MARITAIN ON THE NATURAL DESIRE TO SEE GOD: REFLECTIONS APPRECIATIVE AND CRITICAL

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Having stayed for some time in Salamanca, I could not but be familiar with the famous words of Br. Luis de Leon. Having been unjustly imprisoned for over five years by the Inquisition, and then fully exonerated, he returned to his teaching post. Upon first ascending the lectern, he surveyed his expectant audience and serenely began: "as I was saying yesterday..."[1] My beginning cannot be as splendid or as immortal; still, I here continue an argument made to this Association. I have argued that Maritain, contrary to his own self-understanding, was more of a lay theologian than a philosopher.[2] I will not re-argue that thesis here, but will again only remind us of the vast number of works he wrote dealing with truths that derive from faith: the whole second part of *The Degrees of Knowledge* is a case in point. And so, too, is the matter I will take up here: the natural desire of any intellectual creature to see God. For this matter, Maritain repeatedly argued, could only be understood fully, or adequately, from truths of faith.

It is not surprising that he made such a claim. For this desire is the "lynchpin" or "point of contact" between the orders of nature and grace and is the basis for Thomas's careful, detailed, and concerted effort to establish their proper relation in the *Summa Contra Gentiles.* And here I come to my first critical reflection on Maritain: he never bothers to examine that work in any depth. This is even more surprising given that the matter Thomas expressly seeks to understand in it—namely the relation between the truths of faith that are *accessible*

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[1] See "Leon, Fray Luis de" in the *Enciclopedia de la Religión Católica* (Barcelona: Dalmau y Jover, 1953), T. IV, 1231-32.

[2] See "To Philosophize *For* the Faith: Jacques Maritain's Intellectual Vocation," in *The Vocation of the Catholic Philosopher: From Jacques Maritain to John Paul II*, ed. John P. Hittinger (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 2011), 110-31.

to reason and those that *transcend* it—was so close to the project of Maritain's whole life. And yet one will look in vain throughout Maritain's entire *oeuvre* for any substantive discussion of *The Summa Contra Gentiles.* As we shall see, because of this lacuna, I believe he fails to grasp fully what Thomas's own doctrine is on this important matter.

It is also somewhat surprising that he apparently did not know the work of Fr. Guy de Broglie, S.J., which re-awakened theologians to what Thomas held in that work and that began the arduous and involved discussion on the relation between nature and grace that has so intensely occupied Catholic theologians ever since.[3] And yet one will look in vain in Maritain's work, or even in his correspondence with Charles Journet, for a discussion of de Broglie's findings. In truth, Maritain never wrote in depth on the natural desire for God or dedicated an article to it alone. So, perhaps it is not too surprising that Lawrence Feingold never once referred to Maritain in his doctoral dissertation, which fairly exhaustively examined the natural desire not only in Thomas, but also in his interpreters: ancient to contemporary.[4]

And yet, upon closer examination, one will find that Maritain was preoccupied with the natural desire to see God throughout his career. He speaks of it first in his *Réflexions Sur l'Intelligence et Sur Sa Vie Propre*: thus, in a work dating to 1923. He takes it up again some ten years later, in *The Degrees of Knowledge.* Then there is the whole section, called "Nature and Grace," which bears on it in his article on "The Immanent Dialectic of the First Act of Freedom," in *The Range of Reason*, dating from 1945. And he touches upon it again in a successive series of works: *An Introduction to the Basic Problems of Moral Philosophy* (from 1949), *La loi naturelle ou la loi non écrit* (from 1950), *Approaches to God* (from 1953)—a work that contains a whole chapter entitled "The Desire to See God"—*The Sin of the Angel* (from 1955) and *The Philosophy of History* (from 1957). In fact, he was interested in it to the very end of his life, as two articles in *Untrammeled Approaches* attest: a remark in "Along Unbeaten Pathways" and a note added in 1972 to "Beginning with a Reverie."

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[3] See Guy de Broglie, "De la place du surnaturel dans la philosophie de saint Thomas," *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, XIV (1924): 192-240 and 481-96.

[4] Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire To See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Rome: St. Apollinare Studi, 2001).

Maritain thus dealt with this issue *continually* throughout his long life, even if he always did so all-too-briefly. His ideas on the issue are both interesting and complex; furthermore, in places they undergo a significant evolution.

Let me indicate at the outset, however, how his ideas do *not* change. From beginning to end, he distinguishes the *natural* desire to see God from the love of *charity* that is founded on God's sanctifying grace and that is *supernatural*; and he is clear that we are only rendered in some manner truly "proportioned" to the end of seeing God (i.e. to *glory*) through the latter: through *grace*, not nature.[5] In the same way, he is always clear that *what* we desire (that is, to see God) entirely *transcends* nature and cannot be accomplished by any power of nature. His worry with Blondel, who first provokes him to examine the matter, is that he does not *distinguish* carefully enough between nature and grace, between metaphysics and faith: there is a "formal discontinuity"[6] between them. Thus, "a *natural mystical contemplation* [of God would be]...a contradiction in terms."[7]

Nevertheless, from the beginning to the end of his career, Maritain is also intent upon avoiding a *separation* between nature and grace.[8] He was always fond of Aquinas's *dictum* that grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it, and he always regarded such a separation as the besetting sin of Renaissance, anthropomorphic, humanism. Here is how he puts this attitude in *Integral Humanism*: "man and human life are ordered simultaneously to two different *absolutely ultimate ends*, a properly natural *ultimate* end, which is perfect prosperity here on earth, and a supernatural *ultimate* end, which is perfect beatitude in heaven. Thus, by a sagacious division of labor which the gospel had not foreseen, the Christian will be able to serve two masters at once, God

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[5] "Sanctifying grace is...the root principle of the operation which is the Beatific Vision and *demands as its due* to see God as He sees Himself": Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge* (New York: Scribners, 1959), 255.

[6] Maritain, *Réflexions Sur L'Intelligence et Sa Vie Propre* (Paris: Nouvelle Libraire Nationale, 1924), in vol. III, 93-161, 155 and 157.

[7] Ibid., 135.

[8] Ibid., 157.

for heaven and Mammon for the earth."[9] If one is to hold both to the gospel teaching and to the unity of the human person, this division must be firmly rejected. He accordingly even refuses to *name* a supposed condition of human happiness *absent* the gift of grace as a natural "*beatitude*," reserving the latter term *only* for supernatural glory and referring to this other, supposed, condition as a "natural *felicity*": a happiness "in motion" that is never fully satisfied, that never reaches a final term, "resting place," or "saturation."[10] And thus, also, when he asks himself, in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, whether "we should "suppress every *organic* relation between them [metaphysics and mystical experience, nature and grace]," he responds: "Certainly not. There are *vital* relations between them."[11] At stake in his entire investigation of our natural desire, then, is how best to articulate this vital and organic relation, while respecting the formal distance between nature and grace. Rightly defining our natural desire, then, is an example *par excellence* of "distinguishing to unite."

Not surprisingly, Maritain places the chapter in *The Degrees of Knowledge* that examines it ("Mystical Experience and Philosophy,") *between* metaphysics and the supernatural wisdom of the Holy Spirit. And, since he dedicates it to his theological mentor, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., it also comes as no surprise that his first position on this matter (both there and in his earlier *Réflexions Sur L'Intelligence*) should follow his view, which itself was a "classic" Dominican position on this matter, at least since the Renaissance. He argues, then, that even the *possibility* of being truly happy, in the Beatific Vision, is "a mystery of faith *as incomprehensible as* the Incarnation of the Word;"[12] without Revelation, not only do we not know *how* this might be achieved, but we don't even know *if* it could be.[13] That our nature *can* be fulfilled or achieved by grace, *it alone* can make us "know and feel."[14] Indeed, to

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[9] Maritain, *Integral Humanism* (New York: Scribners, 1968), 22.

[10] Maritain, *Réflexions*, 52.

[11] Maritain, *Degrees*, 283; my italics.

[12] Maritain, *Réflexions*, 151-52: my italics, and my translation (here and in all citations of this work).

[13] See Maritain, *Degrees*, 284, n. 1; my italics.

[14] Maritain, *Réflexions*, 154.

"love God as our friend and as communicating His properly divine life, and to want to see God by His essence and in His deity, *as something realizable*, is a *folly* as regards the powers of our nature alone."[15] True, *faith* teaches us that we are *made for* this happiness; but, as late as 1949, he will still hold that this truth "goes beyond philosophy and could even be *offensive* to it....Such a *possibility* seems more than paradoxical in the light of what we know of the ordinary situation of men and women, and...even seems *contrary* to everything that experience teaches us about human possibilities."[16] Maritain first approaches the natural desire, then, having placed a strong emphasis on the *distance* between nature and grace.

In the light of this distance, what in fact *is* this "natural desire to see God"? It is a desire born of knowing that God exists; that is to say, it is an *elicited* desire. Because we know that God exists, as the first cause of being (a truth we can reach in philosophy), we have a natural desire to know this cause fully. But this desire both is and is known to be *inefficacious*, because we can see that it desires something *beyond our power*. For the same reason, we can say that it is a *conditional* desire: "*if* this were possible, ah, what happiness!"[17] Although our knowledge that God exists engenders a *spontaneous* and *instinctive* desire, upon reflection we can see that its object is *impossible*.[18] It is, then, a mere *wish*, like wanting to fly, a desire that leads to no further volitional acts, because known to be impossible: "metaphysics naturally engenders in the soul a certain *velleity* it is unable to satisfy, a *confused and indeterminate desire* for a higher knowledge."[19] One could even speak of a natural *aspiration* to see God, for "it is a general law that the lower—without for that reason quitting its own nature and its specific bound—always tends to the higher and seeks to make contact with it."[20] Yet this

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[15] Ibid., 154.

[16] Maritain, *An Introduction to the Basic Problems of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Magi, 1990), 118; my italics.

[17] Maritain, *Réflexions*, 152.

[18] Maritain, *Degrees*, 285, n. 1; my italics.

[19] Ibid., 284; Maritain's italics.

[20] Ibid.

aspiration remains no more than an "inefficacious yearning"[21] for a good recognized as beyond our nature. He clarifies this further in an appendix to *The Degrees of Knowledge*: "the created intellect has as its formal and specifying object only being and tends naturally to God only from this angle. That is why its natural desire to know the First Cause in its essence remains, insofar as it is natural, both conditional and inefficacious."[22]

Were our nature left to itself, then, in a supposed state of "pure nature," it would have possessed a certain "*melancholy*," since it would have been unable to attain a final, perfect, happiness. He goes so far as to say that "metaphysical melancholy is *natural to our species*, thus natural to our happiness itself, insofar as it is human [alone]."[23] Later, he will mention other of our natural "nostalgias," such as to be free but impeccable.[24] Such "impotent desires"[25] to surpass nature need not be fulfilled; and so, in a state of pure nature, man's "natural desire would have been frustrated without any violation of the *principle of finality* which protests against the possibility of an unconditional desire of nature being in vain."[26] He thinks Thomas says nothing different in the *Summa* (I, 12, 1), because he there "proceeds as a theologian, by *presupposing* the *possibility* of man's attaining *perfect* or absolute beatitude [of which] faith alone assures us."[27]

Yet, if nature is not proportioned to glory or final beatitude save by grace, it is still in itself *proportionable* to this; for every intellectual nature is capable of seeing God[28]; it is capable, then, of being raised to a new state by grace, and thus proportioned to glory. This is just what it means to say that it possesses an *obediental potency* for these.[29] Maritain

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[21] Ibid., 286.

[22] Ibid., 455 (Appendix IV).

[23] Maritain, *Réflexions*, 153; my italics.

[24] Maritain, *The Sin of the Angel*, 96.

[25] Maritain, *Degrees*, 285.

[26] Ibid, 285, n. 1; Maritain's italics.

[27] Ibid.; Maritain's italics.

[28] Maritain, *Réflexions*, 154, n. 48; Maritain's italics.

[29] Ibid.; my italics.

emphasizes this fact of our nature: "if our understanding, inasmuch as it is human, is directly ordered to being as it is concretized in sensible things, still, *as intellect [as nous] it remains ordered to being in its fullness.*"[30] Likewise, this capacity is consonant with our *natural* or *innate* desire to love God more than oneself, as the common good of the universe; for this reason, our nature is *perfected* by grace.[31] In our *fallen* state, *this* natural love of God remains *inefficacious* or impossible to fulfill, given its weakness; but, in a supposed state of pure and unfallen nature, it would have been effective, and would have ordered us to love God above all things: not as our friend or with supernatural charity, but as the "supreme and subsistent Good" of the universe.[32]

Several later works complete this point. In *La loi naturel ou la loi non écrit*, he argues that the precept to love God and neighbor that undergirds the natural law would, in that supposed state, have been a precept of a *natural* love for each.[33] (For fallen man, that is no longer possible, so *now* the law can only be fulfilled by possessing charity, which means that, at base, the natural law—now revealed in the Decalogue—conceals "a supernatural substance."[34]) In his last year, he even argues that this natural love of God is *in fact* the destiny of infants dying in original sin: they attain the heights of what nature alone can achieve and love God above all things (and their neighbor as their equal).[35] And, in *The Sin of the Angel*, he had argued that the angels would have had an analogous condition and destiny, supposing they had been created in a state of nature and remained in it.[36] Maritain thus remains consistent with much of his first doctrine throughout his life.

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[30] Maritain, *Degrees*, 248; my italics.

[31] Ibid.; my italics.

[32] Maritain, *Degrees*, 271.

[33] Maritain, *La loi naturel ou al loi non écrit*, 234.

[34] Ibid., 235.

[35] Maritain, "Beginning With A Reverie," from *Untrammeled Approaches*, trans. Bernard Doering, Preface by Ernst R. Korn (Heinz R. Schmitz) (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 24. He must thus allow that the natural love of God above all that original sin had rendered *inefficacious* is, by God's grace, *overcome* in them.

[36] Maritain, *The Sin of the Angel*, 34.

Nevertheless, he ends by making an important change to his position. A beginning is made in *The Basic Problems of Moral Philosophy*, and its point is maintained thereafter, in *La loi naturel ou la loi non écrit*, *Approaches to God*, *The Sin of the Angel*, *The Philosophy of History*, and *Untrammeled Approaches*. In all these works, Maritain acknowledges the *present depth* of our strictly natural desire to see God, a fact that strikes him now more forcibly. He renames it a "trans-natural" desire; that is, we naturally desire a goal that transcends our nature.[37] In *Basic Problems*, he notes that "everywhere you see the aspiration to a superhuman condition, and all this bears witness to the existence of a desire for an absolute happiness which would make us like gods."[38] And, in *Untrammeled Approaches*, he declares that this "aspiration towards what is *naturally impossible*...is as *essential* to us as our skin;" should "we try to wrench from our hearts this aspiration" (which is "at the heart of all the great religions of humanity"), we "will bring about the degeneration of our nature, and in so doing the very idea of our nature."[39] He there characterizes this understanding of man as "more Pascalian than Aristotelian;" and he says "it presents us with an image of man that is at once grandiose and pathetic"[40] (rather than merely the latter): it symbolizes the "grandeur and misery" of our condition.

Furthermore, Maritain offers us an *explanation* of its present strength: it is due to the fact that human nature was "immediately and conclusively *infinitized*" by grace and the "supernatural desire issuing from faith:"[41] an event that occurred in our first elevation to the supernatural order. For faith not only activates supernatural desires; it also "*fixes* our natural desire (now made unconditional [in faith]) for

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[37] The outline of Maritain's position is already clear in "The Thomist idea of Freedom," Chapter V of *Scholasticism and Politics* (New York, Macmillan, 1940; Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1972 reprint), 94-113: "...there exists in us, as reasonable animals, a natural desire, which is not exactly of ourselves but of a transcendental element within us, to pass beyond the human condition" (106). (The essay is from 1937, and thus well before the publication of De Lubac's *Surnaturel* in 1946.)

[38] Maritain, *Basic Problems*, 115.

[39] Maritain, "Along Unbeaten Pathways," in *Untrammeled Approaches*, 411.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Maritain, *Basic Problems*, 116 and 117.

the transnatural object: to know the God of reason, the God we know by His effects, in His essence. If faith departs...the effect which depends on the efficient action produced by faith—the fixation of the transnatural desire for beatitude, and of the transcendental desire to see the First Cause—remains in nature."[42] And, in *The Philosophy of History*, he insists that "it is very important that we admit this superelevation *in the very order of nature.* If we don't admit it, we are led willy nilly to a kind of SEPARATION between nature and grace, to a kind of naturalism—nature will have its own course separately from any contact with grace."[43] We see Maritain here seeking to "narrow the distance" between nature and grace, while respecting their formal difference; for the strength of the desire he argues is in fact now at work remains *substantively natural*, even though this is due to the influence of grace.

This new emphasis on the strength of our natural desire is consonant with a crucial shift he makes in his understanding of it, in *Approaches to God.* For he there develops an idea already mentioned in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, namely that "our intellect is *ordered* to *being in its fullness* [my emphasis]." Here is how he now describes this: our elicited desire to see God as the effect of known causes "*follows* [my emphasis] from the very nature of that quest of being which *essentially characterizes the intellect.*"[44] Again, what he now terms our "transnatural" desire reaches "for the infinite, *because* [my emphasis] *the intellect thirsts for being.*"[45] Thus, while the elicited desire remains inefficacious, still "according as it *emanates from nature*, it is a *natural and necessary desire.* It is *not* a simple velleity, a superadded desire, a desire of superogation."[46] Not only does Maritain here *retract* a

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[42] Ibid. (The idea is problematic. The desire in question is intellectual, and each person receives his intellectual soul directly from God. It is difficult to see how the gift of faith could have changed our *body* such that future infusions of our souls would have their intellectual desire altered from what it would otherwise have been.)

[43] Maritain, *The Philosophy of History*, 130, n. 10; Maritain's italics and my capitals.

[44] Maritain, *Approaches to God*, 97; Maritain's italics and my bold.

[45] Ibid.; Maritain's italics and my bold.

[46] Ibid.; my italics.

characterization he had made in *The Degrees*, but he goes on *also* to retract his interpretation of the *Summa*, I, 12, 1: "Because this desire which asks for what is impossible to nature is a desire of nature *in its profoundest depths*, St. Thomas Aquinas asserts that it cannot issue in an absolute impossibility. It is in no wise necessary that it *be* satisfied, since it asks for what is impossible for nature. But it is necessary that by some means (which is not nature) it be *able* to be satisfied, since it necessarily emanates from nature."[47] This is how Maritain, now rather differently, understands the "obediential potency": we *must* "*be able to know* God in His essence through a gift which transcends the possibility of our natural forces."[48]

There is always a worry here that one will end in having nature ground some particular truth of faith or gift of grace: an end he

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[47] Ibid. (Here is a key text from Aquinas on the *dictum* that *a natural desire cannot be in vain*: "If we should proceed to infinity in our desire for ends so that one end should always be desired on account of another to infinity, we will never arrive at the point where a man may attain the ends desired. But a man desires fruitlessly what he cannot get; consequently, the end he desires would be useless and vain. But this desire is natural, for it was said above [9] that the good is what all things naturally desire. Hence it follows that a natural desire would be useless and vain. But this is impossible. The reason is that a natural desire is nothing else but an inclination belonging to things by the disposition of the First Mover, and this cannot be frustrated. Therefore, it is impossible that we should proceed to an infinity of ends" [*Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Notre Dame: Henry Regnery, 1964; Dumb Ox Books, 1993), 8]. The reason a natural desire cannot be in vain, then, is because God's intention [which it is] cannot be in vain. Clearly a natural desire not being "in vain" does not entail that it is *actually* attained in every instance, only that it be *possible* to be attained. It would take another full study to explicate Thomas's idea here fully. Suffice it to say that the impossibility is rooted in God, and [I would argue] specifically in God's *wisdom*: just as a wise architect does not lay a foundation for an unbuildable building, so God does not make a nature with a natural inclination that is vain and useless.This idea is not original. [See Stanislas Dockx, O.P., "Du désir naturel de voir l'essence divine selon saint Thomas d'Aquin,"*Archives de Philosophie*, 1964: 49-96.] Maritain himself never attempts to explicate Aquinas's *dictum*, just as he barely discusses scholarly debate on the natural desire to see God.)

[48] Ibid.

obviously wishes to avoid, since this makes nonsense of both. No doubt that accounted for his original interpretation of I, 12, 1. He addresses that worry with the following distinction: "The argumentation of St. Thomas in the question of 12, a. 1 of the *Prima Pars* establishes rationally the *possibility*, I do not say of the *supernatural order* such as the *faith presents it* [my emphasis] to us and as it implies the *specifically Christian* [my emphasis] notion of grace, but *an order superior to nature*, the notion of which remains *still indeterminate* [my emphasis], except in this, that through the *divine generosity* [my emphasis] man can therein be rendered capable of knowing God in His essence."[49] Nevertheless, human reason (in recognizing that this desire is rooted in our nature and that it cannot be fulfilled by it) comes to see that, for any possible answer to *how* it might be fulfilled (and therefore how one might be perfectly happy), philosophy cannot guide us. Philosophy must end, then, with this question: "*Shall we* go beyond philosophy in order to get our answer?"[50] This is indeed to narrow the distance between nature and grace and avoid their separation; for now reason, rightly pursued on its own terms, shows that nature and philosophy cannot answer the question nature poses to us concerning our final destiny and ultimate happiness. We see that by nature we desire something that transcends nature, and thus we see that *nature* can only be fulfilled through a divine *faith* that is true.

Although Maritain does not make much of his later shifts (as we saw, he continues to affirm many elements of his first position), nevertheless we should not underestimate the importance of the change he is making. He had earlier argued that the Beatific Vision was as "*incomprehensible as the Incarnation.*" That is here being *retracted;* for the possibility of the former is being affirmed, whereas the *way* it will be so (namely through the Incarnation) remains a matter known only to faith. Likewise, earlier he had claimed that the Beatific Vision is a "*folly*" or perhaps even an "*offense*" to philosophy; it is now being

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[49] Ibid.; Maritain's italics and my bold.

[50] Ibid., 100. (Note that Maritain here only argues philosophy sees its limitation, and its need to be transcended. *Faith and theology* do transcend it, and supply human reason with an answer to its question. One *could* defend *this* argument, then, *without* defending his further yet similar idea of a "moral *philosophy* adequately considered.")

regarded as no such thing, but a real possibility. Earlier, he had argued that were it *not possible* to fulfill our natural desire, this would not "offend against the principle of finality"; now, by contrast, he straightforwardly holds that, were that the case, our nature would indeed have been made in vain. Most importantly, he had earlier confined the natural desire to no more than an inefficacious wish to know beyond our natural powers; now, however, he argues that this inefficacious desire is itself rooted in something more profound that is innate to us: the natural end or order of the intellect to being. He might have said "the natural order of the intellect to *know* the *truth* about being," in which case he would have clearly stated what he implies, namely that every intellectual creature has an innate inclination to its perfection, and thus (implicitly) to know (i.e. see) God. Impliedly, his last position on this matter very importantly alters his entire outlook.

I will be much briefer in my evaluation of Maritain's thought on this matter. It is hard not to appreciate the carefulness with which he always approaches this question, combined with his characteristic verve that brings "scholastic distinctions" to life. It is especially admirable that he should struggle so hard and so long to "get the nuances right" and that he should be willing to retract his earlier views, when he thought he saw more deeply. Furthermore, it is good to see him coming back in the end to some of the positions Thomas clearly teaches.[51] Thus, he places the Beatific Vision in Book III of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, as a truth *accessible to reason*, but the Incarnation in Book

[51]As to why Maritain is at first satisfied with his previous interpretation of Thomas (a question my essay prompts and prompted), my own guess as to reasons are these: (1) he never seems to have made a study of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*; (2) there is no evidence that he was aware of the growing debate over its meaning until considerably later in his career; (3) he was initiated into his Thomism by Dominicans, and ever felt himself indebted to the major Dominican commentators, to whose tradition he felt he himself belonged, and was thus ready to follow the lead of a man such as Garrigou-Lagrange on this matter, at least at the beginning of his career; (4) also, he did not see himself as a professional theologian and thus was more ready to defer to the latter's judgment on what he saw as basically a theological controversy; (5) finally, he had felt Blondel had unduly "blurred" the distinction between philosophy and faith, and he was thus disposed to insist on their formal separation: a distance he ends by lessening.

IV, as a truth that *transcends* it. Likewise, he straightforwardly says in the *Summa Theologiae* that it is a truth of *reason* as well as faith, and that nature would be made in vain were it not possible. Furthermore, his entire analysis of the natural desire in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* is manifestly dealing, at root, with an innate inclination for truth of *any* created intellect (one that, as a natural inclination, *every* intellectual creature possesses, whether or not that person knows the necessity of a First Cause). In all of these ways, I believe Maritain's final position rightly turns us in the direction of Thomas's express positions.[52]

It is important to note, however, that none of Thomas's texts lend themselves to being used as Maritain does in defending the state of pure nature. This is patent, for example, in the question whether man was created in a state of grace (I, 109, 6): the alternatives Thomas examines there are between being created immediately in grace or then being raised to it, before original sin. Likewise, in the question before that of whether the angels were so created (I, 62, 2 ad 3), he had distinguished three ways we turn to God: perfectly, in glory; imperfectly, in sanctifying grace; or by the operation of God turning us, where he uses the same text from *Lamentations* he will later use when affirming man's need to be converted by God to prepare for sanctifying grace (I-II, 109, 6). Thus, assuming the angels were not created in sanctifying grace, the alternative is *not* that they be created in a state of pure nature, but rather in a state of nature aided by God's operation turning them to Him, which operation Maritain holds (and rightly, I believe) requires *actual* grace. Nor does Thomas assert that infants in Limbo possess a natural love of God above all things, for the simple reason that original sin makes that inefficacious and they are in that

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[52]As to what led to his shift (another question my essay rightly prompts), I am unclear about this myself and would like to have a better "feel" for it than I do. Certainly, he knew of the De Lubac controversy, and was not entirely ill-disposed to the Jesuit theologian (as René Mougel has pointed out: see his "La position de Jacques Maritain à l'égard de *Surnaturel*," *Revue Thomiste* 101 [2001]: 73-98). He remained sympathetic to his Dominican "opponents," but without being a "hard-liner" (as his later teaching on the impossibility of the angel's impeccability indicates). I think perhaps he was aware of the growing tide of secularism that was rising and recognized the importance of stressing the significance of man's *natural religiosity*, and, hence the importance of insisting on his *profound* and *natural* desire to see God; but I am unsure.

state. Nor can his teaching on the precept of charity be used as Maritain attempts. He rightly sees that, for Thomas, the gospel loves of God and of neighbor are "the first general principles of the *natural law*" (I-II, 100, 1, 3 ad 1); and that Thomas holds that *these principles* (i.e. acts of *charity*, not any purely natural love) "are self-evident to human reason, either through reason or faith." To the objection that then one cannot fulfill the precepts of the natural law without grace, Thomas simply responds: "man *cannot* fulfill all the precepts of the law unless he fulfill the precept of charity, which is impossible without charity. Consequently, it is *not possible*, as Pelagius maintained, for man to fulfill the law without grace" (I-II, 10, ad 3). Thomas is here speaking of the Decalogue, which, as Maritain sees, *reiterates* the natural law (I-II, 100, 1 and 3). There is no evidence at all that a supposed natural love absent charity could somehow "substitute" for this (in the state of "pure nature").

Note that Thomas, just in discussing this question of the need for charity (and thus sanctifying grace) argues that this does not enjoin something *impossible* absolutely, since "man can *dispose* himself to possess charity, and when he possesses it, he can use it" (I-II, 10). True, he could not dispose himself without the aid of actual grace. However, we should remember that, while Thomas holds that we are indeed held to do "many things which we cannot do without the aid of healing grace, such as to love God and our neighbor, and likewise to believe articles of faith" (II-II, 2, 5), nevertheless the *only reason* he assigns for some *possibly* not being given such healing grace is *sin*: "from whomever it is withheld it is justly withheld, as a punishment of a previous, or at least original sin." If, then, the *natural* law requires charity, which Thomas expressly claims that it does, there is no reason, on Thomas's terms, to imagine that a gracious aid will be *withheld* to anyone who is created *without* sin: at a minimum, they would receive the actual grace by which one created without sanctifying grace could *dispose* himself to receive it. There is, then, no need for Maritain to propose his imagined substitute of loving the honest good, and loving God (and neighbor) with a *natural* love, rather than charity.

Finally, and most to the point, it is unfortunate that Maritain never remarks the fact that Thomas clearly, unequivocally, and constantly

criticizes Aristotle regarding his notion of imperfect beatitude.[53] As early as the *Sentences* (IV *Sentences*, d. 49, q. 1, a. 1, qu. 4, sol. IV), he says that Aristotle holds that "perfect beatitude is not possible to man" and that we should order all our activity to attaining only imperfect, earthly, happiness. Note that this would seem to make sense to anyone who argued we should seek goods only within our power. However, Thomas argues, "this position is not *reasonable.*" And the reason it is not is because, wherever there is an *essentially* rational or intellectual creature (rather than brutes), it must be possible *at some time* to reach perfect, and not just imperfect, beatitude; for "otherwise the natural intellectual appetite which is in man would be frustrated." Since perfect beatitude is not possible in this life, "we concede simply that the perfect beatitude of man is after this life." Note well, Aristotle's position is held to be wrong not because it opposes faith, but because it is *unreasonable.* He makes the identical argument in his commentary on the key passages from the first book of Aristotle's *Ethics.* As noted (see my #46), he also explains there why a natural desire cannot be vain: "the reason is that a natural desire is nothing else but an *inclination* belonging to things by the *disposition of the First Mover*, and this cannot be frustrated." He also argues that Aristotle's imperfect happiness does "not seem to measure up in all respects to the conditions for happiness" that he had laid down: namely that it be *perfect* and *complete* or self-sufficient; and he draws the same conclusion: "*since* a *natural* desire is not in vain, we can correctly *judge* that perfect beatitude is reserved for men after this life" (202). The same position is argued repeatedly and at length in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, where he concludes with these moving words: "there is abundant evidence of how even the brilliant minds of these men suffered from the *narrowness of their viewpoint.* From which narrow attitudes we shall be freed if we grant, in accord with the foregoing *proofs* that we can reach true felicity after this life" (III, 48). The same doctrine shows up in the *Summa Theologiae* (I, 12, 1), the *Compendium of Theology* (2, 8), and the *Commentary on John* (I, Lect. 11, #212): in short, Thomas teaches this doctrine from first to last. In the *De Malo* (V, 1, ad 1) he even says that man is "*ordained by nature* to happiness as to an ultimate end, which

[53] It would of course be unfair to signal out Maritain for criticism here: many others also failed to remark on Thomas's texts referred to in this paragraph, especially the decisive one from *IV Sentences.*

happiness consists in the *vision of God*" and thus that "our nature *would* have been made in vain," had it been defeated by original sin, which is why God chose to remedy it, by becoming incarnate in Christ Jesus and offering us His grace.[54]

Now, I have already noted that Maritain does finally come towards Thomas's thinking, inasmuch as he finally acknowledges that we can see that the Beatific Vision is *possible*, on the basis of our inherent intellectual inclination and the principle that it is impossible that such a desire be frustrated, or be in vain. And yet I believe one can show that Thomas's thought is more radical even than that. While I will not argue this here, I believe one can show that his position is that our deepest natural desire not only *can* be fulfilled, but that it *will* be fulfilled, *unless it is impeded by sin* (either original or actual). Such a claim would obviously require even more than another essay. But I think that, had Maritain better studied Thomas's arguments against Aristotle and also his teaching in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, he would have seen that Thomas's entire point of view differed considerably from the one with which he began. When it came to the vexed question of God's permission of evil and the sufficiency of His aid to avoid it, Maritain

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[54] Aquinas could have found an antecedent to his last argument in Augustine: "Here we come across the slanderous question that is so often asked by those who are ready to blame their sins on anything but themselves: 'If it was Adam and Eve who sinned, what did we poor wretches do? How do we deserve to be born in the blindness of ignorance and the torture of difficulty? Why do we first err in ignorance of what we ought to do, and then, when the precepts of justice begin to be open to us and we will to do them, we are powerless, held back by some sort of necessity of carnal desire?' My response is brief: let them be silent and stop murmuring against God. *Perhaps their complaint would be justified if there were no Victor over error and inordinate desire.* But in fact there is one who is present everywhere and speaks in many ways through creation that serve him as Lord. He calls out to those who have turned their backs on him and instructs those who believe in him. He comforts the hopeful, encourages the diligent, helps the struggling, and hears the prayers of those who cry out to him (*On Free Choice of the Will* [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993], 107). The complaint that "perhaps would be justified" is very close to what Thomas has asserted: people would be "justified" to complain that a *natural desire* (to act justly) had been *rendered vain* by a Fall without remedy; however, that the remedy chosen is the *Incarnation* is a truth of *faith*.

noted that "deeper renewals" were sought regarding it and that "finally a great variety of opinions surged up among the Dominican theologians, which is the sign of a certain uneasiness."[55] He urged that the "school position" needed to be "rethought," not just "altered slightly." The same kind of theological situation also existed concerning the doctrine of our natural desire to see God. Although there is a great deal to honor and appreciate in Maritain's thinking on this subject, I think both Thomas and the truth will be better served by a more radical reflection, one that seeks to penetrate Thomas's profound doctrine to its depths.

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[55] Maritain, *God and the Permission of Evil* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966), 20.