

one may speak of the first order of formal abstraction, that is, physical abstraction; the second order of formal abstraction, that is, mathematical abstraction; and the third order of formal abstraction, that is, metaphysical abstraction. These three orders or degrees of formal abstraction respectively constitute the different levels of theoretical science.

Total abstraction admits of different degrees also: some objects are more general and some less general than others. These differences do not constitute differences *among* sciences; they function exclusively *within* a given science. Two objects on the same level of formal abstraction are studied in the same science, but the more general is studied before the more specific. Total abstraction does not help to specify the sciences, but it is a common condition for all the sciences; and, within a given science, it determines the order of proceeding in its particular subject matter.

*Abstraction vs. Separation.* In distinguishing between the types of speculative science, St. Thomas speaks of an abstraction of the whole (*abstractio totius*) that yields the object of natural science, of an abstraction of the form (*abstractio formae*) that yields the object of mathematics, and a separation (*separatio*) that yields the object of metaphysics. The first two of these are called abstractions in a strict sense because they are abstractions by way of simple consideration. The third is more sharply referred to as a separation because it is an instance of the more radical abstraction by way of negative judgment.

The first of these three abstractions is the abstraction of the whole essence of the natural thing from the matter that individuates it. It yields an object sufficiently free from matter to be intelligible, but an object defined nevertheless in terms of common sensible matter. The second yields the form of QUANTITY that is abstracted from all matter save common intelligible matter. The third yields an object abstracted from all matter and an object seen to be independent of matter both in meaning and existence. The significantly different stances in reference to matter for these objects—resulting in significantly different modes of defining—put each on a different level of theoretical science. St. Thomas, with his distinctions between the abstraction of the whole, the abstraction of the form, and separation, covers the same ground as do Cajetan and John of St. Thomas with their distinctions between physical abstraction (the first degree of formal abstraction), mathematical abstraction (the second degree of formal abstraction), and metaphysical abstraction (the third degree of formal abstraction).

*See Also:* KNOWLEDGE, PROCESS OF; KNOWLEDGE, THEORIES OF; KNOWLEDGE, EPISTEMOLOGY; UNIVERSALS

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## ABSURDITY

Absurdity is a basic notion for a number of modern thinkers such as A. Malraux (1901– ), J. P. Sartre (1905–80), A. Camus (1913–60), F. Kafka (1883–1924), E. Albee (1928– ), F. Arrabal (1932– ), S. Beckett (1906–89), J. Genet (1910–86), E. Ionesco (1912–94), and H. Pinter (1930– ). Whereas dictionaries define the absurd as that which is contrary to reason, as used by these writers it designates that which is without a reason. The absurd is a situation, a thing, or an event that really is, but for which no explanation is possible. Because the affair is inexplicable, it offends reason; it is senseless; it is absurd.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) is the source for this type of thought. Kierkegaard’s writings are a constant protest against the excessive RATIONALISM of G. W. HEGEL, who taught that all the mysteries of the Christian faith could be comprehended by reason. To indicate that the Incarnation was beyond the understanding of human reason, Kierkegaard called it the absurd, meaning by that something unintelligible and incomprehensible to reason. He insisted that Christian absurdity was neither nonsense, nor irrationality, nor something meaningless; for notions such as these follow on the judgment of reason examining its legitimate data, whereas the Christian accepts the Incarnation by faith. In the light of faith he sees that the Incarnation is in no way absurd.

The notion was then taken up by modern thinkers, especially by existentialists, but in an atheistic context. Thus, absurdity for Sartre arises from the absolute contingency and complete gratuity of the world. Because there is no God, Sartre argues, there are no reasons for things.

Things just are; and because they are without any reason for being, they are absurd. Ultimately all things come from nowhere and are going nowhere. Camus gives a different meaning. Admitting that there are scientific explanations for the various parts of the universe, Camus denies that there is any ultimate reason for the whole. Absurdity is a feeling that arises from the confrontation between man, who is looking for a unified explanation of all things, and a world that has no basic meaning.

Because of their preoccupation with the absurd, playwrights like Genet, Ionesco, Beckett and the like have been called collectively the Theater of the Absurd. To indicate the role of absurdity in the human situation these dramatists create sections of dialogue that are incoherent; they depict scenes in which the actions of the actors directly contradict the words they are speaking; they construct plays around the weird fantasies of deranged minds. In this they resemble Kafka, whose exuberant and enigmatic symbolism describes man as caught in a nightmare of existence; truth and illusion are so intertwined in his works that life is there seen as wearisome, uncertain, and senseless.

The Christian can well appreciate the loneliness, frustration, and the emptiness engendered by ATHEISM in these men. He can also be grateful for his faith, which enables him to see atheism as the most absurd of all absurdities; for the visible things of this world do declare the hidden attributes of God (Rom 1.20).

*See Also:* EXISTENTIALISM.

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## ABŪ 'L-BARAKĀT

Coptic author; d. May 10, 1324. His full name was Shams al-Ri'āsa abū 'l-Barakāt ibn Kabar. He seems to have taken the added name of Barsauma on the occasion of his priestly ordination. He was a Coptic priest attached to the church called al-Mu'allāqa in Old Cairo. He held, besides, the post of secretary to the prince and Mameluke officer Ruqn al-Dīn Baibars al-Mansūrī and collaborated with him on his history of Islam, which comes up to 1325, the year of Ruqn's death. Other works that he left include: a Coptic-Arabic dictionary; a large number of elegant sermons for feasts and occasions; and his principal work, a theological encyclopedia titled *The Lamp of Darkness and the Exposition of the Service*.

*The Lamp of Darkness* presents all that clergy and laity need to know about the doctrines of the faith, the

Scriptures, Canon Law, liturgy. The work has a practical teaching purpose and seeks to hand on the genuine religious tradition. Of 24 chapters the first seven deal with doctrine (1–3), items of church history (4), a list of collections of Church law (5), introduction to the Scripture and an account of the liturgical books (6), and an account of Christian literature in Arabic (7). The remaining chapters treat of cult and Church customs and practices.

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## ABUNDIUS OF COMO, ST.

Bishop and patron of Como, Italy; d. April 2 c. 462–489, probably 468. Abundius (also called Abundantius), assistant and successor of Bishop Amantius, was consecrated Nov. 17, 449, and sent by Pope Leo I in 450, along with Bishop Eutherius of Capua and the priests Basilus and Senator, to Constantinople to discuss the orthodoxy of its patriarch ANATOLIUS. Theodosius II died before their arrival, but Marcian and Pulcheria received them kindly. On Oct. 21, 450, a synod was held in the baptistery of Hagia Sophia in which all the bishops of the patriarchate, beginning with Anatolius, signed the Tome of Leo to Flavian anathematizing the doctrines of NESTORIUS and EUTYCHES. Abundius performed a similar papal mission to Bishop Eusebius of Milan and his suffragans, and then devoted himself to the conversion of pagans in his own diocese.

Feast: April 2.

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## ACACIAN SCHISM

The Acacian Schism (484–519) was caused by a change of policy on the part of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Acacius (472–489), who despite his intimacy with the Monophysites had opposed the anti-Chalcedonian encyclical of the Emperor BASILISCUS in 475. Upon the restoration of the Emperor Zeno (August 476), he collaborated in the deposition of the Monophysite bishops, including Peter the Fuller of Antioch and John Codonatus of Apamea. In 479 he consecrated the Chalcedonian Calandion as bishop of Antioch at the emperor's behest and drew a protest from Pope SIMPLICIUS (468–483) for interfering in another patriarchal jurisdiction (*Epist.* June 22, 479).