

MARITAIN AND THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY

Matthew S. Pugh

Toward the end of "The Philosopher in Society" Jacques Maritain makes the following provocative claim:

Philosophy, especially moral and political philosophy, can perform its moral and political function in our modern society especially as regards the need of democratic society for a genuine rational establishment of its common basic tenets, only if it keeps vital continuity with the spirit of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and with the wisdom of the Gospel, in other words, if it is a work and effort of human reason intent on the most exacting requirements of philosophical method and principles, equipped with all the weapons and information of contemporary science, and guided by the light of the supreme truths of which Christian faith makes us aware.¹

Now it should be clear from this quote that what Maritain has in mind by philosophy is Christian philosophy, a controversial notion that for him best describes the complex relation between philosophy and Christian theology. And it must also be clear from the quote above that in Maritain's view rationally establishing the common basic tenets and values of democratic society presupposes a recognition of the truths of revelation. The quote makes it clear, in other words, that, for Maritain, the moral philosophy needed to undergird democratic society must in some sense rest upon the foundation of revealed theology. Moral philosophy presupposes moral theology, reason presupposes faith. Is "Christian philosophy," then, for Maritain, just another name for Christian theology? Is moral philosophy ultimately reducible to moral theology, and if so, does this not make a purely rational establishment of the basic tenets and values of democracy impossible?

¹ Jacques Maritain, *On the Use of Philosophy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 13; my emphasis.

Certainly Maritain rejected the position held by some of his colleagues,² who maintained that there can be no real relation between philosophy and theology, that philosophy and theology describe two formally distinct orders. Philosophy operates under the light of natural reason, they said, while theology operates under the supernatural light of revelation. In their view, the premises of the arguments which philosophy uses are taken from reason and observation, while the premises (or at least one of the premises) of the arguments which theology uses are given to reason by revelation. For these philosophers, any use of theological premises in philosophical argumentation turns philosophy into theology. Consequently, the notion of Christian philosophy is a contradiction, like 'square circle.'

But Maritain also rejected the position of those who held that the orders of philosophy and theology do not constitute two formally distinct orders.³ In this view, there can be no real distinction between philosophy and theology. Philosophy, correctly understood, is simply a part of theology. This is the position most often identified with Augustine, who believed that philosophy is simply faith seeking understanding. With Augustine, the advocates of this view believe that the intellect has been so wounded by sin as to require God's grace (through His divine illumination) not only to have the Beatific Vision, but even to apprehend the most basic rational truths.

Lying between these two extreme views of Christian philosophy, however, was the view of Etienne Gilson.⁴ For the early Gilson,

² Cf. Émile Bréhier's *Histoire de la philosophie: tome I, l'antiquité et le moyen âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1943).

³ Cf. P. Mandonnet, *Des écrits authentiques de St. Thomas* (Fribourg: St. Paul, 1910). See also M. Blondel's *Le Problème de la Philosophie Catholique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1944).

⁴ Etienne Gilson, "What is Christian Philosophy?" in *A Gilson Reader*, ed. A. Pegis (Garden City, New York: Hanover House, 1957), pp. 278-97. Cf. *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (Gifford Lectures 1931-32), trans. A.H.C. Downes (London: Sheed & Ward, 1936/repr. 1950); *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), Part III; and *The Philosopher and Theology*, trans. C. Gilson (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 92-93.

philosophy and theology constitute two formally distinct orders. Yet, historically, theology has intrinsically entered into philosophy in its moments of discovery, though it has remained extrinsic to philosophy in its moments of proof. According to Gilson, for example, theology has made positive contributions to philosophy by giving to it the revelation of creation *ex nihilo*, and God as the "I am." Here faith is simply an auxiliary to reason, pointing out to reason certain naturally knowable truths of which it might not otherwise have been aware. Faith helps reason discover rational, natural truths, but it cannot help reason prove these truths. Later, Gilson broadened his notion of theology to include philosophy. Insofar as theology uses philosophy, philosophy becomes a part of theology. In this case, philosophy becomes the handmaid of theology by presupposing the truths of revelation, and then attempting to prove them rationally. For the later Gilson, philosophy is completely bent to a theological end.

Maritain, of course, outlined a position very close to the early Gilson.⁵ In agreement with Gilson, he said that, in terms of their natures, philosophy and theology are absolutely distinct, constituting two distinct formal orders. Yet he added that in terms of the state of the subject in which they inhere, if the subject happens to be a believer, the believer's philosophical, or intellectual, *habitus* may be aided by a higher theological *habitus*, such as faith. In terms of its state, then, philosophy may receive the guidance of theology without ceasing to be philosophy.

Now, as we shall see, Maritain's position certainly has many strengths, but it also, unfortunately, has a weakness that ultimately keeps it from serving the social and political function that Maritain intended for it, *vis á vis* the rational establishment of the basic tenets and values for democratic society. But in order to make this clear, and then discover a possible remedy that will enable Christian philosophy

⁵ Jacques Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, trans. Edward H. Flannery (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955). For a good overview of the whole debate, see M. Nedoncelle, *Is There a Christian Philosophy?* trans. I. Trethowan (New York: Hawthorne, 1960), pp. 85-99.

to function as Maritain intended, we must first examine in more detail Maritain's understanding of Christian philosophy.

I Maritain's Understanding of Christian Philosophy

Maritain's understanding of Christian philosophy is most fully developed in his marvelous work *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*.⁶ There, he says that if we wish to make sense of the notion of Christian philosophy, and avoid the two extremes of theologism and rationalism which have arisen in some Catholic philosophical circles in reaction to the very notion of Christian philosophy, we must distinguish "the nature of philosophy, or what it is in itself, from the state in which philosophy exists in real fact, historically in the human subject, and which pertains to its concrete conditions of existence and exercise."⁷ Given that the operation proper to a science is specified by the object proper to that operation, it is the proper object of a science's proper operation that determines a science's nature, or essence. Since the proper object of philosophy's operation is the whole order of intelligible being, that is, the whole domain of objects that lie within reach of the human intellect, philosophy is wholly rational in nature. Nothing of faith enters into philosophy because there is nothing in its domain that transcends reason; philosophy bases its conclusions entirely on the evidence of the senses and intrinsic rational criteria. It is philosophy's nature, therefore, to be essentially rational in regard to its object, its principles, and its methods.⁸

Furthermore, philosophy's nature, like all natures, is reached through the process of formal abstraction (*abstractio formalis*), which abstracts from philosophy's nature, or essence, all of those individuating or existential features that mask its intelligibility. Yet no nature actually exists in pure abstraction, and so, when considering philosophy, the state in which philosophy exists must also be taken into account. Thus, if philosophy is to be understood in its entirety, it must be viewed from the standpoint of both its nature and its concrete

⁶ Jacques Maritain, op. cit.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

state, i.e. from the standpoint of both its essence and the historical conditions of the subject in which it inheres.

Now the Christian, relying on revelation, believes philosophy's state is that of a nature inhering in a subject (namely, man's intellect) as elevated by grace, for he believes (again by revelation) that man is destined for a supernatural end; an end that man's reason is wholly incapable of reaching through its own powers. Maritain thus avers that in terms of its nature philosophy is entirely rational, but in terms of its state it exists in a subject dependent on that which issues from faith. 'Christian philosophy' therefore identifies a unique discipline that exists in a peculiar tension between a nature wholly rational and self-sufficient, and a state in which its subject is dependent upon a higher and rationally inaccessible order.

Of course, if the above description of the state of philosophy is correct, then philosophy's Christian state has altered the practice of philosophy in a number of important ways; and this is a claim which the history of philosophy in fact confirms. For example, historically Christian revelation has contributed data to philosophy which have entered into it so intrinsically as to change the very way in which philosophy views its own subject matter. These data have been of both natural and supernatural kind. There are certain data, for instance, of strictly natural kind (that is, that are wholly accessible to reason), but included in revelation, that have aided philosophy primarily in its moments of discovery, though they have also aided philosophy in its moments of proof. In agreement with Gilson, Maritain identifies three notions of special merit in this regard: creation, God as Self-Subsisting Being, and sin.⁹ Although reason *could* have discovered these ideas strictly through its own means, their inclusion in the data of revelation has given them a prominence that has caused philosophy to re-examine its subject matter in their light, and thereby brought to reason's attention certain natural truths that it might not otherwise have discovered.

But Christian revelation has also contributed supernatural data to philosophy, and these have likewise entered into philosophy in an

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

intrinsic way, though again primarily in terms of philosophy's moments of discovery. For Maritain, philosophy would not have been able to discover the metaphysical problem of the human person without the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The latter dogma also gives to philosophy its "ontological pivotal center."¹⁰ In this case, metaphysics tests its natural claims in the light of the supernatural data of revelation—data which is said to 'complete' reason. These contributions, of course, are objective contributions. Yet revelation also gives subjective super-natural contributions to philosophy. The virtue of faith, for example, strengthens reason in regard to what it can know through its own powers, namely, that God exists. Also, the theological contemplative *habitus* clarifies the natural philosophical *habitus*. In regard to man's true end, faith sharpens the natural mystical desire for God, pointing out to reason that the Beatific Vision of God is indeed man's true end, and that reason itself cannot attain this end. Finally, faith elevates man's intellect so that it might in fact attain that end, and even strengthens reason's natural operation, aiding that operation insofar as grace helps to bring man's appetites under the control of reason. In short, Christian revelation has historically contributed both objectively to the content of philosophy, and subjectively to the condition of the believer's intellect, and in so doing has thereby significantly altered philosophy's state.

Nevertheless, though revelation has certainly contributed to philosophy in an intrinsic way by aiding philosophy in its moments of discovery, these contributions have been fundamentally extrinsic in regard to philosophy's moments of proof. As Maritain says, "Thus once again do we arrive at Mr. Gilson's conclusions: 'Though this relationship is intrinsic, the two orders (reason and revelation) remain distinct.'"¹¹ For Maritain, then, philosophy and theology are formally distinct though intrinsically related, yet intrinsically related only in regard to philosophy's moments of discovery, not its moments of proof.

However, Maritain rather strikingly makes an exception to this rule when it comes to moral philosophy. And this is striking because even

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 30.

though Maritain admits that theology has a light, and a method, that differ entirely from those of philosophy, he claims that moral philosophy is necessarily sub-alternated to theology. Now this exception creates a real problem, for the notion of Christian philosophy works only insofar as the two orders of philosophy and theology remain formally distinct, that is, works only as long as the supernatural data of revelation do not enter into philosophy's moments of proof. But if the data of revelation enter even into philosophy's moments of proof, that is, are used as premises (which by their very nature are inaccessible to reason) in its arguments, then philosophy collapses into theology, and the two orders become one. Simply put, because moral philosophy has as its proper object "that universe of man and human things envisaged in their moral dynamism *and in relation to their proper end*,"¹² in order to become proportioned to its proper object which clearly lies in the supernatural order, moral philosophy must become super-elevated, or sub-alternated, to theology. It must, in other words, become a philosophy that borrows its most basic and important principle from theology. Hence, in the case of moral philosophy, philosophy and theology share a common domain. For Maritain, consequently, ethics is not a purely philosophic discipline. It must, in order to deal adequately with its subject matter, and particularly with the finality of that subject matter, use the data of revelation.

Of course, Maritain was not unaware of the problem created by his notion of Christian philosophy, especially as this bears on the status of moral philosophy *vis á vis* moral theology, and this is why he goes to great lengths to clarify his position on this question in the second part of the lengthy appendix to *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*,¹³ where he specifically addresses the problem of the relation of moral philosophy to theology. In that appendix, Maritain clearly states that moral philosophy cannot exist in separation from theology, precisely because human conduct cannot exist in isolation from its concrete historical situation. Considered in abstraction, or by itself, moral philosophy is incomplete. In order to be complete, it must have knowledge of man's

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-100.

true end, as well as the actual conditions of man's existence. But that knowledge only comes to moral philosophy through revelation. As Maritain says: "All the great ethical systems which are ignorant of the ways of grace, however rich in partial truths they may be, are bound to be deficient."¹⁴

In point of fact, then, moral philosophy and theology seem to cover the same domain. But it does not follow from this fact that moral philosophy therefore becomes theology, for, as Maritain is quick to point out, the Scholastic philosophers understood that the domain of a science is restricted to either its material object, or to its formal object, that is, to its object as viewed either from the standpoint of its materiality, or from the standpoint of that which makes it be the kind of thing that it is. A science's domain does not, however, include the formal object viewed from the standpoint of that which determines it as an *object of knowledge* and that makes it the properly specific object of a science, i.e. that makes it the truly specifying object of the science in question. Thus, two sciences can have the same domain, materially and formally, but still be specifically distinct. For instance, moral philosophy and moral theology have the same domain, or field, materially and formally considered, namely, human acts, but nevertheless have specifically distinct proper formal objects specifying distinct kinds of knowledge. In effect, the same formal domain can give rise to more than one specifically distinct scientific *habitus*.

To further clarify his point, Maritain turns to the works of Cajetan and John of St. Thomas,¹⁵ and in particular to their application of this principle to the problem of how theology is related to the science of the blessed. They begin with the notion that every science considers its object from two perspectives—from the formal perspective of the *object as thing*, or kind, and from the formal perspective of the *object as object*. From the perspective of *object as thing*, or kind, the *habitus* in question knows those properties of the object that formally determine the subject matter of the science, e.g. *being* in metaphysics, *quantity* in mathematics, and *mutable being* in natural philosophy. From the

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 66-76.

perspective of the *object as object*, however, the *habitus* in question knows the object from the standpoint of its immateriality, or degree of abstraction from matter. There is, then, corresponding to these degrees of immateriality, lights or media of varying degrees under which the object in question is viewed. This means that the unity and diversity of the sciences is actually determined by the purity of the lights under which their formal objects are viewed. Thus, although there is in theology only one formal perspective (the divine light of revelation), by which its object as object—or as object of knowledge—is viewed, nevertheless, because this unity is generic rather than specific, the *habitus* of theology can be divided into three: (1) the divine evident light, corresponding to the science of the blessed; (2) the divine revealing light, corresponding to theology as commonly understood; and (3) the divine non-evident light, corresponding to faith. Since the formal object of theology taken as a whole is God considered in His Deity, this is what constitutes the actual formal unity of the science. Yet, because this formal object can be viewed from different perspectives as an object of knowledge, and can consequently be the subject of different *habitus*, theology properly considered, insofar as it studies God from the standpoint of His revealability, is specifically distinct from the science of the blessed.

Applying these same insights to the problem of the proper relation of moral philosophy to moral theology, we see that these two sciences have the same formal object and the same formal reason, or light, under which they view their object as thing, namely, human acts insofar as they conform to, or can be conformed to, the proper ends of human life. But they have different proper objects insofar as they view their formal object, as object of knowledge, under different lights. In other words, moral philosophy and moral theology have the same formal object, or domain, and the same formal reason, because man has one true ultimate end to which he is ordained—the Beatific Vision of God. Yet these same sciences view their object, as an object of knowledge, under different intelligible lights, or specific *habitus*. Thus, moral philosophy views its formal object under the light or *habitus* of what can be ordered or regulated by reason. Moral theology, on the other hand, views its formal object as object under the light or *habitus* of what is divinely revealable.

For Maritain, then, these two lights suffice to keep moral philosophy and moral theology specifically distinct. Moral philosophy reflects on human actions according to what they are in themselves, or according to their natures, and takes its reasons from the proper causes of things, while moral theology views these only insofar as they refer to God, Who is considered first in the order of knowledge. In a sense, philosophy ascends from creatures to God, while theology descends from God to creatures. Moral theology, in effect, considers human acts as these are referable to a God who reveals Himself to man.

In sum, moral philosophy considers human action as directed to God as final end and regulable by reason, that is, under the light of reason, while moral theology views these actions as ordered to God under the formal viewpoint of revelation. Although both moral philosophy and moral theology view human acts in reference to a supernatural final end (the Beatific Vision), the lights under which that end is viewed are entirely different. The first views it under the practical light of human reason, the second under the light of revelation.

Nevertheless, Maritain says quite clearly that though moral philosophy is specifically distinct from moral theology, moral philosophy is only completed when elevated or sub-alternated to theology. Moral philosophy must be sub-alternated to theology precisely because it has the same formal object as moral theology; if it is to view that object, it must become properly proportioned to it, and this can only occur through a human but elevated light. However, if moral philosophy must be sub-alternated to theology, does this not threaten to collapse moral philosophy into moral theology? Maritain does not think so, although, as we shall see, his defense is inadequate.

Of course, Maritain says that moral philosophy is sub-alternated to moral theology in a rather special way—moral philosophy, he says, is sub-alternated to moral theology as regards the latter's principles, but not as regards its subject matter.¹⁶ Were moral philosophy sub-alternated to theology in regard to its subject matter, it would take the latter from theology and then simply add to it some accidental difference from its own object materially considered, in the same way,

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-89.

for example, that acoustics borrows its subject matter from arithmetic, but adds *sounding* to it, so that its proper subject matter (its formal object) becomes *sounding* number, or optics borrows its subject matter from geometry, and adds *visual* to it, so that its subject matter (its formal object) becomes *visual* line. As such, these sciences are formally mathematical and materially physical; hence they are called *scientiae media*.

Moral philosophy, however, does not take its subject matter from theology, but it does take from theology principles which complete its own purely natural first principles. Unlike the *scientiae media*, moral philosophy is formally philosophical—it is not a formally theological and materially philosophical discipline. In other words, moral philosophy does not simply borrow its subject from theology and then add an accidental material difference to it. Moral philosophy's subject matter is its own, even though it has the same domain as moral theology, namely, human acts. What makes the two sciences specifically distinct are the different lights under which that domain is viewed.

Typically, though, even in sciences sub-alternated to a higher science as regards principles alone, the sub-alternated science is said to resolve its conclusions in its own principles through the mediation of the sub-alternating, or superior science. Thus, the *habitus* of the proximate principles of the sub-alternated science is in fact the higher *habitus* of the sub-alternating science. Yet here, however, Maritain is quick to point out that though moral philosophy (as sub-alternated to theology) receives its completing principles from moral theology, moral philosophy does not resolve its naturally evident conclusions directly in the light of revelation and faith, nor does it resolve them indirectly in naturally evident first principles by the intermediary of theology. Moral philosophy, rather, resolves its natural conclusions in naturally evident first principles and the light of practical reason, even though these naturally evident first principles are completed by principles taken from theology. Revelation simply offers to practical reason certain data which it could not uncover through its own powers—data which it then uses for its own purposes. Unlike moral theology, moral philosophy is oriented toward the natural world, and it is in the natural world that it resolves its conclusions. Moral philosophy

uncovers its naturally evident first principles by its own power, and it resolves its conclusions in these by its own power. Here, then, the light or *habitus*—which knows the first principles of practical reason and by which it resolves its conclusions—is the *habitus* of philosophy; theology simply offers that light by which these natural principles are perfected and completed. The *habitus* of theology does not replace the *habitus* of philosophy—it simply complements it. In sum, for Maritain, moral philosophy does not need the light of theology either to resolve its conclusions or to take possession of its natural first principles, nor does it need the light of theology to resolve its conclusions in those natural first principles. Yet moral philosophy does need moral theology in order to complete, or perfect, its own first principles.

II Critique

All of this makes it quite clear that Maritain's notion of Christian philosophy is a complex and sophisticated notion, but it is also quite clear that it fails to meet the challenge of those critics who wish to safeguard the autonomy of moral philosophy. For, insofar as moral philosophy needs moral theology for the completion of its own natural principles, the data of revelation enter into moral philosophy, not simply in an intrinsic way, but in so deep a way as to destroy the very autonomy of the philosophy that Maritain is at pains to preserve. Like any sub-alternated science, moral philosophy must accept on faith the truth of the principles which it takes from the higher science of moral theology. Moral philosophy is not able to see of its own accord, either the principles of theology (actually, its conclusions), nor those first principles of theology in which those conclusions are resolved. This, by itself, is enough to destroy the autonomy of ethics for many secular and non-secular philosophers alike. Simply put, if philosophy admits into its arguments the data of revelation, and uses these as premises in its arguments, then philosophy is no longer philosophy, no longer purely rational. It has in fact become some species of theology.

Now, as we have seen, the most important notion that moral philosophy borrows from theology is the doctrine of man's ultimate end. And because in practical philosophy ends play the role of principles, the doctrine of man's ultimate end is the most important, and indeed the genuinely first principle of moral philosophy, and

should therefore according to Maritain "dominate all of moral philosophy."¹⁷ The first principle of practical reason, for example, only makes sense on Maritain's reading if viewed in the context of the doctrine of man's ultimate end: in fact this is how it must be viewed if philosophy is to take into account not only its nature, but also its concrete existential state.

We must point out, however, that this position is based on a presupposition that need not, and I dare say must not, go unchallenged if we wish to establish a truly workable notion of Christian philosophy. The presupposition in question asserts that man's desire for the Beatific Vision of God, man's true ultimate end, is a purely *natural* desire. It asserts, in effect, that man has a purely natural desire for a supernatural end. Of course, if this assertion is true, then moral philosophy is indeed dependent on theology for the justification and completion of its principles.

Historically, of course, this position had generally come to be accepted by many Catholic theologians for a number of apparently good reasons. Foremost among these was the desire to reject a conception of man's supernatural destiny that appeared to be overly extrinsic or juxtaposed to man's nature. More specifically, there was a desire to reject Cajetan's concept of obediential potency (a creature has a purely passive capacity for supernatural elevation so long as this is not repugnant to its nature), in favor of a much more dynamic and positive concept of obediential potency. For theologians such as Henri de Lubac,¹⁸ for example, man's supernatural end or destiny must resonate very deeply with man's natural being. These theologians sought to show that grace establishes a kind of continuity between man's intellect and his supernatural end. Secondly, their reading of Aquinas supported, or so they believed, the notion of a positive, natural exigency in man's natural being for a supernatural end. Thus, the later Scholastic doctrine of a hypothetical state of pure nature was an aberration stemming from a misunderstanding of Thomas on this very

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁸ Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967).

point. There never has been, nor could there have been, they said, such a state of pure nature. Man has been destined from the very beginning for a supernatural end—an end that is, furthermore, entirely gratuitous insofar as it is God's free gift to man through creation. Karl Rahner even went so far as to speak of a supernatural existential intrinsic, yet somehow super-added, to man's being: a pre-requisite for grace manifested in the form of man's natural desire for the Beatific Vision of God.¹⁹ Man's being is such that it is inconceivable apart from this supernatural destiny. In sum, they believed that though man has a natural exigency for the Beatific Vision, this exigency does not obligate God in any way.

Nevertheless, those Scholastics who rejected the doctrine of a natural desire for the Beatific Vision had their own good reasons for doing so as well. Most importantly, the idea of a natural desire for the Beatific Vision seemed to compromise the gratuity of man's final end, turning it into something due man's nature. The problem becomes obvious immediately—if man's desire for the Beatific Vision is natural; if, as Thomas clearly says, it is impossible for a natural desire to be in vain; and if man's end necessitates that man's nature be elevated by grace, then nature places a demand on God that God is obligated to satisfy. Put another way, if man's destiny is an exigency of nature, then the supernatural order would seem to be reduced to the natural order, and the supernatural would simply become a perfection of nature within the order of nature, i.e. the supernatural order would be collapsed into the natural order.

Yet the Scholastics in question found an even more compelling reason to reject the doctrine of a natural desire for the Beatific Vision of God. If grace is an exigency of human nature, then its loss would thoroughly corrupt human nature—a position which the Church did not and could not accept.²⁰ Indeed, it was precisely a concern to safeguard the fundamental goodness of man's nature that ultimately led some

¹⁹ Karl Rahner, "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace," *Theological Investigations*, v. 1, trans. Cornelius Ernst, O.P. (Baltimore, Maryland: Helicon, 1961), pp. 295-317.

²⁰ Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1950).

Scholastics to postulate the doctrine of the hypothetical state of pure nature. That is, in order to safeguard the goodness of man's being even after the Fall, it was necessary to say that God could have created man in a state of pure nature wherein he would possess all of the physical and spiritual realities necessary to man, including a physical body and rational soul, with a purely natural end properly proportioned to his natural capacities. Such an end would consist of the love of God above all things as author of nature, and the purely philosophical contemplation of His being as First Cause.

Though it is true that the Scholastic philosophers who rejected the doctrine of a natural desire for the Beatific Vision disagreed on the finer points at issue in that complex debate, they all agreed that the desire for the Beatific Vision is not natural in the sense of being an exigency of nature—it is rather, dependent upon grace, or supernatural in origin. Thus any 'natural' desire for God must be understood to be consequent on the intellect's knowledge of the existence of the Beatific Vision as man's actual end, (which can only be known to man if given to him in the form of a datum of revelation—and, even then, the desire elicited by this act of reason enlightened by revelation need not necessarily become a desire for the Beatific Vision as such—it might simply become a desire for God as First Cause),²¹ or be relegated to a lesser kind of desire, wherein the desire is prior to revelation and hence purely natural, but nevertheless is not a desire for the Beatific Vision, being instead a desire to know God as First Cause and elicited by an act of the intellect which knows that God is.²²

Certainly, this is a position that is perfectly consistent with Aquinas's position, even though there appear to be some passages in Thomas's works, such as *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 3, a. 8, that seem to point to the contrary. In that passage Thomas discusses the nature of man's beatitude, which he says consists in seeing God's essence. His discussion begins with a recognition of an apparently natural desire for the Beatific Vision. He says that so long as there is something for man to desire, he cannot be happy. Furthermore, the perfection of every

²¹ This was Cajetan's position, for example.

²² This was Sylvester of Ferrara's position.

power is judged from its object. Since man's soul is rational, and since reason is its highest power, the perfection of reason, and hence the soul, is attained when the intellect knows the essence of a thing. But in knowing the essence of an effect the act of knowledge is not complete unless the intellect also knows the essence of the cause; knowledge of the simple existence of the cause is not sufficient, even if that knowledge comes via the effect. In knowing the essence of the effect, then, the intellect automatically desires to know the essence of the cause. Thus, if knowing the essence of a created effect leads to a knowledge of the existence of God, its uncreated cause, the intellect will naturally desire to know the essence of that cause. In other words, only a direct knowledge of God's essence will ultimately satisfy the intellect's natural desire.

Evidently, then, Aquinas certainly seems to be claiming in *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 8 that there is in man, prior to revelation (though not prior to the intellect's knowledge of God's existence), a natural desire for the Vision of God. Yet, when this article is placed in its proper context, and read in the light of Thomas's principle that claims priority for the intellect over the will, we see that this is in fact not the case.

According to Thomas, the will or rational appetite depends on the intellect by nature; as the rational appetite, the will is rooted in the intellect, since it is that appetite of the soul which follows what the intellect apprehends as good. (In this respect, the intellect can be likened to a mover which is not moved, while the will can be likened to a moved mover.) Nevertheless, as two distinct powers, the intellect and the will have two distinct ends. The intellect's proper end is knowledge, while the will's proper end is happiness. Yet the will cannot be moved towards happiness until the idea of happiness is present in the intellect. Since Thomas believes that happiness consists in the Vision of God, and since that Vision is withheld from man in this life, the will is not moved of necessity (that is, naturally) to desire the Vision of God. Consequently, the good that the will naturally and of necessity desires is happiness in general, and since no particular thing appears to the will to be good in every respect, the will does not naturally identify any particular thing with happiness in general. Thus, although the will necessarily desires happiness, it does not necessarily desire the Vision of God as its happiness. At best, the desire for God is included in the

desire for happiness in general only in a very obscure and confused way. We have no explicit desire for the Vision of God, and Thomas does not say that the will by its very nature desires such a vision.

Furthermore, although *ST I-II*, q. 8 might seem explicitly to recognize the existence of a natural desire in the intellect for the Vision of God, this desire must again be viewed in the context of the relation of the will to the intellect. When so viewed, we see that this "desire" is not what it appears to be. Thomas gives us the key in *ST I*, q. 82. a. 4, where he explains how the will moves the intellect. Among an order of active powers, that power which regards the universal end moves those powers which regard particular ends. But the object of the will is the good and the end in general, while the other powers have as their objects some good suitable to their proper operations, as the knowledge of truth is the end proper to the intellect. Hence the will moves all the powers to their respective ends, including the intellect. In other words, the will desires, in addition to its own goodness or happiness, the good of all the powers of the soul, including the intellect. The will naturally moves the intellect to complete its act of cognition. In this case, the will naturally moves the intellect to seek completion in the Vision of God. The will here acts as an agent that alters what is altered, or impels what is impelled. Thus, the natural desire that Thomas is talking about in *ST I-II*, q. 3, a. 8 is simply the result of the will's willing the intellect to complete its act of cognition. This is why Thomas refers to the desire in question as a desire for perfection, or completion.

Nevertheless, this desire is not to be confused with the will's genuine desire for the Vision of God, and here is where the intellect truly takes priority over the will for Thomas. In the first case (wherein the will moves the intellect to complete its act of cognition), the intellect does not know God as He is in Himself (there the intellect simply desires to know more about God). In the second case (wherein the will desires the Vision of God), it does so precisely because the intellect has actually seen God as He is in Himself, or has been given knowledge through revelation that this is in fact our true end, and an end that will one day be actually realized. Here, the will is moved by what is actually in the intellect. Since the Beatific Vision cannot be actually present in the intellect in this life (except perhaps in the most

advanced states of mystical ecstasy, which of course can only be given to us by God), there can be no innate tendency or natural desire in either will or intellect for the Vision of God. The intellect does naturally desire to know God's essence after it has learned of His existence; however, since God's mode of being transcends creation and thus the created intellect's mode of being (which knows only those objects naturally proportioned to that created mode of being), the intellect can have no knowledge through its own power that such a desire will ever be satisfied. Thus, the only natural desire for God that the intellect has in this life is the desire, vague and confused though it be, to know more about God. The genuine Vision of God, in other words, is not the terminative end of the intellect's natural desire for God. What appears to be the intellect's natural desire for the Vision of God, then, is not the genuine desire for the Vision of God, the true Beatific Vision.

In addition, because God cannot be seen as He is in Himself in this life, the will enjoys a freedom of both specification and exercise in regards to the Vision of God. Not only are we free to act or not to act in regard to the Vision of God, but we are also free to reject this end. Hence, the will enjoys a freedom that it does not have in regard to happiness in general (which appears to be good in every respect). In the case of happiness in general, we are free to act or not to act in regard to it, but, if we act, the act cannot be one of rejection. In short, what appears to be the intellect's natural desire for the Vision of God must be distinguished from the will's genuine desire for Beatitude.

If we have a desire for the Beatific Vision, then, this desire must be a supernatural desire. And this is exactly what Aquinas says in *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 2.²³ This means that in our concrete state of existence, insofar as we have a desire for the Beatific Vision, the natural desire for God (the intellect's desire to know the essence of God, as well as the will's desire that the intellect complete its act of cognition) has had super-added to it the supernatural gift of the will's desire for beatitude, that is, the desire for the anticipated beatitude that would come from the Beatific Vision itself. This is a gift that was conferred on us in our

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 27, a. 2, trans. Robert W. Schmidt (Chicago: Regnery, 1954), p. 315.

second elevation in Christ,²⁴ which restored to us not only the supernatural gifts of our elevation in the First Adam, but also the preternatural gifts of the first Adam.²⁵ In our prelapsarian state we had neither the Beatific Vision, nor the desire for the Beatific Vision²⁶—the second cannot be had apart from the first, or apart from our elevation in Christ, which the First Adam did not have. And this also means that the loss of those gifts through sin did not so corrupt man's nature as to make our intellect incapable of apprehending first principles, or knowing God in natural philosophical contemplation. Nevertheless, though a purely philosophical knowledge of God is possible in our present state, this knowledge is incomplete short of grace.

Yet, if there is no natural desire in man for the Beatific Vision of God, then God surely could have created man in a state of pure nature with a purely natural and terminative end. This end, as noted before, would consist of the purely philosophical contemplation of God as First Cause and author of all creation. It would, in essence, be what Aristotle meant by the intuitive contemplation of the Unmoved Mover. Yet its perfection would be realized only in death, when the encumbrances of the body fall away and the path cleared for the intellect's pure

²⁴ There are numerous passages (too many to reference here) in both Scripture and from tradition that confirm this notion. For example, cf. St. Leo the Great, "What fell in the first Adam, is raised up in the second" (*Sermon* 12.1; PL 54: 168); also *Ephesians* 1.4 and 1.6. In short, these passages state that Adam had *gratia Dei*, but not *gratia Christi*.

²⁵ The preternatural refers to the supernatural gifts which surpass the nature of some particular kind of creature (like man) but not others (like the angels), as opposed to the absolutely or simply supernatural, which surpasses the nature of every kind of creature. Adam's immortality and right ordering among the parts of his soul were preternatural gifts. In addition, the preternatural does not elevate a creature to a share in God's life. Hence, Adam did not have the Beatific Vision. The restoration of man in Christ (his second elevation) thus did not, strictly speaking, restore man's desire for the Beatific Vision. It was restored only in the sense that man was destined for this end from the very beginning, but, again, strictly speaking, this desire actually exists in man only from the time of Christ.

²⁶ Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 94, a. 1 ad 3.

contemplation of God—a contemplation taking place *through* the soul and in a kind of natural mysticism, wherein the soul understands God's immensity as being present to it as a cause is present to its effects.²⁷ Realizing this end would comprise perfect natural beatitude; prior to death, only imperfect natural beatitude is possible in the state of pure nature.

In sum, man in his present state of being has only one true ultimate end—the Beatific Vision of God. This has been our destiny from the very beginning, insofar as it has been a part of God's plan, from the very beginning. Yet the desire for the Beatific Vision of God is a supernatural desire, and it is a desire that was given to man by God in man's second elevation in Christ. Hence, in his present concrete state of being, man is inconceivable apart from grace, but this does not mean that man in his essence is inconceivable apart from grace, nor does it mean that God could not have created man in a state of pure nature, with a purely natural end. Indeed, such a possibility is the only way to truly protect the gratuity of the Beatific Vision, to keep the order of nature separate from the order of supernature, and to preserve the goodness of man's being, even after the Fall.

But most importantly for our purposes, it is also the only way to preserve the autonomy of moral philosophy, for once we know that man could have existed in a state of pure nature with a purely natural end, we can, in essence, construct a purely rational moral philosophy which has God (though not the Beatific Vision of God), as its natural and terminative end. We can, in other words, construct a moral philosophy whose first principles are in no way dependent on theology, either for their completion or their justification. In this moral philosophy, God is indeed man's final end, but the end is purely natural, and thus purely rational, given that the end in question is in this case entirely knowable by us through the natural intellect. Here, nothing more is needed for the completion of the first principle of practical reason than reason's understanding that the first principle of practical

²⁷ Cf. Jacques Maritain's "Natural Mystical Experience and the Void," in *Challenges and Renewals*, ed. Joseph W. Evans and Leo R. Ward (New York: Meridian Books, 1966), pp. 76-106.

reason's underlying metaphysical principle—all things by nature desire the good—is grounded in an even more basic metaphysical principle (all natures exist for some end), which in turn culminates in an ultimate First Cause/Final End. There is nothing here that transcends the nature of reason, nothing that goes beyond natural metaphysics.

III Conclusion

Maritain's notion of Christian philosophy, then, ultimately works only if it has added to it the correction which eliminates any conceptual dependence on the natural desire for the Beatific Vision of God. In this corrected version of Maritain's understanding of Christian philosophy, moral philosophy rests upon a purely rational foundation needing no completion by theology. Here, man's ultimate end—and hence the ultimate principle that grounds the first principle of practical reason—is indeed God, but God as known through reason alone. This does not mean, however, that moral theology provides no guidance for moral philosophy. Theology may indeed enter into philosophy in terms of its moments of discovery, but it must remain extrinsic to philosophy in terms of its moments of proof. No revealed (supernatural) truth is used in philosophy's arguments, either in its premises or its conclusions. Yet revealed truths can provide guidance to philosophy by pointing out to reason certain natural truths of which it might not otherwise have been aware. And this is exactly how moral theology functions when it points out to moral philosophy that the desire for the Beatific Vision of God that we do have in our concrete state of existence is a supernatural desire for the vision of God. Reason's attention is thereby drawn, in spite of our existential state, to the real possibility of a purely natural, and hence rational, end for man. Thus, a purely natural, rational truth that reason could have discovered on its own is simply made more evident to reason by the light of moral theology. Reason is made to see, in other words, that there is an end that is perfectly complete, and perfectly attainable, for reason, and that might have been the one end for which we exist.

Finally, this corrected version of Maritain's Christian philosophy has the added advantage of making a strictly rational establishment of the basic tenets and values of democracy possible. For it provides the rational completion needed for a moral philosophy grounded in a

natural teleology, and therefore requiring a natural end. So completed, the moral philosophy that must be the foundation for democracy becomes rationally self-enclosed, making no appeal to truths beyond reason's grasp. In short, only a Christian philosophy that safeguards the real autonomy of philosophy can provide for democracy a genuine rational foundation, for the basic tenets and values of democracy are only established in a truly rational way if the moral philosophy justifying those tenets and values is itself free of non-rational presuppositions.