BERNADETTE E. O'CONNOR

Two False Theories of Human Equality Identified by Jacques Maritain

Applied to Feminist Issues

In the essay "Human Equality," which first appeared in French in 1939[1] and is the first chapter of *Ransoming the Time,* Maritain considers two false theories of human equality and opposes to them what he calls the "realist"[2] and "Christian"[3] view of human equality. Maritain treats both false theories as "practical attitudes rather than philosophic schools," attitudes deriving "from concrete attitudes of the intelligence that are of basic practical importance."[4] At the roots of the false theories are sometimes unconscious or only obscurely conscious "instinct and passion"[5] and "restless emotionalism."[6]

I will describe the two false theories of equality and then show where something like the errors of the two false theories enter into feminist concerns. As I address the second set of feminist concerns, I will touch on what Maritain says concerning the relationship between the sexes in "Let Us Make for Him a Helpmate Like to Himself," published in English in *Untrammeled Approaches.*[7] And I will raise some possible difficulties, both

1. See Donald and Idella Gallagher, *The Achievement of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain: A Bibliography, 1906–1961* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1962), 65, 90, and 128. The essay appeared under the title "L'Égalité Chrétienne" in *Études Carmélitaines* 24, no. 2 (1939): 172–94 and in *Les Hommes sont-ils Êgaux?* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1939), 172–94. The identical pagination for these two publications shown here is as it appears in the Gallaghers' work.

2. Jacques Maritain, *Ransoming the Time,* translated by Harry Lorin Binsse (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 2.

3. Ibid., 17.

4. Ibid., 2.

5. Ibid., 5.

6. Ibid., 16.

7. Jacques Maritain, *Untrammeled Approaches,* translated by Bernard Doering (Notre Dame,

speculative and practical, with his theory of subspecific masculine and feminine types of a modal-essential order and the complementarity of men and women he bases on them.

The first false theory of human equality Maritain calls an "anti-Christian philosophy of enslavement."[8] In this false theory of human equality, a radical empiricism leads to a nominalist concept of humanity in which the real "identity" or "equality" of human beings in sharing one species is reduced to "only a word,"[9] to a mere name. The true equality of human beings—Maritian prefers to speak of the "unity" of human beings—is grounded in their sharing in a real human "*nature* or essence."[10] But the empiricist, limited in knowledge as he or she is to the data of sense experience, cannot conceive this human unity or equality in essence because that essence "is not visibly perceived"[11] but "is perceived by the intellect with the help of the senses, and by transcending the senses."[12]

What is readily apprehended by the empiricist, Maritain posits, are the human "inequalities, which are themselves manifest and tangible, often in a very painful fashion."[13] And, inasmuch as these inequalities, be they natural or social, are real—they "do exist; they cry out; they cover the whole expanse of human reality"[14]—the empiricist makes no mistake in remarking them. The error of empiricist nominalism is not that it sees real differences among human beings but that it sees only them and not the real unity or equality in human nature.[15] The error of empiricist nominalism is to see and to state *only* these differences "and in practice deeming as nothing the reality and ontological dignity of that *nature* or essence which all … [humans] have in common."[16]

The empiricist blindness to humans' sharing in a real essence or nature, which sharing is the ontological foundation for human unity or equality, manifests its pernicious effects first in the practical realm. By an ironic "sort of recurrence of the instincts and needs of the intelligence," "on a level lower than that of fully-formed intelligibility and of essences properly so-called,"[17] the empiricist raises up pseudo-essences or pseudo-species

---

Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977). According to the Editor's notes (151 n. 1, and 163 n. 8) this essay was originally "an informal talk given at Kolbsheim. Cf. published in *Nova et Vetera*, 1967, no. 4: 241–254," the postscript being added in 1972.

8. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 3.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 4.
11. Ibid., 3.
12. Ibid., 4.
13. Ibid., 3.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 4.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.

among human beings on the bases of differences or inequalities among humans. Then the empiricist treats these pseudo-essences as if the differences between or among them were of the same value as the differences between two species, such as loins and asses or ants and eagles.[18] The practical mind of the empiricist bent thus "sets up arbitrary groups" "in the fluid mass of individual peculiarities" and attributes to them "the character of specific categories"[19] or of species in their own right.

Maritian mentions both biological and social inequalities or differences among human beings as the bases on which empiricist nominalism raises pseudo-essences, hardening "the natural or social inequalities to which ... [humans] are heir into the differences of species between those groups, existing in fact or arbitrarily imagined, into which they sort ... [humankind]."[20] The false hierarchies and cleavages among the pseudo-essences thus created lead to unjust discrimination among human beings in which accidental differences among human beings replace the "unity or equality"[21] of sharing in a real human "*nature* or essence."[22]

As an example of natural or biological differences on the bases of which essences can be created, Maritain refers to racism and explicitly cites "the racist theses proclaimed at Nuremberg."[23] One of these racist theses claims: "'there is a greater difference between the lowest forms still called human and our superior races than between the lowest man and monkeys of the highest orders.'"[24] Maritain explains that "the biological pseudo-essences may arise in ... [humans'] imaginations by virtue of an unconscious process, the origin of which lies in the obscure workings of the will to power."[25]

And Maritain offers four examples of social differences on the bases of which pseudo-essences can be created: i. layers within a society brought about by "successive conquests"[26]; ii. "privileges of birth normal in a society of the aristocratic or feudal type"[27]; iii. "privileges of wealth in normal society of the mercantile or bourgeois type,"[28] and; iv. "privileges of a purely cynical 'elite' normal in a society of the totalitarian type."[29]

Thus, by "a process, pleasing to instinct and passion,"[30] the empiricist

18. Ibid., 4–5.
19. Ibid., 4.
20. Ibid., 7.
21. Ibid., 3.
22. Ibid., 4.
23. Ibid., 8.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 7.
27. Ibid., 8.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., 5.

creates among human beings "pseudo-scientific cleavages," or "false hierarchies of pseudo-specific gradations."[31] Whether the pseudo-essences are based on differences of the biological or social type, the hierarchies constituted among persons sharing in these false species have certain characteristics in common. First, Maritain mentions, as we have seen, the workings of a covert will to power and insists that the "pseudo-logic" that leads to these false hierarchies "is not at all disinterested."[32] For "just as the life of our instincts constantly underlies and affects that of our intelligence, so the burning inclination toward great sins constantly excites within us the inclination to great errors."[33] Maritain asserts that "the royal race," on top in the hierarchy it creates by a false logic, "in effect concentrates in itself ... all the privileges and dignity of human nature."[34] And "the lower categories ... are only partially or inchoately human. They are midway between beast and ... [human]."[35] The fulfillment and happiness of those on the lower rungs of the hierarchy depend upon making their superiors fulfilled and happy:

If they obey their masters, if they work for them, if, through the toil and trial of the lowest categories, their masters succeed in gathering the fruits and joys of supreme human knowledge or supreme human power, and in conquering the life of the free and the strong, their masters will make them happy.[36]

Maritain's outraged sense of justice is almost palpable when he writes that these masters punish their underlings "for their own good"; maintain "them for their own good in a state of slavery"; refuse "them for their own good the rights and liberty of which they are not worthy"; make "available to them the necessities of life and the half-animal, half-human joys which alone they are capable of appreciating."[37] And, finally, Maritain asserts, the "masters can bestow no higher benefit upon ... [the inchoate humans in the lowest categories] than to teach them to find their pleasure and the best reward for their faithfulness in the happiness of those they serve."[38] Maritain asserts that "this philosophy of enslavement is the pure form toward which tends every kind of moral or social empiricism which disregards ... [humans'] equality as a species in nature and sees in it only a word."[39]

The creation of false cleavages and hierarchies appears first as a func-

31. Ibid., 4.
32. Ibid., 7.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 8.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 9.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.

tion of practical intellect and of the perhaps unconscious instincts and passions that can distort it. But the creation and justification of false cleavages and hierarchies then extends to the speculative sphere, where driven by the same perhaps unconscious forces, is born "a pseudo-science, taking for its object of study the pseudo-essences in question,"[40] and seeking "to justify the privileges or domineering ambitions of those categories judged to be superior."[41] Social Darwinism and Nazi race theory would be examples of pseudo-sciences.

The second false theory Maritain calls "the pure idealist notion of human equality ... the philosophy of egalitarianism."[42] Maritain characterizes this theory, too, as a "concrete" attitude of intelligence that "is of basic practical importance."[43] "The egalitarian error is at once less hateful and more treacherous than the error of the philosophy of enslavement; less hateful, because it preserves an element of that which is naturally Christian in the human soul; more treacherous, because it corrupts that very element."[44]

The idealist egalitarian error is enamored of something like the Platonic Form Humanity Itself. This practical idealism sets up against real "natural inequalities a speculative denial."[45] Practically speaking, the idealist denies these natural inequalities: Humanity Itself must be equal to itself; "the equality in species among ... [human beings] alone becomes the reality, alone has the right to exist, alone is recognized by the mind."[46] Idealist anthropology would transport humans "into the heaven of separated essences ... [which concentrate] in the unity of the hypostasized Species [Humanity Itself] all the qualitative perfection and all the nobility of human nature."[47] Thus the idealist egalitarianism entertains only a "purely logical and not ontological conception of the community-in-essence between reasoning creatures."[48]

For this idealistic and false egalitarianism, natural inequities among humans are "a pure accident ... without value for the mind and from which the mind can learn nothing."[49] The essential dignity of Humanity Itself "is outraged each time one individual is unequal to another and, in short, each time one individual differs from another."[50] For this pseudo-Christian egal-

40. Ibid., 5.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., 2.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 16.
45. Ibid., 11.
46. Ibid., 10.
47. Ibid., 13.
48. Ibid., 10.
49. Ibid., 11.
50. Ibid.

itarianism "all natural privileges and the privileges of the mind, natural gifts or acquired virtues, must be rigourously leveled."[51] The poetic, the artistic, and the contemplative gifts "are not exactly denied"[52] but "are refused consideration, pushed aside by the mind beyond any sphere of existence worthy of the name,"[53] and "culture as such must be flattened out."[54] Thus Maritain observes among egalitarian devotees of the Platonic Form Humanity Itself "an uneasy touchiness regarding any possibility of a hierarchy of value among ... [human beings], whatever it may be."[55]

The error of idealist egalitarianism is thus the mirror opposite of the error of positivist nominalism. Nominalism errs, not in remarking the differences among human beings but in regarding only them and not also the essential unity and equality of human beings. Egalitarianism errs, not in remarking the unity and equality of human beings in sharing one nature but in regarding only this unity and equality and not also the real natural and social differences and inequalities that obtain among them.

Maritain locates the origins of the practical attitude of idealist egalitarianism in both base and noble motives. The attitude can arise from the instinctual tendencies of "hatred of all superiority, collective envy and resentment, a thirst to impose a punishment on others for the setback and humiliations one has suffered."[56] But a leveling egalitarianism can arise also from "generous instincts and truly human aspirations which, although in the end inefficacious, are none the less the attempts at or vestiges of a Christian disposition."[57]

And Maritain observes that a tendency toward leveling egalitarianism arises not only among the "'popular masses,'"[58] where one might expect it to arise. A tendency toward leveling egalitarianism is "rampant all the more among individuals in a given social group as that group is more differentiated and advanced."[59] Maritain identifies the error of idealist egalitarianism with the Communist state.[60] "The cult of ... [Humanity Itself] demands an absolute egalitarianism"[61] and "ends, in the empirical world, by bringing about an utter uniformity of ... [human beings] under the law of Number and Quantity, and by transferring to the masses the dignity of the human

51. Ibid. 13.
52. Ibid., 10.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., 14.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid., 13.
57. Ibid., 15.
58. Ibid., 13.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., 14–15.
61. Ibid., 12.

person."[62] Thus, in the real world, the two false theories, empiricist nominalism and idealist egalitarianism, these "opposing divagations,"[63] "give rise to each other"[64] and issue in the same bitter fruit: "for, by an effect of the very dialectic of error, that very totalitarianism which belongs in itself to the philosophy of enslavement, is also the last achievement as well as the destruction of egalitarianism."[65]

I turn now to a consideration of how these practical attitudes might be related to feminist concerns. And I begin with what I perceive to be the error of idealist egalitarianism as it afflicts the practice—first, I believe—and then the theory of certain feminists. When the practical consciousness of women and of minorities is raised regarding their unjust oppression under patriarchy and other systems of irrational domination, a possible response is to decry the hierarchy that has unjustly put them in subordinate positions. While victims of unjust hierarchies correctly object to the failure of those at the top of these hierarchies to recognize their co-participation in real, ontological human nature, some victims go further and reject, in practice and subsequently in theory, all forms of hierarchy, even those founded on real differences and inequalities, and thus fall into the mentality of leveling egalitarianism.[66] As Maritain states, however, the false theories of

62. Ibid., 13.
63. Ibid., 10.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid., 14.

66. Here are five quotes from feminist theorists that illustrate the speculative rejection of hierarchies:

> "The reinterpretation of women's experience in terms of their own imagery of relationships thus clarifies that experience and also provides a nonhierarchical vision of human connection. Since relationships, when cast in the image of hierarchy, appear inherently unstable and morally problematic, their transposition into the image of web changes an order of inequality into a structure of interconnection." Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 62.
>
> "The proclivity of women to reconstruct hypothetical dilemmas in terms of the real, to request or to supply missing information about the nature of the people and the places where they live, shifts their judgment away from the hierarchical ordering of principles and the formal procedures of decision making." Ibid., 100–101.
>
> "Our culture is set up according to this basic hierarchical structure [what this author calls "the White Male System"]:
>
> God
> Men
> Women
> Children
> Animals
> Earth
>
> God is dominant over men, women, children, animals, and the earth. Men are dominant over

equality manifest themselves first and more basically as practical attitudes. So consider this example of the leveling attitude, drawn from the practical life we share in a social "group that is more differentiated and advanced"[67] than the common masses: university professors. Sometimes we hear at faculty meetings, by way of a negative evaluation of some proposal for governance, a statement like this: "But this proposal is hierarchical." The explicit statement serves as the minor premise of a syllogism, the major premise and conclusion of which we all infer:

All hierarchies are evil.
But this proposal is hierarchical.
Therefore, this proposal is evil.

And, concerning another issue, some of our colleagues may object to honors programs because they discriminate, in the commitment of university resources, against students who cannot meet the criteria for admission to them.

---

women, children, animals, and the earth. Women are dominant over children, animals, and the earth. The earth is at the bottom of the hierarchy; it is seen as powerless and submissive.

"Along with this dominance goes a tendency to rape and control those who are below one in the hierarchy. There is also a feeling that one should constantly strive to move upward to the next rank; that one's present position is never good enough. Men try to be like God; women try to be like men; children try to be like adults. We also force those below us in the hierarchy to be more like us." Anne Wilson Schaef, *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 164–65.

"Somehow, we must begin to realize that the theology of our culture—White Male System theology—forces us into a static system of hierarchy and exploitation. We must begin to see how current theological assumptions serve to perpetuate the White Male System and limit human freedom and growth." Ibid., 169.

"'Patriarchy,' 'the family,' 'bureaucracy,' 'management' name hierarchical ways of organizing what people do. They name the way groups are supposed to be organized in going about their activities, not the way they actually do, for they describe groups in terms of roles and role relations. Those words describe hierarchical structures, not the real human activities going on under their supposed control. For example, an organizational chart of a corporation shows lines of authority and responsibility. Does the chart serve as a true description of reality? Does it show what part many secretaries really play in the work of the corporation? Does it show who really has influence and how the work really gets done and how plans really get made? Or does it, rather, picture lines of an ideal coercion: What those at the top like to think is the reality—or perhaps, what they want those at the bottom to think is the reality? Isn't it a sketch of the way things 'ought to be,' the way some people would like them to be, not the way they are?" Kathryn Pyne Addleson, "Words and Lives" in Ann Ferguson, Jacquelyn N. Zita, and Kathryn Pyne Addelson, "On 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence': Defining the Issues," in *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, edited by Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 182–83.

67. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 13.

Remember that Maritain acknowledges that the error of leveling egalitarianism can arise from noble motives: some colleagues grade "encouragingly" for fear of what acknowledging real differences in students' achievements might do to the self-concepts of students at the lower end of that hierarchy. Some universities have a department, staffed with feminist theorists, that manifests "an uneasy touchiness regarding any possibility of a hierarchy of values among ... [human beings], whatever it may be."[68] This uneasiness with a hierarchy of values manifests itself on awards day with prizes for all or, if necessary not to leave anyone out, with "ties" for prizes.

Thus the leveling egalitarian error appears among some feminists and others who have found themselves at the bottom of hierarchies created among pseudo-essences that fail to take into account all human beings' sharing in the unity, equality, and dignity of human nature. But this error refuses to accept the reality of all differences and inequalities, natural or social, differences which, Maritain asserts, "are in themselves as necessary for the development and flowering of human life as [are] the diversity of the parts for the perfection of a flower or a poem."[69] And, while the results of the egalitarian error in academia may not be of the world-historical significance that the sway of Communism was, they can, nevertheless, create what Maritain called the "uniformity of emptiness,"[70] and they fill our halls, if not the world, with what he called "unhealthy fermentations."[71]

Next I want to consider feminism's critique of one false and unjust hierarchy constructed, à la empiricist nominalism, on the pseudo-essences of man and woman. This is the hierarchy that subordinates woman *qua* woman to man *qua* man. Maritain appears to side with the feminist critique in rejecting this error in the essay "Let Us Make for Him a Helpmate Like to Himself." There he writes of "the unity of human nature and equality in nature and dignity of man and of woman."[72] Maritain even characterizes Aristotle's[73] and St. Thomas Aquinas's[74] subordination of women to men as "contrary to philosophical reason which, by the fact that it proclaims the

68. Ibid., 14.
69. Ibid., 12.
70. Ibid., 30.
71. Ibid.
72. Maritain, *Untrammeled Approaches*, 153.
73. See ibid., 154. The parenthetical reference in Maritain's text is to "*De generatione animalium*, chap. 3" without a book or Bekker number. At *De generatione animalium* 4.6, 775a16, the Stagirite writes: "the perfecting of female embryos is inferior to that of male ones." Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, translated by A. L. Peck (London: William Heinemann, 1943), 459.
74. See ST I, q. 92, a. 1, c., and ad 1 and ad 2.

unity of human nature, proclaims at the same time the equality of value in the very things which constitute the specific human difference."[75] And Maritain acknowledges that the "like to himself" of the second chapter of Genesis, the essential likeness of the two sexes, was "so vexing ... for a long tradition of commentators that held masculinity ... [in] such profound veneration,"[76] attributing to men a superiority of nature over women, "an error that has for such a long time been committed in favor of man."[77] Mary Daly could not have said this better.[78]

Let us consider some examples from our tradition of this kind of unjust subordination based on the pseudo-essences of man and woman that Maritain joins with feminists in condemning. There is an implication of what Aristotle had to say that I want to consider. Aristotle set up a "fearful symmetry" between the body-soul or matter-form relationship and the female-male relationship. Just as the body is inferior by nature to the soul, so too is the female inferior by nature to the male. Just as it is natural and proper for the soul to rule the body, so too is it natural and proper for the male to rule the female.[79] But if for Aristotle the human is distinguished from the other animals by the capacity for deliberation, and if deliberation has as its principle the rational soul,[80] then the male, who is identified with the form or the soul, is fully or properly human and the female, who is identified with matter or the body, is not fully or properly human. Another implication of the proportion matter:form::body:soul::female:male is that just as the soul is the final cause or goal of the body,[81] so too is the male the final cause or goal of the female. The proportion would seem to rob the woman of the personal dignity of being an end in herself.

The scripture scholar Roland de Vaux remarks that among the Jews of old a man could repudiate his wife but a woman could not divorce her husband and that, in effect, a woman remained a minor all her life.[82] And thus her full sharing in rational and self-determining human nature was not

75. Maritain, *Untrammeled Approaches*, 154. 76. Ibid., 156.

77. Ibid., 155.

78. She treats the misogyny in Old and New Testaments and in the ecclesiastical fathers and doctors up through Pope Pius XI in *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), upon which I depend for the examples below.

79. See Aristotle, *Politics* 1.5, 1254a33–1254b15.

80. See ibid., 7.13, 1332b4–5, and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.1, 1138b35–1139a15.

81. See Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals* 1.5, 645b14–19.

82. See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, translated by John McHugh (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), 39.

acknowledged. And Clement of Alexandria must have had some pseudo-essence in mind when he wrote to the effect that it should be shameful for a woman to reflect on her nature.[83]

St. Thomas Aquinas seems to discount the woman's full sharing in humanity's specific difference of reason when he asserts: "It was necessary for woman to be made, as the Scripture says, a helper to man; not, indeed, as helpmate in other works, as some say, since man can be more efficiently helped by another man in other works; but as a helper in the work of generation."[84]

I am going to make a gigantic leap here, in this flying survey of our tradition, from the thirteenth century to the twentieth. Those of us who were educated in Catholic schools in the 1940s and 1950s know that such a leap is not all that improbable. In his 1929 Encyclical Letter on *The Christian Education of Youth*, Pius XI wrote: "there is not in nature itself, which fashions the two [sexes] quite different in organism, in temperament, in abilities, anything to suggest that there can or ought to be promiscuity, and much less equality, in the training of the two sexes."[85] Again there does not seem to be any real appreciation of the fact that women share fully in rational human nature.

Many of us are familiar with the work of Louis Bouyer, a French priest who has written beautifully on liturgy and the history of spirituality. In an article published originally in France in 1976, Bouyer writes: "let us say bluntly that it would have been monstrous if the Son of God had become a woman."[86] For one who has mediated often on the mystery of the Incarnation, this assertion is simply outrageous. It implies that there is a greater gap between maleness and femaleness than there is between the divine and human natures. We are reminded here, of course, of the Nazi proposition, which Maritain cites, that annunciates a greater difference between the lowest humans and the master race than between a monkey of a higher order and the lowest human. Bouyer appears to insinuate a greater dif-

83. See Clement of Alexandria, *Paedogogi*, in vol. 8 of *Patrologiae Graeca*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris, 1857), II, 2, 430 at C.

84. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947), I, q. 92, a. 1.

85. Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri* ["Christian Education of Youth"] (31 December, 1929), in *The Encyclicals of a Century* (Derby, New York: Daughters of St. Paul Press), 95.

86. Louis Bouyer, *Woman in the Church*, epilogue by Hans Urs von Balthasar and essay by C. S. Lewis, translated by Marilyn Teichert (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979), 72.

ference between men and women than between God and human beings. He accepts the divine wisdom that made the eternal Word incarnate in a male but would find it a "monstrous" humiliation of the divine to incarnate in a female. Let this suffice for some examples of unjust subordination of women as a pseudo-species to men as a pseudo-species. It is rampant in our tradition and as Maritain remarks, it "does not cease to exert its power in our subconscious,"[87] where it gains power over actions and their rationalizations precisely because it is unconscious.

I now want to consider Maritain's theory of "two *subspecific* types, masculine and feminine, which share the same human nature."[88] At first Maritain characterizes this typology as a "subspecific typicity of an essential order."[89] Then in a footnote, perhaps recalling the error of creating pseudo-essences he had denounced earlier, he indicates that a better expression for this typology would be "subspecific type of a modal-essential order."[90] I want to consider the advantages and possible disadvantages of understanding men and women as subspecific types of a modal-essential order.

Clearly these subspecific types are created on the basis of real differences between women and men, differences Maritain understands as much more profound than merely biological differences.[91] Men and women, "the members of the human species,"[92] are "persons who at the same time are constituted by their soul and its particular qualities in their masculinity or femininity."[93] Maritain identifies these differences in the following way: women have as their "share the most delicate qualities, those of the highest value for the human race,"[94] while men have qualities that are "at the same time more powerful and more directed toward action leading to a good end in the realm of the world as in the realm of thought."[95] Men, by "right of nature," have authority but not domination over women.[96] Notice how the language of nature or essence has a way of insinuating itself even

87. Maritain, *Untrammeled Approaches*, 154–55.
88. Ibid., 158.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid., 158 n. 5.
91. See ibid., 158–160.
92. Ibid., 161.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid, 153. We must note, however, that some women would consider this elevation of women to the possession of the most delicate qualities of highest value to humanity as a form of pedestalization. Pedestalization occurs when, on the one hand, a woman or woman in the abstract is elevated and romanticized for some special trait while, on the other hand, her concrete reality and needs are ignored. Statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary on campuses that make no provision for maternity leave or childcare would be examples of pedestalization.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid.

into Maritain's discussion of differences between men and women. But inasmuch as men and women share the same human nature, these different natures could not be on the level of species.

Maritain argues for the complementarity of men and women on the spiritual level as well as on the physical and sexual levels.[97] He asserts "the evident complementarity of the feminine and masculine types, as well as the fact that their differential qualities are those of the spiritual soul itself which informs the body according as it is individualized in one direction or another."[98] And, to his credit, Maritain asserts that the complementarity of men and women works in two directions: being-woman complements being-man, and being-man complements being-woman.[99]

Given that Maritain has insisted so strongly on the unity in human nature of men and women and therefore on their equality in that nature, his theory of the complementarity of men and women is the kind of complementarity that Prudence Allen, R.S.M., characterizes as "integral gender complementarity" or a complementarity in which each is wholly a person.[100] This is the complementarity of men and women that recent popes have written about, celebrating the evident differences between men and women while insisting on their unity in human nature. In this last section of my paper I want to suggest some possible difficulties, both theoretical and practical, with the concept of integral complementarity or the complementarity of wholes.

The first difficulty is verbal, but words are expressive of ideas and ideas are our grasp of realities. Is there not, at least literally, that is, etymologically, something oxymoronic about the complementarity of wholes? The Latin verb *complēre* means to fill up, to complete, or to make perfect. If a man or a woman shares fully in human nature, in what precise sense does his or her soul need to be completed? And can the specifically spiritual complement one person needs be supplied only by a person of the opposite sex?

And I must ask: is there an ambiguity in the expression "subspecific types of a modal-essential order"? On the one hand, a sub*species* would still have to be a universal that grasps a whatness, and an essential order certainly suggests an essence or nature. But, on the other hand, *modal* qualifies

97. See ibid., 156, 159–60, 162–63.
98. Ibid., 162.
99. See ibid., 160.
100. Prudence Allen, R.S.M., "Man-Woman Complementarity: The Catholic Inspiration," *Logos* 9, no. 3 (2006): 95.

the essential order. I think Maritain means that the masculine and the feminine are ways of being human. But Mary F. Rousseau, in her presidential address at the 1992 American Catholic Philosophical Association meeting, struggled with the nature of "the differentiation of the sexes"; it has, she asserted, "an odd logical, predicable status."[101] To say someone is a woman and another is a man is to assign predicates to them that are neither accidents nor specific differences or properties.

I ask: in this matter of creating masculine and feminine types, could something like what Gilson described in the last chapter of *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* as the professorial "tendency to abstract and to confine ourselves to the abstract concept,"[102] to dwell in the realm of pure, stable and unchanging essences, be ironically operative in Maritain's "struggling with words to designate this mutual complementarity"?[103] I say "ironically" because Maritain himself was, of course, a great proponent of the concretely existential character of Thomistic thought. But Gilson reminds us that, while philosophy must transcend concrete, sensible realities in the direction of essences or quiddities, to be fruitful it must return to concrete existing realities.[104] Gilson quotes St. Thomas to the effect that "the properties of the essence are not the same when it is taken abstractly in itself as when taken in state of concrete actualization in a really existing being."[105] And how many real, concretely existing men and women fulfill their human nature and achieve happiness without instantiating the particular qualities that Maritain assigns to their subspecific types of a modal-essential order?

This question brings to mind the obvious, empirically verifiable differences that exist both among women and among men. There are continua of strengths and weaknesses and of gifts and afflictions, continua existing both among women and among men. Because of these real differences among individual men and individual women, some men, in some ways, are more like typic woman than like other men, and some women, in some ways, are more like typic man than like other women. Given this, could isolating male

101. Mary F. Rousseau, "The Primacy of Gender," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 66 (1992): 1.

102. Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Laurence K. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), 364.

103. Maritain, *Untrammeled Approaches*, 159.

104. See Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 365.

105. Ibid. The source in St. Thomas is *In II Boethii De hebdomibus*.

and female types with set spiritual characteristics require something like what Maritain characterized as the logical error of "attributing, without realizing it, the character and value of specific categories to arbitrary groups set up in the fluid mass of individual peculiarities"?[106]

Maritain softens his critique of St. Thomas's having made woman the helpmates of man in procreation *only* by stating that, in writing about the relations between men and women, "the pressure of the cultural milieu exerts such force on the mind" that St. Thomas "was not able to free himself from the intellectual climate of his time, and from the prejudices which reigned there."[107] Could this not be true, to some degree of which he was not conscious, in Maritain's own case? In the abstractive realm, the type of woman is pure and unchanging—and I should add—most often defined by male philosophers and theologians. But the condition of real women can and does change. And with that change we have seen what some thought belonged to the essence or subspecific modal-essential type of woman, "by right of nature," was simply the result of a centuries-old process of socialization to that male-defined role, a process through which the male-benefitting feminine gender role came to inform the very psyches of generations of women. If Maritain could have observed and read for another thirty or forty years, would he still have insisted on the two abstractive types?

In regard to difficulties presented in the practical order—the moral order!—by a theory of subspecific types of a modal-essential order, it is not inappropriate to ask who gains and who suffers from the definition and prescription of these types. The myth of the Eternal Feminine was touted in Catholic philosophical and theological anthropology from the 1930s through the 1950s. It was the idealization of certain traits which are supposedly natural—at least in a subspecific modal-essential way—to women, traits such as: silence, humility, modesty, tact, submission, self-effacement, passivity, and docility.

Those who propagated this myth included Gertrude von le Fort and Gerald Vann, O.P., among others. I have put into the notes several quotations from the writings of von le Fort and Vann and quotations giving the injunctions of A. D. Sertillanges, O.P., to the wife of an intellectual.[108]

106. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 4.

107. Maritain, *Untrammeled Approaches*, 163.

108. "Wherever woman is most profoundly herself, she is not so as herself but as surrendered; and whenever she is surrendered, there is also bride and mother." Gertrude von le Fort,

These thinkers give the impression that certain virtues—silence, humility, submission, and self-sacrifice—were proper to women and really "above" poor aggressive men so that the latter, practically speaking, are effectively dispensed from the requirement of practicing them. The myth of the Eternal Feminine tended to identify women with life-forces, with the body, with nature, and to define the fulfillment of "their nature" as selfless service to others, primordially, to husband and children.[109] What this myth denied to women was the recognition in them of a rational center of mean-

The Eternal Woman, translated by Placid Jordan (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Bruce, 1962), 6. The original German edition was published in 1934; "... the surrendering power of the Cosmos, which is the mystery of woman ..." Ibid., 16; "As woman primarily denotes not personality but its surrender, so also the endurance that she is able to give her descendants is not self-assertion, but something purchased at the expense of submerging herself into the universal stream of succeeding generations." Ibid., 18.

"Let the guardian spirit of the hearth be not its evil genius, but its muse. Having married a vocation let her have the vocation also. Whether she achieve something herself or through her husband, what does it matter? She must still achieve because she is but one flesh with him who achieves. Without needing herself to be an intellectual, still less a woman of letters or a bluestocking, she can produce much by helping her husband to produce, compelling him to keep watch on himself, to give of his best; helping him to recover after the inevitable lapses, buoying him up when he loses courage, consoling him for his disappointments without accentuating them through undue insistence, soothing his sorrows, being his sweet reward after his labors." A. D. Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, translated by Mary Ryan (Westminster, Maryland: Newman Press, 1965), 44–45.

"Her part, in the last resort, is not to command and make decisions; otherwise he will never fulfill his stature as a man. But she herself will never reach her full stature as a woman unless she goes on to fulfill her destiny as a mother. Her life of labour in kitchen and nursery, with all the demands it puts on her of courage and patience and dogged endurance: it is this that can teach her, more than anything, her own deep wisdom. But only if she does it wholeheartedly." Gerald Vann, *Eve and Gryphon* (New York: Blackfriars, 1947), 35. This book is a collection of conferences Vann gave to a women's group in England on "The Vocation of Woman."

"And if you are a woman, then remember that this [pity] is your special vocation, the vocation of woman; and until you have fulfilled that vocation you will never be made whole. The male mind, the rational mind, has its schemes and ambitions; it tries to order the economy of the world, to marshal events and dictate policies and build up the outward structure of life; and it has great pride, the pride of the creator, in its achievements.... But reason without intuition, the male without the female mind, is often blind and often stupid; and one day its house of cards falls.... And then it is time for you to fulfill your vocation; to have pity on the rational stupidity of men.... [Y]ou have to have pity in order to heal and restore and re-create; and then in your pity you yourself are made whole.... [Y]ou have in Mary, the Mother of Mercy, the figure of what you have to be." Gerald Vann, *The Divine Pity* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1946), 127–28.

And, of course, Mary, the figure and model of what women have to be, was "a woman wrapped in silence." In 1941 John W. Lynch published a beautiful book of blank verse telling the life story of Mary, the Mother of Jesus; the title Lynch gave his book was *A Woman Wrapped in Silence*. It was reprinted by Paulist Press in 1968.

109. See Mary Aquin O'Neill, "Current Theology: Toward a Renewed Anthropology," *Theo-*

ing, complete in itself, and of a personal *telos* and agency, surely essential aspects of human personhood.

I shall conclude by asking: could it be that those who raised what was the cultural norm imposed on women by patriarchy into the theory of an abstractive and eternal essence or of a subspecific modal-essential type were creating—through "an unconscious process, the origin of which lies in the obscure working of the will to power"[110]—the anthropological pseudo-science that would serve to justify the subordination of women?

---

logical Studies 36 (December 1975): 725–36, which offers a five-point critique of the myth of the Eternal Feminine (734–35), not all of which would be applicable to Maritain's subspecific modal-essential types.

110. Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 8.