

II

MARITAIN'S EPISTEMOLOGY

A SUMMARY PRESENTATION

Gerald A. McCool, S.J.
Fordham University
Bronx, New York

The two key words which summarize Maritain's epistemology are "critical realism." Maritain's epistemology is intended to provide the reflex justification for the human knower's implicit, lived conviction that his mind is ordered by its nature to the apprehension of real being. For Maritain, moreover, real being does not mean simply the extra-mental object. It is the being of metaphysics, the possible, the essence intrinsically ordered to possible or actual existence. A critically realist epistemology is a self-conscious discipline which focuses the knower's attention upon the implicit contact with the metaphysical realm at the heart of every judgment whose clear-eyed denial through a judicial act would involve the human knower in a performative contradiction.¹

The term "critical realism," therefore, highlights two important aspects of Maritain's epistemology. First, Maritain's epistemology is critical because it is a rigorous, reflexive thematization of a lived certitude which the mind already possesses and cannot reject, and because it is a philosophical justification of that certitude's validity. The philosopher must raise the question of the validity of

his knowledge if he is to avoid the accusation of naive or dogmatic realism. Nevertheless, extensive and rigorous though his questioning may be, the philosopher's query can never become a real doubt, a Cartesian dubito. To meet the demands of an arbitrarily chosen method, Descartes' real universal doubt severed the cogito from the lived contact with being which the human mind spontaneously affirms in its natural judgments. The Cartesian doubt, therefore, cannot be made the legitimate starting point of a critical epistemology.²

This is obvious, since the Cartesian real doubt, which claims to provide a sure defense against philosophical dogmatism, clearly reveals itself to be yet another instance of arbitrary philosophical dogmatism. When Maritain was writing The Degrees of Knowledge, the Cartesian doubt and the univocal understanding of philosophical certitude, rigor and method associated with it had come back into prominence through Husserl's phenomenology. Maritain made it clear that, for the critical realist, the Husserlian use of the epoche was no more characteristic of a "presuppositionless philosophy" than Descartes' use of the real doubt had been.³ Like Descartes, Husserl had "bracketed" the lived presence of being which manifests itself in very judgmental affirmation. Arbitrary real doubt leads to the cogito of Descartes or to the ego cogito cogitatum of Husserl. From the cogito or the percipi, however, there is no bridge to being. On the other hand, there is no legitimate ground upon which to postulate idealism. For the critical realist, being is immediately present in the

cogito, and consciousness is understood in terms of being. Critical realism is an immediate, direct realism, and, indeed, Maritain would claim that direct realism is the only non-arbitrary approach to the problem of knowledge.

This brings us to the second aspect of Maritain's epistemology highlighted by the name "critical realism." This aspect is the close connection between epistemology and metaphysics in Maritain's philosophy.⁴

One of the major functions of Maritain's epistemology is to provide a critical grounding for his philosophy of being. In fact, we could say that in The Degrees of Knowledge epistemology both provides a cognitional justification for the first principles of metaphysics and itself forms a part of metaphysics. As we shall see, Maritain's metaphysics of knowledge plays a vital role in the distinction and interrelation of the diverse elements which form a lived unity in the total act of sensitive-intellectual knowledge. By doing so, metaphysics of knowledge provides a reflex justification of how and why the mind's grasp of the real in the act of judgment is possible. In assigning this dual role to epistemology, Maritain's critical realism manifests a certain similarity to the epistemology of Father Joseph Maréchal, despite the notable differences between the systems of these two distinguished Thomists.⁵

Maritain, of course, never felt any attraction toward Transcendental Thomism, nor did he subscribe to the view that epistemology should become the starting point of philosophical reflection. In the tradition of the classical

Thomistic commentators, Maritain adhered to the Aristotelian order of the sciences in his own philosophy. In the Aristotelian order of the speculative sciences, the study of Philosophy of Nature, or Physics, precedes the formal study of Philosophy of Being, or Metaphysics. It is no accident, therefore, that in The Degrees of Knowledge a compendious treatment of philosophy and the experimental sciences precedes the methodical exposition of Maritain's critical realism. As we have seen, Maritain's epistemology has as one of its functions the critical introduction to the philosophy of being, or metaphysics.⁶

In this preliminary discussion of the philosophy of nature, Maritain explains the difference between a contemporary science concerned with the mathematical ordering of observable phenomena and a metaphysically oriented philosophy of nature in the Aristotelian sense, from the mathematico-empirical sciences of our contemporary world. In the course of his exposition, Maritain carefully distinguishes between the total abstraction of ever broader and emptier generic and specific notions of the logician, and the scientific, formal abstraction through which the philosopher of nature, the mathematician and the metaphysician disengage the formal subjects of their specifically distinct intellectual disciplines.⁷

At least three of the points which Maritain makes in his discussion of philosophy of nature should be noted here because of their bearing upon his subsequent treatment of epistemology.

The first point is the important distinction made between

the being of reason, the purely mental being, represented in the concepts of the logician and the mathematician, and the real being represented in the concepts of the philosopher of nature and the metaphysician. According to Maritain, one of the major causes of intellectual confusion in modern philosophy is the failure of its producers to make this essential distinction between the being of reason and real being in the mind's abstracted concepts. Not only has this failure blurred the distinction between realism and idealism, but also it has encouraged a univocal approach to philosophical and empirical sciences which overlooks the specific difference between the diverse disciplines in the analogical hierarchy of the speculative sciences. The effect of this univocal approach on both empirical science and philosophy has been detrimental. A coherent unification of the sciences requires a prior and accurate grasp of their distinction.⁸

The second point of interest to us in Maritain's discussion of philosophy of nature is his employment of the Aristotelian-Thomistic notion of a scientia media. Maritain thereby clarifies the nature of mathematico-empirical science and integrates it with the real being of metaphysics through the subalternation of these sciences to a metaphysically oriented philosophy of nature.⁹

The third point is the distinction, already mentioned, between the total abstraction of the logician and the three degrees of formal abstraction through which the subjects of the three specifically distinct Aristotelian sciences are disengaged from the data of sense experience.

Several important consequences flow from Maritain's distinction between the three degrees of abstraction:

1. Starting from the data of sense, three specifically diverse realms of intelligibility are disengaged in their intellectual purity through three distinct processes of abstraction of the concept from the phantasm.
2. Therefore, the three degrees of abstraction ground three specifically diverse intellectual disciplines. One cannot descend from metaphysics to mathematics through a process of univocal deduction, as the logician moves from his broader genera to his narrower species. Formal abstraction is not total abstraction. Each science, therefore, has its own specific intelligibility, its own manner of proof and its own specific method. "Science," then, as applied to the three philosophical sciences and to the empirical sciences, is an analogous term.¹⁰ There is no such thing as univocal scientific method applicable to all the empirical sciences and to philosophy. I believe Maritain would not be immediately receptive to Bernard Lonergan's project of extending a generalized method of the empirical sciences to metaphysics and to theology. The author of The Degrees of Knowledge and the author of Insight,¹¹ in other words, do not accomplish the integration of

the sciences in the same way. Their theories of knowledge are not the same, although both claim the inspiration of St. Thomas.

3. Finally, Maritain asserts that the key to the coherent integration of the speculative sciences is a metaphysically oriented philosophy of nature in which ens mobile is grasped in the intellect's judgments about the objects of sense experience performed under the light of being.¹² The human mind, which orders its phenomenal objects through the empirical sciences, is ordered by its nature to the grasp of real being. First, the being of sensible reality is grasped by the mind's experience. Then - saltem natura posterius - being can be disengaged in its transcendental purity through the third degree of abstraction. Consequently, a genuine philosophy of nature, whose formal subject is ens mobile, is the key to the integration of physico-mathematical science with metaphysics.

A reflection on the philosophy of nature, therefore, is a necessary preparation for a successful consideration of the problem of knowledge. Maritain believes that, by undertaking this reflection in The Degrees of Knowledge, he has forearmed his readers against the danger of an uncritical extension of the norms of evidence and the methods of the empirical sciences to the whole domain of knowledge.

He also laid the groundwork for his epistemology contention that real being, touched in the mind's affirmation of the objects of sense experience, is the rock on which our metaphysical certitudes are built and the key to the successful integration of human knowledge.

In other words, the epistemology of critical realism is simply the reflex justification of the natural metaphysics of the mind implicitly grasped by the philosopher of nature. Thus, it appears at first glance that the place of cognitional theory and epistemology in Maritain's integration of the sciences is incompatible with the roles assigned to them by Father Bernard Lonergan. Insight and The Degrees of Knowledge both propose a speculative integration of knowledge, but the relation between epistemology and metaphysics in these two books is not the same. The difference between these two integrations, and the role of epistemology in each of them, could form a topic for fruitful discussion among philosophers in the tradition of the Angelic Doctor.

As a justification of the natural metaphysics of the human mind, Maritain's critical realism begins with an intellectual reflection on the act of intellectual knowledge. As we know, before his conversion to Thomism, Maritain had been an ardent disciple of Henri Bergson. Bergson's exposition of his "intuition of being" had freed Maritain from positivism and Kantian idealism. Bergson had shown him that the mind truly grasps the real. Bergson's "intuition," however, denied to the

abstract concept any grasp of being. As a result, the Bergsonian "intuition of being" led to a process metaphysics in which reality was defined in terms of continuous motion. Maritain's subsequent discovery of St. Thomas enabled him to see that although the mind can be said to have an "intuition" or immediate grasp of its own reality, through direct or concomitant consciousness, this intuition occurs in the process of the mind's judgmental affirmation of extra-mental being. Reflecting upon the judicial affirmation under the inspiration of St. Thomas, Maritain discovered that there is a much more profound and significant intuition of being. This is the "eidetic intuition of being" in the concept. Bergson was wrong, therefore, when he denied the possibility of a metaphysical grasp of being through the concept. Being is grasped in the concept and affirmed in the judgment, and if that is so, being cannot be the mobile process of Bergson. Being is the being of St. Thomas, the act of esse.¹³

The results of this all-important reflection are laid out for the reader in the first part of Maritain's exposition of his critical realism. The principle of identity ("What is, is") reveals itself to be the norm of every judgment, for if it were not the necessary rule of all thought, no judgment could be made at all. Every enunciation, in the very course of its utterance, could be the affirmation of its contradictory. Consequently, in the performance of every meaningful affirmation, the knower must commit himself implicitly to the truth of its condition of possibility, the principle of identity. To deny this principle is ipso facto to affirm it;

the only coherent course of action for the philosopher who rejects its truth is to maintain total silence.¹⁴

Therefore, Maritain asserts that, as an intellectual knower, I know something with absolute certainty - scio aliquid esse. I know that what is, is; and knowing this, I am aware that the principle of identity is not just the logical law of my own thought. It is the ontological law of being. Furthermore, as the necessary law governing every affirmation, the principle of identity cannot be grounded upon a contingent and mobile being. Neither can the absolute law of being be grounded upon the contingent, sensible data of the phenomenal realm. It can rest on nothing less than the absolute ratio entis. St. Thomas was correct when he held that nothing is so contingent that there is not some necessity in it, for the objectivity of the mind's objective judgments is due to the intellect's cognitive grasp of being. Speculative judgments do not terminate with an intra-mental object, as Kant believed. In and through the intra-mental object, speculative judgments terminate with the extra-mental thing. Logical truth is what St. Thomas said it is, conformity between the intellectual judgment and extra-mental reality.

Thus, by justifying the principle of identity through the technique of retortion, Maritain roots the objective judgment in extramental being and vindicates the classical Thomistic definition of truth.¹⁵ The starting point of metaphysics has received its reflexive justification.

The full force of Maritain's epistemological grounding of metaphysics really manifests itself, however, in his

epistemology of the eidetic intuition of being.

The principle of identity ("What is, is") reveals an object whose necessary intelligibility transcends the mutability which invests both sensible reality and the human knower's moving mind. Since the objects of human thought stand under the principle of identity, their stable intelligibility shares in the immutable intelligibility of being. Universals, therefore, are real possibles, not mere Lockean abstractions devoid of genuine necessity. The objects of human thought are true essences ordered to actual or possible existence.

Only through the medium of the concept can the human knower disengage from constantly changing contingent existents to stable essences whose absolute intelligibility can hold up under the principles of identity, the law of being and affirmation. Contrary to Bergson's contention, then, the intuition through which the human knower grasps the metaphysical reality, even of his own moving mind, must be an eidetic intuition. Being presents itself to the human knower as an eidos, a stable essence ordered to actual or possible existence, and, if this be the case, being can be known only through the medium of the concept. To put it in other words, the concept is the condition of possibility for the human knower's grasp of being.¹⁶

Truly enough, as Maritain explains more fully in Existence and the Existent, the notion through which being is grasped can arise only in the course of the judgmental affirmation through which the human knower posits the existence

of a concrete singular. The concept comes into being in the heart of the judgment, from which it is never separated.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the crucial point of Maritain's exposition retains its validity. Only in the concept can being be present to the mind with the absolute necessity required for its philosophical intelligibility. Metaphysics as a science depends upon the eidetic or conceptual intuition of being.

Maritain is careful to point out that the eidetic intuition of being, through the medium of the concept, is distinct from the knower's pre-scientific or pre-philosophic intuition of his own mutable mind through concomitant consciousness.¹⁸ The distinction between these two radically different intuitions is the basis of Maritain's critique of Bergsonian philosophy and the reason for his preference of St. Thomas' metaphysics to the metaphysics of his former master. As we shall see later, the distinction is also a crucial one in Maritain's differentiation and integration of the various types of human knowledge.

Thus, Maritain's progress from the principle of identity, through the rooting of the objective judgment in the extramental real, to the eidetic intuition of being is a brilliant and sustained series of moves. Maritain's aim in this sustained reflection has not been simply to ground a realistic theory of knowledge. The reflection has accomplished much more. It has grounded a Thomistic metaphysics of being and motion.

Maritain does not understand being in terms of motion, as it is understood in Bergson's metaphysics. On the contrary

motion, even the motion of the knower's mind, is understood in terms of being, requiring a metaphysics of potency and act. A human intellect, whose thought, by its nature, has been affirmed to be a real motion ordered to the grasp of being opens the way to an Aristotelian metaphysics of action and finality.

Therefore, Maritain can proceed to the second part of his epistemology. Whereas the first part has established the mind's objective grasp of being as a fact, the aim of the second part is to show how this type of realistic knowledge is intrinsically possible. Critical realism has turned its attention, then, from the "that" to the "how" of direct realism. To manifest its possibility, Maritain draws upon the Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge. In the second section, therefore, Maritain proceeds as a metaphysician.

There is no vicious circle in this procedure. In his discussion of philosophy of nature, Maritain has shown the natural metaphysics of the human mind at work. To reject the natural certainty of this metaphysics, as Descartes does, by means of a universal real doubt, is to adopt an arbitrary procedure. Following Maritain's treatment of philosophy of nature, the first part of his exposition of critical realism establishes that the mind's grasp of the extra-mental real, through the concept and the judgment, is a certain and undeniable fact. The implications of this established fact, as I have already shown, ground an Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics of being and motion. In the light of this metaphysics, it is perfectly legitimate to proceed to a reflection

upon the conditions of possibility for realistic knowledge.

Furthermore, it is quite appropriate to do so. A number of epistemological errors into which modern philosophers have fallen find their origins in a mistaken metaphysics of knowledge. Failure to understand how realistic sensitive-intellectual knowledge is possible has led more than one modern philosopher to deny the factual existence of such knowledge. Positivism and idealism have profited greatly from this sort of intellectual confusion. Metaphysics of knowledge, therefore, can serve a very useful function in epistemology by clearing up difficulties about the possibility of such realistic knowledge.

The general lines of Maritain's metaphysics of knowledge are similar enough to those of Thomists. As far as the general framework is concerned, Maritain is not out to break new ground. The abstraction of the concept from the phantasm, the illumination of this phantasm by the agent intellect, the determination of the passive intellect by the species impressa and the production of the species expressa in the immanent act of intellectual knowledge are all explained in a manner appropriate to a disciple of John of St. Thomas. Maritain makes no mention of the act of insight or of its role in the abstraction of the concept. Moreover, although he is aware of the procession of the mental word, or verbum, in the act of knowledge, he does not exploit the double procession of the conceptual and judgmental word from a prior act of insight, as Lonergan does in Verbum.²¹

Thus, Maritain would fall into the class of Thomists whom

Lonergan stigmatizes as "conceptualists."²² Although I have neither the time nor the inclination to go into the matter here, I would suggest the possibility of the expansion of Maritain's thought along the lines of its own intrinsic development in the light of the textual study of St. Thomas' own metaphysics of knowledge in Verbum. Comparatively little development of Maritain's thought has occurred in recent years. Most of the writing on Maritain has been largely expository. This might make an interesting project for future discussion.

Maritain's great contribution can be found in his brilliant application of classical Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge to the problems of contemporary philosophy and in his exploitation of that metaphysics in his own account of the integration of knowledge. Modern philosophy, for example, has difficulty in understanding how direct realism is possible because modern philosophy has forgotten St. Thomas' metaphysics of intentional being. Intentional being, Maritain explains, is the special type of existence which actuates an essence when it exists in the mind as an object of knowledge. Knowledge, therefore, should not be defined as a product of the mind. Knowledge should be defined as a special manner of existence which actuates an essence as the term of an act of cognition. Knowledge is primarily a form of existence.

One and the same essence, with one and the same formal principle of specification, can be actuated in the physical world through its natural existence, its esse naturale, and can be actuated in the knowing mind as an object of thought through its intentional existence, its esse intentionale.

The diversity of these two types of existence does not alter the specifying formal principle of the essence which they actuate. Consequently, the known essence and the extra-mental essence are one and the same intelligibility, even though their intentional and natural existences are different. Ontologically considered, therefore, the known essence is the act or perfection both of the knower and of the known reality.

The concept, Maritain tells us, is a pure cognitional sign, a medium quo, through which the essence of the extra-mental being is grasped immediately, for the intentional existence of an act of knowledge, as a cognitional sign, is a "pure making known" of an essence.²³ Descartes' failure to understand the nature of the esse intentionale of the cognitional sign transformed the Cartesian concept into a medium quod, an intra-mental facsimile from which the real could be reached only over the indirect road of argumentation. Post-Cartesian philosophy, then, became the prisoner of the mind and its objective concepts. It could no longer distinguish between the beings of reason, which are the objects of logic and mathematics, and the possible essences which are the objects of philosophy of nature and metaphysics. The former are capable of no more than intentional existence in the mind, whereas the latter can be actuated either by intentional existence within the mind or by natural existence in the extra-mental world. The Thomistic metaphysics of intentional being, therefore, is the proper antidote to the mathematicism and idealism which Descartes bequeathed to modern philosophy.

The distinction between the natural and intentional existences of the same essence specified by the identical formal principle is the key to the explanation of how direct realism is possible. It also provides the key to the proper distinction and the coherent integration of the diverse forms of human knowledge. Intentional existence, as we have seen, is the specifically distinct type of existence which actuates an essence present to the mind in a cognitional sign. Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge carefully differentiates between the multitude of specifically distinct but vitally interrelated acts of knowledge, the diverse cognitional signs, in man's awareness of himself and of his world. Maritain brilliantly employs these distinctions in his speculative integration of knowledge. This is the significance of the subtitle attached to The Degrees of Knowledge, "Distinguer pour unir ou les degrés du savoir."

Maritain carefully distinguishes between the human knower's concomitant self-awareness and the diverse types of objective knowledge acquired through cognitional signs. Then he applies his philosophy of knowledge to the religious, aesthetic, moral and scientific realms of experience. Acts of sense knowledge, including the phantasm of the imagination, are a special type of cognitional sign. Affective acts and habits, whether of natural love or supernatural charity, are cognitional signs of a specifically different sort. In every cognitional sign, an extra-mental object is intentionally identified with the knowing subject. The concept alone, however, permits the subject to distinguish clearly between

his own reality and the reality of the extra-mental object in the affirmation of the judgment. Acts of sensation and affective acts and habits, even when the latter are spiritual, do not permit this distinction. Sensation and affectivity cannot transcend the level of experience on which subject and object are not clearly differentiated. Only the concept permits the knower to reach the level of scientific awareness through his objective judgments, in which knowing subject and known object are clearly distinguished from each other.

Maritain's brilliant employment of the distinction between experiential and scientific knowledge in his speculative integration of human knowledge enables him to reconcile the mystical theology of St. John of the Cross with the scientific theology of the Angelic Doctor in The Degrees of Knowledge.²⁴ The Christian mystic enjoys an experiential knowledge of the Triune God, intentionally united to his soul on the affective level, through the supernatural habit of charity. Experiential knowledge of God through the cognitional sign of charity does not clearly distinguish between the reality of God and the reality of the human knower. The theologian makes the distinction clearly in his scientific knowledge of the revealing God. It is not surprising, therefore, that the language in which John of the Cross describes his experiential knowledge of God differs markedly from the language of St. Thomas' scientific theology. The form of these two types of knowledge differs, even though the God who is their extra-mental term is the same.

Maritain also employs the distinction between experiential and scientific knowledge in his defense of natural mysticism in Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle.²⁵ The Indian ascetic, who has purified his mind of its images and concepts through the discipline of yoga, can acquire experiential knowledge of his own act of existence in the experience of the void. This experience can become an encounter with the Absolute on the level of nature. It is a grasp of the mystic's substantial act of existence, in which the Absolute is present through His conserving activity. On the experiential level, the mystic and the Absolute cannot be clearly distinguished. Therefore, the experience of union is mystical. Nevertheless, the experience is natural because the cognitional sign through which the Absolute becomes intentionally present is not the supernatural habit of charity, but the mystic's grasp of his own substantial act of existence.

Maritain once again employs the distinction between experiential and scientific knowledge to discriminate between existential and metaphysical knowledge of the self in Existence and the Existent.²⁶ With great success, he draws the difference between experiential knowledge of reality, through the cognitional sign of the intellectualized phantasm, and scientific knowledge in Art and Scholasticism²⁷ and in Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry.²⁸ In these works he points out that the soul's mystical experience of itself and God is not the conceptual knowledge of scientific theology. Aesthetic experience is not philosophy. The intrinsic aims

of these diverse forms of knowledge are not, and could not be, the same. To make mysticism a substitute for theology or to make art a substitute for scientific self-knowledge - as the symbolists seem to do - is a fatally destructive error.

At the conclusion of his exposition of critical realism, therefore, Maritain had provided the critical grounding for his speculative integration of human knowledge. Against the positivism and idealism of nineteenth century philosophy he has vindicated the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. Against Husserlian phenomenology he has shown that consciousness is a form of being. Being cannot be reduced to a form of consciousness. Consequently, the intentionality of consciousness is to be explained in metaphysical terms. The true phenomenology, were one to use that sort of strained language, would be a metaphysics of knowledge. In fact, it would be the metaphysics of knowledge which Maritain undertakes to present in The Degrees of Knowledge.

Furthermore, the metaphysics in terms of which the intentionality of consciousness must be explained is the Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics of esse. Reacting against Bergson, Maritain shows that the intuition through which the real is touched is not the knower's preconceptual grasp of his own mobile reality. On the contrary, the true metaphysical intuition is the eidetic intuition of being, given through the concept. Motion, therefore, must be understood in terms of being. Being cannot be understood in terms of motion. Process metaphysics is not the true metaphysics, for

motion understood in terms of being requires a metaphysics of Aristotelian act and potency. The human knower is a subsistent Aristotelian nature endowed with an intellectual faculty, whose final cause is the grasp of real being.

Maritain's epistemology is a Thomistic epistemology of the concept and the judgment, in which the mind's first contact with reality occurs in its affirmation of the sensible real. Grounded upon the natural certitude of that primary affirmation, the epistemology of the conceptual judgment leads to the metaphysics of abstraction and the intentional being of the cognitional sign. These, in their turn, ground Maritain's analogical hierarchy of the degrees of formal abstraction, and account for the integration of the empirical sciences with metaphysics through philosophy of nature.

The eidetic intuition of being, given through the concept, accounts for the clear distinction between subject and object in the judgmental affirmation, and so distinguishes the necessary judgments of the philosophical sciences from the pre-conceptual, pre-scientific knowledge of the artist and the mystic.

Maritain's epistemology of critical realism, therefore, lays the cognitional foundations for his whole system. As a critical epistemologist, Maritain knew what he was about, and he did his work with thoroughness and coherence.

NOTES

1. Jacques Maritain, Les degrés du savoir, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1948), pp. 137-142. Hereafter referred to as Degrés.
2. Degrés, pp. 150-155.
3. Degrés, pp. 195-208. Maritain remained firm in his opposition to Husserlian phenomenology until the end of his life. See: The Peasant of the Garonne, (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1968), pp. 107-111.
4. Georges Van Riet, L'Epistémologie thomiste. (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1946), pp. 358-364.
5. Ibid., p. 366.
6. Degrés, pp. 43-134.
7. Degrés, pp. 71-93.
8. Maritain returns to this topic in his discussion of critical realism (Degrés, pp. 257-263) and his discussion of sensible knowledge (Degrés, pp. 273-286).
9. Degrés, pp. 80-81.
10. Degrés, pp. 71-93.
11. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J. Insight, (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1957).
12. Degrés, pp. 90-93. For a more detailed exposition of this thesis, see: Science and Wisdom, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), pp. 34-69.
13. Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism, (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1955), pp. 108-113; A Preface to Metaphysics, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1948), pp. 43-54; Existence and the Existent, (New York: Pantheon, 1948), pp. 19-37.
14. Degrés, pp. 146-158.
15. Degrés, pp. 163-175.
16. Degrés, pp. 176-184.
17. Existence and the Existent, pp. 26-31.

18. Ibid., pp. 68-74.
19. Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism, pp. 105-108.
20. Degrés, pp. 225-248. See also Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), pp. 75-80.
21. Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967).
22. Ibid., pp. 141-142.
23. Degrés, pp. 769-787.
24. Degrés, pp. 489-573.
25. Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle, (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 1939), pp. 131-177.
26. Existence and Existent, pp. 62-86.
27. Art and Scholasticism, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), pp. 5-22.
28. Creative Intuition, pp. 75-108.
29. Ibid., pp. 179-184.

COMMENTARY ON "Maritain's Metaphysics"
BY GERALD A. McCOOL, S.J.

Frederick D. Wilhelmsen
University of Dallas
Irving, Texas

The role of a discussant or respondent to a paper read by a principal speaker at a scholarly conference such as our own is at best ambiguous and at worst disconcerting, ambiguous because the discussant must try to balance his remarks between comments made by the speaker, in this case Father McCool, and comments made about his subject, in this case Jacques Maritain; disconcerting because the discussant, in this case myself, always has things he wants to say on his own authority but which he ought not to say. His role is not to exposit but to discuss some other exposition and, if possible, to raise questions for discussion. With this apologia behind me, hopeful but not too sanguine in my hope that I will not transgress my own boundaries of the ethics of my role here this morning, permit me to begin by congratulating Father McCool in having done almost the impossible: covering Maritain's vast epistemology in its relationship to his metaphysics in something less than eighteen full pages⁶⁵, counting his notes. Permit me, therefore, to raise certain problems implicit in Father McCool's paper which are pertinent both to penetrating and to evaluating the thought of Jacques Maritain. Given that Maritain himself assumed as his motto early in his career the banner of "Woe unto me if

I do not Thomisticize," frequently I shall cast my comments and questions within the context of Maritain's relation to his master, St. Thomas Aquinas.

Father McCool reports early in his paper Maritain's insistence that man's "...mind is ordered by its nature to the apprehension of real being. For Maritain, moreover, real being does not mean simply the extra-mental object. It is the being of metaphysics, the possible, the essence intrinsically ordered to possible or actual existence."¹ Our speaker, of course, has reported accurately Maritain's position. I raise the following questions for the deliberation of this body of philosophers:

1. Does Maritain's position reflect faithfully the position of Thomas Aquinas, for whom the being of the possible is reduced to the being of an intellect that can project ahead in time and the being of an agent capable of producing? Has not contemporary scholarship established that, in itself, the possible, for St. Thoams, is reductively nothing at all?

2. If this is so, does not Maritain's insistence that the being of metaphysics is real but possible being extend the notion of the "real" beyond existence, and if this is so, then how is this doctrine compatible wiht Aquinas' insistence that esse is absolutely prior, presupposing nothing, but which everything else presupposes? The issue, as I pose it, has less to do with the truth of the matter than with the suggestion that Maritain's metaphysics is not quite identically the metaphysics of Aquinas. This ought not to shock us because all great thinkers (and Maritain is among the

greatest of the century) never merely repeat the past, even the past to which they profess fidelity.

Father McCool fingers, with peculiar perspicacity, Maritain's genius in exposing the fakery of the Husserlian "presuppositionless philosophy," which smuggled into the back door the Cartesian doubt and the "...univocal understanding of philosophical certitude, rigor and method associated with it."² Maritain's probing distinction between a doubt as signified and a doubt as exercised and his insistence that the Cartesian doubt is self-contradictory as an act performed by the mind is found in a number of the most incisive pages in The Degrees of Knowledge. Father McCool writes that, for Maritain, "...critical realism is an immediate, direct realism, and, indeed, Maritain would claim that direct realism is the only non-arbitrary approach to the problem of knowledge."³ Not only would Maritain claim an exclusiveness to his realism, but, in fact, he did so throughout the early part of The Degrees of Knowledge. However, old disputes never go away - at least they seem not to depart in philosophy - and this leads me to my second cluster of questions:

1. If realism is immediate and direct, as Maritain argued, then in what significant way is it "critical"? My question, of course, is that of Etienne Gilson, whom Maritain treats with great delicacy in a number of footnotes in The Degrees,⁴ but with whom he parts company on this issue.

2. Are the differences between the Gilson school of dogmatic or metaphysical realism and the Maritainian critical

realism only semantic and stylistic, or do they reveal deep divisions in the Thomistic family? I shall not attempt to answer the question here, but I raise it as germane to a full understanding of the thought of Jacques Maritain.

Father McCool argues cogently to the key role played by the famous "three degrees" of formal abstraction in Maritain. Maritain expanded in his Short Treatise on Existence and the Existent his earlier treatment of this notion in The Degrees. Under the pressure of Wyser's corrected edition of Questions Five and Six of Aquinas' commentary on the In Librum Boethii de Trinitate in 1948, a considerable body of literature mushroomed into being which insisted that the theory of three degrees of formal abstraction as differentiating the classical Aristotelian schema of the sciences, possibly of a Cajetanian origin, certainly did not reflect St. Thomas' teaching in Questions Five and Six of the In Boethii de Trinitate. Aquinas spoke there of three ways of distinguishing scientific subjects, two of them abstractions and only one of these the abstraction of a form, and the third, proper to metaphysics, a separation from matter and motion effected in a negative judgment which yielded metaphysical principles, "separable in being" from matter and motion. In his Existence and the Existent Maritain argued to an equivalence of the two doctrines and expanded on his, by that time, famous "intuition of being" in a privileged concept by way of a synthesis of judgment (prior in the order of exercise) and conceptualization (prior in the order of signification).

With Father McCool I think that the Maritainian intuition of being is crucial both to his epistemology and to his metaphysics. I suggest, moreover, that Maritain scholars bend more time to elucidating this topic which is of great importance both to metaphysics as a science and to our understanding of Maritain's place in the development of modern Thomism. To this problem I address the following, my third, cluster of questions:

1. Is there, indeed, a privileged intuition of being which grounds metaphysics and thus gives birth to the habitus of first philosophy? Is there any "experiential" (to use a term coined by Father Robert Henle, S.J.) or theoretical evidence buttressing Maritain's position?

2. If there is such a privileged concept, the result of an "intuition," does this make metaphysics an analytic discipline consisting in the disengaging of what is already present in the conceptualization of being? In other words, does the metaphysician unravel a content already implicitly present in the concept of being or does his reasoning conclude to successively new truths concerning being? Maritain already raised the issue in his Seven Lessons on Being where he argued that the transcendentals are already present in the concept of being and need only be disengaged therefrom. His contention is, at the very least, open to discussion and possible disagreement. The issue has to do with the analytic or synthetic nature of first philosophy.

More positively, I would like to see work done on Jacques Maritain's brilliant reasoning on knowledge as intentionality,

including his insistence that the act of knowing, although an entitative accident in creatures is not constituted by its "being-in" but rather by its relation to the other as other. Maritain frequently appealed to St. Thomas' insistence that "to know is to be but not to be after the manner of a subject." In us, as Maritain maintained, "...to know is to be the other as other." His work on intentionality suggests to me several questions pertaining to the metaphysics of God and the analogy between God and creatures so far as cognition is concerned:

1. If "to know" is not to be a subject, on the one hand;
2. If "to know" in us is to be an object and, since to know is not the being through which we are subjects, then "to know" is somehow located in the predicamental and hence accidental order;
3. If "to know" is, hence, non-subjectivity, predicamentality, objectivity, relationship in us, then cannot the analogy of knowledge as said of God and creatures involve negating predicamentality, objectivity and relationship, while retaining being, but not being after the manner of a subject, thus concluding to God's transcendence in the order of knowledge of both objectivity and subjectivity? There is a wealth of unmined material in Maritain that could be disengaged by scholars on this topic.

Finally, I want to agree with Father McCool that there is little in common between Maritain's epistemology and Father Bernard Lonergan's. Therefore, - unlike Father

McCool - I fail to see the possibility of a "fruitful dialogue," in this case a dialogue between realism and idealism; I can only see a marshalling of positions which cannot be compromised on the threat of each position ceasing to be itself. Again, I can discover no affinity, even remote, between Maritain and the school of Transcendental Thomism. In this vein, might I emphasize that Maritain's critique of Hüsserl's phenomenology in The Degrees of Knowledge is the most penetrating and even savage of which I know. Maritain insists that Hüsserl's approach smacks of bad faith, that the reconstruction accomplished in knowledge after the "bracketing" of existence so dear to phenomenologists, simply re-does artificially what is already given realistically before the "brackets" are placed arbitrarily around existence. After all, if the phenomenological method would remain true to the data of intending consciousness, as it claims to do, then the first and crucial datum to be adverted is the truth that man knows, intends, that which is not knowing but that which transcends the act of knowing in that very act, namely being. As Maritain pointed out in The Degrees, the idealist and phenomenologist trick of talking about an "inside" and an "outside" makes sense only in terms of spatiality, and not in terms of consciousness.

As Maritain often painfully pointed out, what is first, namely, being, can be set aside only at the risk of converting philosophy into an arbitrary game in which men pretend that what is there is not there in order to get on with the play. It is to the eternal glory of the epistemology of

Jacques Maritain that he refused to abide by the rules of a game which he resolutely declined to play because he understood philosophy to be something altogether higher and more noble. With these few words of comment on Father McCool's highly interesting and splendidly organized paper I wish to confess my own debt to the wisdom of Jacques Maritain. Like all of us here, I have learned much from him, so much that it would be impossible to understand my own professional life had he not been the benediction that he was to all of us.

NOTES

1. See p. 1 of this publication.
2. See p. 2 of this publication.
3. Ibid.
4. Jacques Maritain, The Degrees of Knowledge, trans. under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 80, footnote 4.