Introduction: In Appreciation of Gyula Klima

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Évezred hanyatlik, évezred kel újra,

Míg egy földi álom e világba téved,

Hogy a hitlen ember imádni tanulja

A köd oszlopában rejlő Istenséget.

—János Arany, “Dante” (1852)

One millennium sets and one millennium rises,

Till a mortal’s dream into that world will stray,

Till the unbelieving person recognizes

That mist-hidden Godhead to which he must pray.

(trans. David Hill, 2010)

What began as a peaceful student protest in Budapest on October 23, 1956 quickly turned violent. Soon many strategically placed buildings had become staging grounds for confrontation between communist and populist forces. Within days, a Soviet tank had driven through the maternity ward at Saint Margaret Hospital in Óbuda. So on October 30, in the midst of the Hungarian Uprising, a midwife was called to a modest house on Bercsényi Street, and Gyula Klima was born at home.

In what follows draw from the coincidences of this beginning – the philosopher’s birth during a world-historic political confrontation –three threads which can be carried through his impressive career: the characteristic Hungarian temper of resilience, independence, and creative conservatism; attention to the practical implications of first principles; and midwifery—at least in the Socratic sense, which is to say, the service of dialectic.

While all three threads intertwine, we will consider each one, in turn, in a more dominant way: the first, to highlight some general features of Klima’s style; the second, to frame a summary of his scholarly work; and the third helps to focus on what we think is his work’s animating theme.

**A MAGYAR MIND**

It is not uncommon to suggest that there is a distinctively Hungarian temperament, linked in part to the distinctiveness of the Hungarian language. The historian John Lukacs (who emigrated from Budapest to the United States in 1946, at the age of 22) noted “the loneliness of the Magyar language,” having “no relative among the great families of European languages” (*Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture* [Grove Press, 1988], p. 65). Not only the vocabulary, but the grammar and syntax, isolates Hungarian from Germanic and Romantic languages. Its structure is “agglutinative,” which linguists also call “synthetic”: its syntax is strictly rule-based and conspicuous through added syllables, rather than inflections and prepositions. Lukacs links this to “the frequent linguistic abilities of Hungarians” (and we might conjecture that such a mother tongue would be an advantage especially in studying both Latin and formal logic).

The grammar and syntax also gives Hungarian speech a distinctive sound. In appropriately musical English, Patrick Leigh Fermor described how in Hungarian “changes of sense are conveyed by a concatenation of syllables stuck on behind the first; all the vowel sounds imitate their leader, and the invariable ictus on the leading syllable sets up a kind of dactylic or anapaestic canter which, to a new ear, gives Magyar a wild and most unfamiliar ring.” (Fermor, *Between the Woods and the Water* [NYRB 2005; originally published 1986], p. 31)

Lukacs describes the language as strongly “declarative… rational rather than mystical, lyrical rather than metaphorical,” which he takes to explain why “there is little that is sly and secretive in the national character” (Lukacs 110). The Hungarian literary scholar Antal Szerb, linking this to the style of the nation’s parliamentary politics, said the Hungarian mind “tends to monologue, rather than to dialogue” (quoted in Lukacs 109).

We draw out these cultural reflections because language is central to Klima’s philosophical project, not only an object of study, but for its range of persuasive power – a range that somewhat confirms, and somewhat challenges, Lukacs’ comments on Magyar rhetorical habits. Klima’s writing moves comfortably between technical formalization and elegant, often poetic, composition. And anyone who has heard him speak knows his playfulness with language, his love of elegant turns of phrase, and his intense animation, which is perfectly fluent in English but takes on a rushing intensity when speaking in his native tongue.

The Magyar language’s “loneliness” inspires an almost unsharable pride in national literature, especially poets. It was a reading of Sándor Petőfi’s 1848 “National Song,” an anthem for freedom asserting independence from Austria, that also roused some students’ spirits to begin what became the 1956 Uprising. And Klima’s personal favorites include Miklós Radnóti and János Arany, modern poets who yet confirm the Hungarian habit of preserving and persisting: “Many of the most enduring achievements of the nation consist of conservative efforts of recovery and rebuilding after its worst disasters.” (Lukacs 110)

This helps to illuminate another feature of Klima’s work. Hungary is often described as a nation mixing melancholy and hope, nostalgia and perseverance. Lukacs finds that spiritually, Hungarians are more conscious of “that blending of major and minor, of optimism and pessimism, of light and darkness that is, after all, the inevitable human condition, and also the condition of any culture that is worthwhile” (Lukacs 24). Preserving culture involves both protecting against threats but assimilating valuable contributions from outside.

Klima’s work reflects this creative traditionalism. One of the first things one notices as his student is that he does not think of medieval thinkers as part of a past age, a lost curiosity. He once remarked that, as far as intellectual culture is concerned, the middle ages lasted in Hungary well into the 19th century. (Lukacs confirms: “[T]he Enlightenment, the Century of Reason, the French Revolution hardly touched Hungary” [Lukacs 114].) While in many ways Klima is fully modern and even ahead of his time—for instance, as early adopter of the internet as a tool for researching and sharing work—this in now way compromises the sense that he survives from times often thought long past, one who thinks as if a contemporary of philosophers long dead.

This transcending of categories, or creative traditionalism, is reflected in the category to which some might fit the genre of much of Klima’s work in philosophy: “Analytic Thomism.” Edward Feser, trying to articulate his contested label, distinguished three types: (1) analytic philosophers first, who happen to show interest in Thomism, (2) those attempting to give both the analytic and Thomistic traditions equal weight, and (3) those (with whom he groups Klima) “whose training was in the analytic tradition and whose modes of argument and choice of topics reflects this background, but whose philosophical views are in substance basically just traditional ones, without qualification or reinterpretation.” (Feser 2009; “The Thomistic tradition, Part II” <https://edwardfeser.blogspot.com/2009/10/thomistic-tradition-part-ii.html>)

Whether he would accept this description or not, Klima is rare among Thomists in not being primarily trained within one of the dominant mid-20th C “schools” (Existential, Laval, Transcendental, Lublin), whose particular preoccupations, and sometimes idiosyncratic jargon, therefore seem less significant to Klima’s students. Studying Aquinas more or less on his own—and effectively finding himself persuaded by Aquinas after attempting to find fault with his Five Ways—Klima was formed not by a *Thomism*, but by *Thomas*, the philosophical saint treated on his own terms and as capable of dialogue with the most prominent contemporary thinkers Thomistic or otherwise.

Although he has criticized Peter Geach in particulars [CITE FIVE MISTAKES article], Klima was inspired by Geach’s confidence in Christian theology’s power to keep logic honest, and in the importance of reconstructing a pre-modern conceptual schema. As an epigraph to the third essay (“General Terms in their Referring Function”) in his early volume *Ars Artium* (p. 44), Klima quoted Geach’s hope to achieve the “Paradise Regained” of reconstructing an Aristotelian semantic framework (from Geach’s essay, “History of the Corruption of Logic”).

In this underlying hope of recapturing a lost classical framework, Klima has something in common with another philosopher known for bringing Aquinas into conversation with very different contemporary philosophical conversations. Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* taught many to think of our moral discourse as a collection of confusing scraps and fragments; ethics would make more sense, he proposed, if its questions could be reformulated in terms of a once fundamental, but now lost, teleological framework. Where MacIntyre’s attempted to recapture lost concepts of practical reason through an alternative narration, Klima seeks to recapture lost concepts of theoretical reason by bringing them into dialogue with whatever displaced them—confident that, if they were ever intelligible, a judicious application of argument can make them intelligible once again.

If for MacIntyre the most important tool for renewing the intelligibility of a tradition is narrative, for Klima the most important tool is logic. More specifically, Klima’s project commits him to dialectic, applied to semantics. It is in these terms that we can review more properly some of his particular contributions to philosophy and philosophical scholarship.

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORY OF SEMANTICS**

The breadth of Klima’s scholarship stretches historically from some of philosophy’s best-known figures in Anselm, Aquinas, Ockham and Descartes to lesser-known figures including Thomas of Sutton and Henry of Ghent, to Frege, Geach, Kenny, and others who have produced some of the most consequentional scholarship in the analytic tradition; and thematically from debates on identity, categories, and causation in metaphysics, on skepticism in epistemology and theories of mental content in philosophy of mind, to others too numerous to mention.

From his earliest work in semantics, Klima recognized that classical logic, being primarily interested in developing an account of the semantics of propositions as a precondition for the development of a theory of consequence, affords much less attention to the components of propositions themselves. Klima fills this lacuna by providing some of the earliest and most ambitious applications of restricted quantification in the history and philosophy of logic, using it both to formalize the medieval theory of supposition and to provide a general account of quantitatively ambiguous natural language sentences.[[1]](#footnote-1) Elsewhere, Klima’s formalizations of supposition theory specifically and medieval semantics more broadly provide us with an account of the semantics of intensional verbs (Klima 1991b), a semantic foundation for Aquinas’ theory of the analogy of being (Klima 1996, 2002a), and a clean resolution of the problem of existential import in the Aristotelian square of opposition.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In one sustained thread of that work, Klima decouples *via antiqua* and *via moderna* semantics from the realist and anti-realist metaphysics with which they are most commonly paired, contending that neither semantics by itself strictly entails its associated metaphysics (Klima 1999, 2011b). Rather, archtypical realists were required to adopt non-straightforward semantic accounts of the meanings of terms in at least some cases by their antecedent metaphysical commitments (e.g. to divine simplicity) (Klima 2002b), while some of the best known nominalist logicians incorporated what today would be regarded as realist elements in their logic (Klima 2005). For Klima, the *via antiqua* and *via moderna* traditions of medieval logic differ not in their *quantity* of ontological commitments, but in the tools they provide for *handling* ontological commitments, which in turn differ from those of the model-theoretic framework dominant today.

*Via antiqua* semantics takes an affirmative statement to be true when what is signified by its predicate inheres in what is signified by its subject - sometimes called the *inherence theory of predication*. Within this framework, terms predicating common natures or accidental features of a subject are taken to ultimately refer to exactly the categorical entities one might expect. But the framework avoids full, immediate, fundamental commitment to entities today’s nominalists might find objectionable by providing a rich theory according to which being is predicated in different degrees.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Conversely, the *via moderna* framework that became ascendant after Ockham takes an affirmative statement to be true when its subject and predicate term refer to the same object - sometimes called the *identity theory of predication*. Within this framework, terms predicating common natures or accidental features of a subject need not be taken to ultimately refer to different types of objects such as abstract genera or relations, but instead refer to familiar objects *differently*. For example, the truth of ‘Socrates is a father’ does not require commitment to a distinct entity that is Socrates’ fatherhood. Instead, the sentence’s predicate may (non-rigidly) refer to Socrates himself, albeit connoting his being a father, and hence refer to the same object as that rigidly referred to by the proper name ‘Socrates’. Granting some license for intensional contexts,[[4]](#footnote-4) the verb ‘is’ or ‘exists’ in *via moderna* semantics is equally ontologically committing in its various uses, but *what* one is committed to by its uses need not be immediately apparent (Klima 2008b, 437–30).

Both medieval frameworks would reject the object-language metalanguage distinction taken for granted since Tarski in their theory of truth, and in their use of ampliation for tensed, modal, and intensional contexts, both provide ample tools for rejecting a naïve application of Quine’s account of ontological commitment in terms of existential quantification.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**METAPHYSICS AND LOGIC: NEUTRALITY AND INDEPENDENCE?**

None of this means that there is *no* relationship between an author’s positions in metaphysics and his semantics: rather, the semantic framework an author adopts conditions what options that author has in metaphysics without fully determining them. For example, extreme realism in metaphysics doesn’t follow strictly from the *via antiqua*’s inherence theory of predication, but it is the most natural fit for that theory if one accepts the view that terms signifying accidental being denote their referents rigidly while rejecting that framework’s insistence on multiple, analogically related senses of ‘being’ (Klima 1999, 125). Conversely, the broad outlines of Ockham’s account of the relation between language, thought, and reality serve not only as a foundation for Ockham’s own metaphysical reductionism, but also for the realism of a Descartes, Malebranche, Putnam or a Leibniz (Klima 1991b).

There is, however, no relationship of *entailment* from purely semantic principles to metaphysical truths. Klima writes:

To be sure, this is not to say that metaphysical principles are to be derived from, or somehow justified in a weaker sense on the basis of, semantic principles. Metaphysical principles, being first principles using the most general terms, such as the transcendentals and the categories, cannot be derived from prior principles, and their terms cannot be defined on the basis of more general terms. What semantics can do, however, is that it can provide the principles of interpretation of metaphysical principles. On the basis of these principles of interpretation the implications of metaphysical principles are more clearly delineated, which then can be used in their evaluation in dialectical disputations concerning their acceptability in the interpretations thus clarified. Furthermore, if the semantic principles of interpretation are made explicit, they can also be subject to further evaluation, in a disputation on a different level, the sort appropriate to the comparison of different logical theories (Klima 2011a, 49).

Modern mathematics calls this relation *independence*, though as the name implies the fundamental notion itself is by no means a recent one. Just as Cantor’s continuum hypothesis is neither provable nor refutable from the principles of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory alone, or - to provide a more medieval example - truths of revealed theology are neither provable nor refutable from the principles of natural philosophy, neither on Klima’s account are metaphysical principles provable or refutable from those of semantics alone.

**MEDIEVAL SEMANTICS AND THE PROBLEM OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

Two complications distinguish the semantic case from those mentioned. The first is that while both the set-theoretic and theological case mentioned above concern provability and refutability in a single system, the sheer multiplicity of semantic frameworks itself may provide a barrier to a broadly acceptable account of provability across those frameworks. The second generalizes a problem nearly the opposite of that established by Gödel in his first incompleteness theorem (Gödel 1931): where that theorem established the expressibility of unprovable claims of number theory in any sufficiently robust system, the semantic problem we face here is that a claim of metaphysics may be taken to be established or refuted merely on account of the lack of expressibility of the particular semantic framework one is working in.

Klima’s response to these problems is anti-pluralist without thereby being dogmatically classical. While it would be easy enough, for instance, to construct a metalogical account of validity by quantifying over distinct logical systems on the model of possible world semantics and regarding as valid all and only those theorems valid in every system, Klima instead recognizes the known limitations of classical semantics while also taking the provable equivalence of systems containing distinct logical primitives as *prima facie* evidence for the possibility of a fundamental diversity at the *conceptual* level that nevertheless doesn’t entail a despairing or indifferent anti-realism at the *metaphysical* level (Klima 2012). So Klima’s response, both technically and philosophically, is to *extend the framework*. Meeting the tradition where it is, he extends classical semantics to allow for treatment of donkey sentences (Klima 1988, 2010), non-existent entities (Klima 2001), and quantificational phenomena (Klima and Sandu 1990), while more broadly appealing (in a rare quote of a ‘continental’ philosopher that shows up in multiple places throughout his *œuvre*) to the possibility of a ‘fusion of horizons’ mentioned by Gadamer as a solution to the impasse of communication across distinct semantic frameworks, cultures, or philosophical traditions and the attitude of metaphysical anti-realism it encourages (Klima 2000, 2009a).

Despite the depth and breadth of his work, the amount of space Klima devotes to advancing positions that are unambiguously his own, rather than to steel-manning positions of historical or contemporary figures he may or may not agree with, is comparatively little.[[6]](#footnote-6) Still, Klima’s solution here provides a window into the answer to a more personal question that his scholarship solicits: namely, of all the intellectual pursuits to devote oneself to, why study medieval philosophy, and specifically medieval semantics?

In one uncommonly autobiographical passage, Klima writes:

I remember that when I was at Notre Dame (so this happened in the second half of the nineties), I asked several of my colleagues, and even the then visiting David Armstrong, to provide metaphysically non-committal clarifications of the semantics of the language they were using in describing their metaphysical theories. In response, I was given puzzled looks and declarations strongly reminiscent of the way medieval nominalists characterized the attitude of their realist opponents: we don’t care about names; we go right to the things themselves!—Well, just look at the history of late-scholasticism and early modern philosophy to see what good that attitude did for them.

So, what can we do to avoid the late-scholastic scenario, going on another cycle of endless and more and more meaningless metaphysical debates until the arrival of another Kant declaring the whole enterprise ill-founded and another Carnap declaring it to be meaningless, to launch another anti-metaphysical cycle of meaningless search for meaning to be abandoned yet again for metaphysics, etc., etc.? Why don’t we try both in tandem, i.e., analysis and metaphysics at the same time, as the very designation “analytic metaphysics” would seem to demand? For then we could start by laying down our clearly defined semantic principles (instead of making them up and twisting them around as we go) and engage each other in our metaphysical debates according to the same principles, instead of talking past each other, making clear that whoever is talking according to different semantic principles is just playing a different game (Klima 2014, 86–87).

Here, Klima’s apology for analysis aims to alleviate a difficulty—namely, that in much debate in the core disciplines of analytic philosophy and in metaphysics in particular, rival participants are often unable or unwilling to state their positions in a linguistic context their opponents would be able to agree to, leaving such debates unfruitful from the start. Without the opportunity for common ground that semantics provides, not only shared understanding, but even proof, refutation, and disagreement itself become unattainable.

With this problem in mind, the study of medieval semantics, as a study of frameworks of meaning remarkably foreign to that of our own time, provides an example *par excellence* of the kind of interpretive charity needed to surmount our own crises of meaning and communication.

**TO METAPHYSICS THROUGH DIALECTIC**

Nowhere has this effort been more sustained than in Klima’s scholarship on John Buridan’, which has helped elevate the 14th century arts master from a lesser-known figure to one whose stature is closer to that of an Ockham, arguably surpassing the Franciscan in his logic. A strict nominalist might seem an unexpected research focus for someone of such strong Thomistic sympathies, but Klima’s seminal contributions on Buridan and in medieval philosophy more broadly provide excellent examples of how one can solve apparently intractable philosophical and communicational problems simply by *expanding the framework* - whether that framework be classical semantics expanded to include an existence predicate and restricted quantifiers or the broader historical consciousness of Anglophone philosophy of the past seventy or so years.

[DO WE NEED MORE ON HIS BURIDAN CONTRIBUTIONS???]

By doing so, Klima is able to shed light on traditional (and sometimes apparently intractable) topics even within Thomism, for instance on analogy, causality, the soul, the real distinction between being and essence, divine simplicity, illumination and abstraction, and participation. He is particularly adept at avoiding the ruts of established Thomistic arguments by focusing his efforts on making novel concepts intelligible – in themselves, and as part of an overall intelligible framework – rather than first seeking to defend traditional theses as true. Thus when Klima does turn his attention from the conceptual framework of classical semantics directly to metaphysics, he is capable of articulating for modern audiences matters not typically covered in its more recent Anglophone metaphysics: the convertibility of the transcendental predicates with being itself; the different senses of being pertaining to past present, and future being; to real and rational; to substance and accident; to the potential and the actual, along with the relations of priority, posteriority and relative perfection displayed therein that prevent these distinctions from being understood as differences in kind.

And there is no doubt that Klima wants to defend a classical approach to metaphysics – an intention never exactly hidden but prominent as the dominant thread of his undergraduate lectures on the history of philosophy, in which he takes the occasion of particular challenging texts from Plato, Porphyry, Boethius, Aquinas, Descartes, and Hume to trace the central role, and then “vanishing” of the notion of substance from metaphysics. (“The Yale Lectures,” 1991-1993; <https://faculty.fordham.edu/klima/lectures.htm>)

Is there perhaps something *sly*, then, when Klima more scholarly work posits different senses of ‘being’ as if to “avoid” the question of “ontological commitment”? For while Klima’s semantic focus may avoid *presuming* metaphysical conviction, it isn’t a way of altogether avoiding metaphysical *reflection*; elucidating possible meanings of ‘being’ elucidates the varieties of ways of conceiving *being*; in that sense, it *is inseparable from metaphysics*.

Thus, far from relegating claims about the meaning of being to semantics *rather than* to metaphysics, and thereby construing them as linguistic or conceptual *rather than* ontological, Klima’s strategy is to help isolate where metaphysical disagreement is and how it can be intelligibly formulated. For instance, Klima’s *semantic* analysis of medieval realism and nominalism “as just different versions of conceptualism, differing especially in how they handle the problems of describing and identifying mental content’ (Klima 2011b, 110), is only superficially metaphysically neutral; by emphasizing a specifically semantic sense of realism and nominalism, Klima helps us appreciate the sense in which a *metaphysical* realism would have to be formulated differently in each of them, and encourages us to look for the possibility of moving back and forth the between the various conceptual frameworks in order even to raise the genuine metaphysical questions that may have helped facilitate the initial semantic innovations.

That is why, despite his technical focus on semantics, Klima’s body of work evinces a breadth and depth of attention to genuinely metaphysical questions. We could say that theses such as the distinction between the various analogically related senses of being, concerned as they are with the *meaning* of being, are sometimes treated by Klima as providing *a semantic foundation for metaphysics* distinct from *metaphysics* itself,[[7]](#footnote-7) whereas he seems also to be aware that, as they are with the meaning of *being*, they are also a means of expanding the possibility of metaphysics and so contribute properly to metaphysics [CITE?].

**INTELLECTUAL MIDWIFERY**

The strategy of pursuing “metaphysics through semantics” thus points to another crucial dimension of logic in Klima’s work: the role of dialectic. We have already hinted that what narrative is to ethics in *After Virtue* – the means of reconstructing (without recourse to metaphysics!) a “teleological” alternative to modern confusion – dialectic is to metaphysics in Klima’s overall project: the means of making intelligible a lost a conceptual framework, not to assert victoriously over other alternatives, but to learn to enter into and occupy from alternative frameworks.

Even more, dialectic allows one to find those alternative frameworks within oneself. The Platonic contrast of *mythos* and *logos* is not between supernatural and natural explanations, but between modes of persuasion: the narrator is invitational, calling one to trust a vision proposed. The dialectician is maieutic, assisting one to recognize intelligibility in and from one’s own participation in reasoning.

So it was not only an act of humility, nor as plausible deniability for the accusation of “teaching,” that Socrates compared himself to a midwife. It was part of his understanding of human reason, as containing within it forgotten truths, or (in more Aristotelian terms) potencies waiting to be actualized. In its Platonic development, this points to spiritual heights more mystical than conventional *mythos*: ideas themselves as traces of an original intelligibility, a transcendent Truth and Goodness and Being inarticulable in words but the source and end of our participatory intellectual activity.

One might not know it from his most technical papers in medieval Aristotelian semantics, but Klima has a deep and sincere affection for Plato (and for the Platonist tradition, as in Augustine). Without compromising a commitment to hylomorophic anthropology, a favorite film is *Shawshank Redemption*, which Klima interprets as an overt analogy of the soul’s struggle for emergence into freedom from the oppression of embodied suffering.

And always for Gyula, Socrates is model for argument, as not competitive, but communal. Not every philosopher who loves to argue is as committed to the Socratic principle that we should be as glad when shown wrong as when shown right: either way we end up closer to the truth.

Dialectic as “art of arts” is a recurring theme of Klima’s work, and one he finds especially well articulated by Buridan:

…we should note that dialectic (that is, logic) is rightly said to be the art of arts, by reason of a certain superiority it has over other arts, [namely], in virtue of its utility and the generality of its application to all other arts and sciences. Due to this generality, which it shares with metaphysics, it has access to disputations that concern not only the conclusions, but also the principles of all sciences. (quoted in Klima’s Buridan book, p. 8)

This vision of dialectic offers to unify intellectual pursuits, not in a reductionist way imagined by positivists and rationalists, translating complex ideas into a simple conceptual framework, but making ideas intelligible in and across conceptual frameworks. In Klima’s conception of dialectic, we don’t translate different worldviews, as if to eliminate them, but inhabit them and seek to understand them, and learn how to move between them. The Gadamerian “fusion of horizons” is not a resolution, such that one framework ceases to be different from another, but a network, so that one is capable of moving from one to another, and perhaps occupying both at the same time.

Hence comprehending dialectic as *ars artium* suggests more than that it is a foundation for all the sciences; it is also the foundation of society and friendship. Dialectic is a common pursuit of truth, not competitive manipulation. Notwithstanding its Socratic and Platonic heritage, for even this function of dialectic Klima has drawn inspiration from the scholastic nominalist Buridan:

Dialectic, when applied in speculative matters or utilized in a speculative manner, is directed toward opinion; for both disputants aim at acquiring an opinion about the point of the discussion; they take contradictory stances, and each of them should produce probable arguments for his position, if he has any. He should also solve his opponents’ arguments, if they also have probable solutions—and not in a litigious manner, just in order to win, but in order that both of them should assent, in agreement with each other, to the position that they have seen to have been supported in the disputation by more probable and less soluble arguments; and if they do otherwise, then they slip into a sophistic disputation, which often happens. (SD 7.1.3. p. 499)

Teasing out the political and spiritual stakes of this conception of dialectic, Klima glossed this this passage from Buridan remarks introducing his recent conference on “The Metaphysics and Theology of the Eucharist” (Budapest, September 2021):

[T]he point is that *a dialectical disputation is not a zero-sum game*. It is all too often that we see the deterioration of such worthy discussions into petty quarrels, indeed, we shall see historical examples of how they can turn into something worse: fights, schisms, even wars (in which we know truth is the first victim), all for winning by vanquishing the opposing party. But a dialectical discussion is not for vanquishing one’s opponent: it is a win-win encounter for both parties, from which both come away with the prize of *deeper understanding*.

As Klima’s philosophical project attests, at stake in the dialectic’s maieutic persistence is not only political but spiritual communion. Hence even Klima’s most sober technical papers do not shy away from gesturing to the more mystical implications of Thomistic metaphysics, and its ascent to a simple God Who transcends discursive reason. Dialectic rightly pursued improves the human condition; it fosters productive harmony. It is thus a noble service to persist in dialectic, building the community of truth-seekers, and anticipating a life without it only in union with truth’s perfect source, the ineffable Divine.

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1. (Klima 1988, 1990, 1991a; Klima and Sandu 1990). Cf. (Parsons 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Klima 2001). Cf (Read 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See (Klima 2002a). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See (Klima 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. (Klima 2004), (Klima 2009b, 171–74). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Exceptions include his acceptance of both Anselm’s proof of God’s existence and Aquinas’ proof of the immateriality of the intellect as sound (Klima 2000, 2009a) and his advancing, based on an examination of Buridan’s treatment of reciprocal liar paradoxes, that any adequate semantics for natural language must be semantically closed and token-based (Klima 2004, 2008a). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Cf. (Klima 1996, 88), (Klima 2011a, 49). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)