kingdoms, Luther praises the benefits of reason in the left-hand realm. In theological truths, however, one is not to come to conclusions by way of syllogism but through revelation. Even here, however, Luther can at times use arguments from philosophy to bolster his scriptural arguments. One example cited above was his utilisation of nominalist categories to explain his approach to Christ's presence in the Supper. He also speaks of regenerate reason, which can be used positively in formulation of doctrinal positions. A final point to be noted about Luther's approach here is that he explicitly affirms Platonic essentialism in opposition to Aristotle's philosophy in the Heidelberg Disputation. In all of these ways, it is clear that though Luther is cautious about the benefits

of reason and philosophy, he also recognises their usefulness in the appropriate contexts. Melanchthon argues similarly.

Luther's student and friend, Philip Melanchthon, followed his older colleague by rejecting the abuses of Aristotelian logic which were used to defend a form of works-righteousness in the medieval period. Also, in line with Luther, he believed that philosophy could be used in a beneficial manner when expositing theological truths. Melanchthon was a more systematic thinker, and as such he has a stronger use of the fourfold definition of causation as developed by Aristotle, and proclaimed the benefits of Aristotle's ethical system. He also followed some of the basic metaphysical concepts at work in medieval theology such as divine simplicity in both the Augsburg Confession and its Apology. Like Luther, Melanchthon demonstrated a moderated adaptation of classical philosophy, though with a recognition of its limitations.

The scholastic authors do not significantly depart from Luther and Melanchthon regarding these basic assumptions. Chemnitz and Gerhard speak clearly of the benefits of philosophy and reason, while also cautioning against their abuses. Within this understanding, they do, however, use more philosophical language than do the earlier two authors. Chemnitz explains several Aristotelian distinctions in his writings on the two natures of Christ, such as the difference between substance and accidental qualities. These are also affirmed in the Formula of Concord. Johann Gerhard adopts Aristotle's hylemorphism in his treatment of the doctrine of God, and especially in his proofs of God's existence. It is clear then that essentialist philosophy is not inherently opposed to Lutheran thought.

The views of Luther, Melanchthon, Chemnitz, and Gerhard present a challenge for the Lutheran church today. While many Lutheran theologians present a doctrinal system, which is inherently opposed to Greek philosophy, such an approach is at odds with the earlier Lutheran tradition. In these earlier writers, the church today can receive guidance in using philosophy cautiously but beneficially in service to theology.

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