

**PART IV**

**SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

*The Natural Restoration of Fallen  
Angels in the Depths of Evil:  
Concerning the Obscure Origins  
of Absolute Human Autonomy  
in Political Philosophy*

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The sin of the Angel does not presuppose either ignorance or error in the functioning of the intellect as such. His sin thereby reveals to us the frightening and, as it were, infinite power proper to free will. That will can choose evil in full light, by a purely voluntary act, and without the intellect's being victim of any previous error.<sup>1</sup>

—Jacques Maritain

Lucifer, without doubt, will be the last one changed. For a time, he will be alone in the abyss, and he will believe that he is the only one condemned to endless torment. But for him one will also pray and cry out. And in the end, he too will be restored in the natural order alone; he will be restored despite himself to the natural love of God, carried by a miracle into Limbo where the night sparkles with stars. There he will take up again his office of prince—forever reprovéd, in regard to glory; loved again, in regard to nature.<sup>2</sup>

—Jacques Maritain

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain, *The Sin of the Angel*, trans. William L. Rossner, S. J. (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1959), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> "Lucifer sans doute sera le dernier changé. Pendant un temps il sera seul dans l'abîme, et se croira le seul condamné aux tourments sans fin, et son orgueil sera sans bornes. Mais pour lui aussi on priera, on criera. Et à la fin lui aussi sera restitué au bien, dans l'ordre de la seule nature, rendu malgré lui à l'amour naturel de Dieu, porté par miracle dans ces Limbes dont la nuit brille d'étoiles. Il y reprendra son office de prince—reprouvé toujours, au regard de la gloire; aimé de nouveau, au regard de la nature" (Jacques Maritain, *Approches sans Entraves* [Paris: Fayard, 1973], p. 28).

[The Angels] knew that God Himself and God alone is the primary object of this happiness and that the vision is in no way interrupted by the existence of any neighbour nor by any number of them. Yet they [the fallen angels] prefer that lower good which is possessed as a privilege of their angelic nature or as wholly personal, to a good common to many and dispensed according to the free choice of God Himself Who can make the last first and the first last.<sup>3</sup>

—Charles De Koninck

## I

At first sight, social and political philosophy would seem to have little interest in or appreciation of presumably baffling theological and philosophical discussions about the inner lives of what Aristotle called “separated substances” or of what revelation called angels. Yet, St. Thomas was not called “the angelic doctor” for nothing. He understood that the relations among divine, angelic, and human things were delicate, and that, to recall Aristotle, a slight error in the beginning of such matters could, in some unexpected place, lead to a huge error in the end. That is to say, what we believe or argue about the ultimate destiny of angels might well, on examination, indicate something of what we maintain about the destiny and nature of human society and the rational, finite beings who make it up.

G. K. Chesterton, likewise, was particularly struck by Aquinas’s speculative endeavors concerning the being, mind, and final fate of the angels. “St. Thomas was rather specially interested in the nature of Angels, for the same reason that made him even more interested in the nature of Men,” Chesterton pointed out in his *St. Thomas Aquinas*. “It was a part of that strong personal interest in things subordinate and semi-dependent, which runs through his whole system: a hierarchy of higher and lower liberties. He was interested in the problem of the Angel, as he was interested in the problem of the Man, because it was a problem; and especially because it was a problem of an intermediate creature.”<sup>4</sup> The two principal intermediate creatures, no doubt, *pace* animal and vegetable rights folks, are angels and men, the finite, rational beings. How can they stand outside of nothingness? How can they be free? Finally, as Maritain put it, what are the consequences, if any, of this “frightening and infinite power proper to free will?” Why “frightening?” Why

<sup>3</sup> Charles De Koninck, “In Defense of Saint Thomas,” *The Aquinas Review* 4, no. 1 (1997), p. 341. This volume also contains De Koninck’s “On the Primacy of the Common Good” and “The Philosophy of the New Order,” along with I. Th. Eschmann, O.P.’s “In Defense of Jacques Maritain.”

<sup>4</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (1933; rpt. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday Image, 1956), p. 165.

"infinite?" St. Thomas's interest in the "hierarchy of higher and lower liberties" itself suggests some connection in the line of principles of being running through what is common to angels and men. We are, in fact, concerned here with precisely "the higher liberties" and their consequences, consequences that necessarily lead to questions of beatitude and, indeed, to questions of evil.

My immediate concern with this problem of angels comes from corresponding with and reading the many but too-little known writings of E. B. F. Midgley, in Aberdeen, in Scotland.<sup>5</sup> Midgley has long been puzzled by certain obscurities in Maritain. He has not yet written a final study on his position, but he has indicated the basic problem he sees in Maritain as it is occasioned, in particular, by his explanations of the fate of the fallen angels. Much as Midgley appreciates many of Maritain's insights, he holds that it was in part at least through Maritain's social philosophy that there came into Christian social teachings an unwelcome undercurrent of autonomous liberalism or relativism. In turn, this modernity undermined any permanent order of secondary causes with their relation to the truths of reason and revelation.<sup>6</sup> The problem centers around one meaning of the word "personalism" that, as

<sup>5</sup> Professor Midgley has been for some time at work on his *magnum opus*, a long awaited multi-volume history of political philosophy from the point of view of St. Thomas. The following are among Midgley's principal published works: *The Natural Law Tradition and the Theory of International Relations* (London: Elek, 1975); *The Ideology of Max Weber: A Thomist Critique* (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983); *Hobbes: Leviathan* (Alcalá: Crítica Filosófica, 1988); "Natural Law and Fundamental Rights," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 21 (1976), pp. 144-65; "Concerning the Modernist Subversion of Political Philosophy," *New Scholasticism* 53 (Spring 1979), pp. 168-90; "On 'Substitute Intelligences' in the Formation of Atheist Ideology," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 36 (October 1980), pp. 239-53; "The Crisis of Modernity in the Theory of International Relations," *Year Book of World Affairs* 36 (1981), pp. 235-47; "Man's Knowledge of Truth vis-à-vis the History of Ideology: Some Reflections on Thomistic Anthropology," *Anthropologia Tomista*, in vol. 3 *Atti del IX Congresso Tomistico Internazionale* (Vatican City, 1991), pp. 416-24.

<sup>6</sup> On this point, Midgley recommends the reading of Hamish Fraser, "Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky: Fathers of the 'Christian' Revolution," Supplement to *Approches*, no. 71 (Saltcote, Scotland, 1980). This essay contains an English translation of R. Th. Calmel, O.P.'s review of *Approches sans Entraves*, from *Itinéraires*, no. 181, March 1974. Calmel writes, "The book is composed, in equal parts, of teaching which is faithful to classical Thomism and of his own creation which can be called Maritainism; and more than once the two are inextricably mixed. So on the one hand we have excellent summaries of the great genuine Thomism . . . and also general explanations which probe Thomism in its proper direction. . . . Side by side with the great professor of Thomism . . . is the Maritain that must be called Maritainism: the Maritain of theories, 'approches' or essays which aim at directing Thomist doctrine along the deviating lines of the moderns" (p. 57).

De Koninck intimated, subordinated all common goods, including the divine one, to human personality. It also deals with a certain independent autonomy in the natural being of angels that would exaggerate the power of reason to direct us to or deflect us from the good, the proper object of the will. Included in this problem also is the degree to which Maritain was successful in relating modern natural rights, with their origins in Hobbes, to classic natural law.

Midgley's problem, however, arises most graphically from Maritain's treatment of the sin of the angels together with the final fate of Lucifer. Midgley's apprehension, if I understand him at all correctly, concerns Maritain's later reflections on eschatological subjects found in *Approches sans Entraves* (1973). However curiously presented as mere musings of an old philosopher to the Brothers in Toulouse, in no way intended to contradict any position of revelation, these philosophical speculations were in fact indicative of a deeper problem.<sup>7</sup> Maritain was said to have left the uncorrected galleys of these passages on the angels on his desk just before he died as a very old man in his 90s.

These "essays" on eschatology, it is said, help explain those tendencies in Maritain's social philosophy that made it, unexpectedly, an opening to the left, as it is called. By the "left" in this context, I mean any view that derives its understanding of the world from autonomous will, itself not dependent on reality.<sup>8</sup> Hence, this view uses essentially ungrounded ideology to refashion the world in its own image of order. This endeavor is unrestricted by *what is* or by lessons of experience. Maritain, of course, considered himself to be and in general was a realist. The problem was whether these angelic reflections did not in fact undermine at certain points the very grounds of his realism. This is the issue about which I shall attempt to make some sense.

If we look at Maritain's whole career, no doubt, he is usually understood early on to have begun rather as a man of the right with *Action Française*.

<sup>7</sup> See *Approches sans Entraves*: "Avant-Propos," pp. 3–5 and "Imagerie," pp. 7–8.

<sup>8</sup> "[T]wo senses of the words 'right' and 'left,' a physiological sense and a political sense. In the first sense one is of the 'right' or of the 'left' by a disposition of temperament. . . . The pure man of the left detests being, always preferring, in principle, in the words of Rousseau, *what is not* to *what is*. The pure man of the right detests justice and charity, always preferring, in principle, in the words of Goethe . . . *injustice* to *disorder*. Nietzsche is a noble and a beautiful example of the man of the right, and Tolstoy, of the man of the left. In the second sense, the political sense, left and right designate ideals, energies, and historic formations into which the men of these two opposing temperaments are normally drawn to group themselves. . . . There are no more dreadful revolutions than revolutions of the left carried out by men of the rightist temperament (Lenin). There are no weaker governments than governments of the right run by leftist temperaments (Louis XVI)" (Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne: An Old Layman Questions Himself about the Present Time*, trans. Michael Cuddihy and Elizabeth Hughes [New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1968], pp. 21–22).

Subsequently, he became, with *Integral Humanism*, more of a man of the left, verged back to a man of the center with his wartime and post-wartime writings such as *Christianity and Democracy*, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, or *Man and the State*, and was even a conservative with his book, *Reflections on America*. Finally, in the minds of many on the left, he was seen as a candidate for a man of the right again with his *Peasant of the Garonne*, in which he was critical of Teilhard de Chardin and many post-Vatican II movements in the Church. Midgley does not like this pat schema. He finds a rather contrary philosophic undercurrent in Maritain that exists in parallel with his admittedly correct interpretations of Aquinas. This "secondary" current would place Maritain more in conformity with certain strands of modern ideology at variance with natural law than would at first sight seem possible because of his Thomist positions.

Indeed, in a similar concern, even *Man and the State* is seen by the Hungarian philosopher, Aurel Kolnai, in a recently republished 1951 review, to indicate the problem that bothers Midgley. "My quarrel with Maritain is not, then, that he is too partial to 'Caesar,' be it a Christian or even a pagan 'Caesar,'" Kolnai wrote, "but that he would abolish Caesar altogether and *therefore* conjure up the spectre of an infinitely worse Caesar who, as it were, has expropriated the transcendent God and swallowed up the spiritual substance of Christ."<sup>9</sup> Theology and *sapientia* thus become anthropology. Again such concerns, on their first hearing, are surprising since Maritain's whole philosophic work seems ordered to rejecting such a Hegelian, Feuerbachian, and totalitarian alternative. Let me see if I can get to the bottom of this disquiet of Midgley and Kolnai.

## II

The idea of the eventual salvation of the devil has a long history. Its classic source appears to be Origen (185–254 A.D.), who seems first to have broached the topic of the eventual salvation of Satan and all the damned, angelic and human.<sup>10</sup> It is a heady game, one that regularly recurs in the history

<sup>9</sup> Aurel Kolnai, "Between Christ and the Idols of Modernity: A Review of Jacques Maritain's *Man and the State*," in *Privilege and Liberty and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. Daniel J. Mahoney (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 1999), p. 179.

<sup>10</sup> "Si quis dicit aut sentit, Dominum Christum in futuro saeculo crucifixum iri pro daemonibus, sicuti pro hominibus, A. S." Virgilius, 537, "*Canones adversus Origenem*," Denziger, 209. "Si quis dicit aut sentit, ad tempus esse daemonum et impiorum hominum supplicium, eiusque finem aliquando futurum, sive restitutionem et redintegrationem (αποκατάστασιν) fore daemonum aut impiorum hominum, A. S" (Denziger, 211).

of philosophy and religion. It is not unknown, indeed it is quite popular, in some form or other in contemporary theology, though the nuances of the arguments need to be attended to. What seems ultimately to be at stake here is the significance of free acts of finite and free creatures, of whether it makes any real difference in some transcendent sense what we think or do. The link between act and consequences seems jeopardized by making less significant an objective order in which human or angelic acts take place.

Nor is this concern unrelated to classical Pelagianism which seems to propose a self-salvation that elevates human nature to a power that it does not possess by itself, the power to achieve one's own salvation by oneself. At bottom, I think, these are among the issues that worry Midgley about Maritain's position on the sin and subsequent curious restoration of the fallen angels to their previous natural state, as if they had never been offered a higher end. Nor did they seem to suffer as a result of their rejection of it except, perhaps, for their awareness of their loss.

Maritain's own particular hypothesis, that again he presents as a "would it not be nice if" sort of argument, presupposes certain doctrines in classical theology that are seldom heard of since Vatican II, most noticeably, the doctrine of Limbo. But this doctrine, whatever we might think of it, had a perfectly intelligible origin and, in that form, suited Maritain's later arguments about "the end of Satan." If we suppose that the doctrine of Limbo has no speculative grounding whatever, then, no doubt, Maritain's solution will not hold. Yet, how Maritain dealt with this issue can still provide great insight into his own philosophy.

Limbo specifically meant that certain innocent un-baptized infants, in particular, those who do not perform any formally rational acts in their lives and who die before possibly doing anything, would not receive the beatific vision promised to all the faithful baptized. Rather, they would spend eternity in that natural place reserved for mankind had it not fallen and been elevated by grace to the supernatural vision of God. The point at issue here is simply that a form of natural happiness could be envisioned that would be due to a given creature, even though in fact such a natural creation was never put into effect by God from the beginning. In this hypothesis, there could be no complaint if this creature did not receive something gratuitous beyond its natural due. Hence worry about the "pains of Hell" would be ultimately mitigated. God would, as it were, be exonerated from having to punish anyone for anything he did since everyone would simply follow his own nature.

With this teaching in mind, let us see how Maritain proposed to use it. An ancient accusation against God implied that He somehow was a failure if He could not in fact save or redeem all creatures that were, by His original

intention in creation, promised eternal life if they obeyed Him. Maritain is careful throughout his discussion of evil to make angelic or human choice, not God, to be responsible for any de facto rejection of God. Thus the failure, if there be a failure, is not on the side of God. This attainment of God's original purpose in creation, to associate other rational beings in His own inner life, thus had to face the problem of free will, angelic and human. Any gift could be rejected by an authentically free being. Of course, without such free-willed creature, no high drama would exist in the universe. Everything would be determined by non-free agents, assuming such a universe without free will is conceivable. Thus, we must be careful to keep clear what is at stake here. On this point, Maritain at times proposes a God so all-powerful that He can, if He chose, bring any free creature to His desired end. But normally, he thought, God did not act in this way but left free creatures in their own environment. However, Maritain, particularly in the case of Satan, does not propose that he be transported to the same destiny granted to the angels who did not fall.

Rather, what Maritain proposes is Limbo as a fit place for the fallen angels and men. Limbo has the psychological advantage of implying no real, continued, or eternal punishment. He maintains, with classic teaching, that the all-powerful God loves all that He has created, including the "being," but not the sin, of the damned angels and men. However, God, in consequence of His power and love, can nevertheless restore or elevate fallen creatures, even those who positively and definitively rejected Him. God could, without contradiction, it is argued, transport damned beings from Hell to Limbo. If God can perform this feat, why should He not do it? Therefore, He would do it. This is the impression with which we are left in reading Maritain's reflections on the "end of Satan." That Satan still would have a sense of missing out on something greater, Maritain does not deny. But something drastic has evidently changed in the universe. On the basis of this thesis, granted it is only a "musing," the ultimate worry of real damnation, of real seriousness about our responsible acts, is mitigated or eliminated.

At this point, it is also worth noticing that, in the chapter of *Notebooks* entitled, "Apropos of the Church in Heaven," dated 1963, Maritain has a related reflection concerning the proportionate number of the damned and the saved. It would seem that his further reflections about Lucifer are a logical outcome of his efforts to save most, if not all, people no matter how forceful the counter-argument from Scripture or tradition might appear against his position. Maritain points out that for Augustine, based on his reading of human nature, few could be expected to be saved. He adds that Aquinas agreed with this argument: "Because the vision of God exceeds the common state of



human nature—which moreover and above all bears the wounds of original sin—*pauciores sunt qui salvantur*, the chosen are fewer in number than the damned.”<sup>11</sup> This conclusion has seldom been greeted as a happy one. Though it may in fact be the truth, it leaves us with the impression of either a harsh or impotent God, an impression Maritain wants to mitigate or efface.

Arguing on the basis of the Cross, of the fact that in principle mercy is higher than justice, Maritain suggests that there were more saved than damned. “I am persuaded that the idea of the *greater number of the chosen* imposes itself and will impose itself more and more on the Christian conscience.”<sup>12</sup> Maritain did not argue at this point that his new thesis necessarily excluded “a great number in Hell,” but they were outnumbered by an even more vast array of saved. However, he did suggest that the teaching that a greater number were in Hell caused most people to lose hope, surely not the intention of a revelation of love. It also tended to break the link between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant.

### III

In retrospect, it seems clear, whatever be its truth, that Maritain’s feeling about what most Christians have come to hold on this issue seems largely correct. Hell itself and the greater number of damned in it are seldom mentioned today. That anyone at all might be damned is, in fact, embarrassing for most people and is presented as contrary to God’s love. But the point I am making here is simply that Maritain’s thought did direct him both in philosophy and theology towards a view of the world in which, whatever they did, most, if not all rational beings, would be saved, or at least exempted from real and lasting punishment on the basis of their acts. This position would seem to lessen the grandeur of human choice. In spite of his consistent teaching that God is never the cause of evil, Maritain makes God to appear rather heartless *if* He does not follow this theory about subsequently mitigating the punishment of the damned.

Some flavor of the background of Maritain’s thinking can be gathered from this rather poignant passage from *God and the Permission of Evil*:

In proportion as the conscience of men, under the very influence of Christianity, became more sensible of the dignity of the human person and of the outrages which are inflicted on him by evil, while on the other hand the dimensions of evil, of injustice, of cruelty, of all the kinds of

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Notebooks*, trans. Joseph Evans (Albany, New York: Magi Books, 1984), p. 270.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

crimes at work in history were made more and more revealed in it in depth as well as in extension . . . — in proportion, consequently, as such a process developed, the problem of evil has taken on a more tragic importance for the human conscience. It is this problem which is at the origin of many forms of atheism, at the origin also of what one could call in many the bewildered Christian's conscience.<sup>13</sup>

Through his theory of Limbo, Maritain evidently wishes to "un-bewilder" the Christian conscience by explaining how the finite creature can choose evil and at the same time have any consequences for doing so mitigated.

Behind all of this reflection on Satan's ultimate status lies Maritain's understanding of the sin of the angel. He proposes what seems like a unique theory, namely, that even in a state of pure nature, the autonomy of the angel could reject God even though God in creation had given this creature everything it could rightly expect to achieve its natural end. Maritain points out that the Thomist school in general did not think that angels in a purely natural order, "because of the perfection of their intelligence and wills," would have been able to sin. They were "potentially peccable" but only "in relation to a purely possible supernatural order."<sup>14</sup> However, for Maritain, neither in theory or practice is there any natural impeccability. This position seems, at first sight, logical enough, namely, that all finite beings can and therefore some or many probably will fail at times.

However, this position runs into difficulty with another account of the nature of the fall. This view would argue that, in their original state, angels were offered something higher than their own natural end, that is, the contemplation of God by their own powers. Had this higher end not been offered, none would have sinned, not even Satan. But they were offered the beatific vision. Had they not been offered something that they could reject, they would not have fallen in any sense. That is, they would have naturally, in practice, been "impeccable" because they would have had no reason to choose something else other than the natural happiness for which they were ordained by nature and in which they rejoiced. "From the moment that created persons are naturally peccable, there will be some who will in fact sin. . . . Hence, we must conclude that in fact God would not have created nature if He had not ordained it to grace and to that charity by which man becomes, under grace, freely the friend of God, and that sin is the ransom of glory."<sup>15</sup> The apparent denial of this possibility of a practical impeccability is one of the main points

<sup>13</sup> Maritain, *God and the Permission of Evil*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Bruce Publishing Company, 1966), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Maritain, *The Sin of the Angel*, p. 39.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37–38.

at issue here. Paradoxically, this denial serves not to lessen but to elevate the autonomy of angelic nature even beyond its initial powers. This same elevation seems to lessen both the power and providence of God with regard to His actual creation and its initial purposes. This is what concerns Midgley.

It is often held that the reason why the angels, Lucifer in particular, fell was because they inordinately loved their own good, a genuine good, no doubt, in preference to the beatific vision, a gift, a gift not "due" to them, but capable of being freely received by them in grace should it so be offered by God. It was also held that the angels, by their own natural knowledge, could not *not* know that they were not God. This issue is often cast in the form of their rejecting, as something beneath them, the idea of an Incarnation whereby God became man, on the whole, a rather vile creature. They saw God's offering of His inner life as a gift to angels and men to be contrary to their own peculiar but real glory. They denied a good common to all, a good not exclusively theirs. The fall, thus, would not have happened, that is, there would have been no angels who did not reach their natural end had they not been offered something higher than they must, in the act of its being offered to them, either accept or reject. It is to be noted, in this sense, that God might be blamed for offering natural creatures something more than themselves. There is a kind of incipient philosophic individualism present here.

This account of the fall is, no doubt, the ultimate origin of the City of God and the City of Man in Augustine's sense. Paradoxically, it differs from Maritain's account by rejecting one part of his notion of the expected fall of angels in the natural order. It does not think this natural fall would in fact have happened. And here lies the root of the concern that Maritain, in this discussion, reveals an autonomy of natural creatures over against the power and omniscience of God, an autonomy that would, in fact, have no serious consequences if even Satan ended up in Limbo and not Hell.

#### IV

What are we to make of these considerations? We might simply say that they are the reflections of an old man that never should have been published as they are contrary to his normal teachings. However, such thoughts of Maritain are apparently not just thoughts of his old age. Moreover, it seems to be quite true that in his normal presentation of how evil is freely chosen by finite creatures, he gives a standard Thomist explanation.<sup>16</sup> For example in *God and the Permission of Evil*, Maritain assigns the following explanation of

<sup>16</sup> Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1942).

why free creatures find themselves in Hell. In this account, we find no hint that this final condition is likely to be changed by a subsequent act of God reducing the sentence, as it were, of the fallen creature. "It is through their (the condemned's) fault and by reason of their demerits that they will have been less loved," Maritain wrote:

I have already noted that St. Thomas takes great care to call them the fore-known (and not the "negatively-condemned"!); God knows from all eternity that they will be, that they are condemned—but not because He would have condemned them in advance, even negatively; on the contrary it is they who have refused God. It is *post praevisa demerita*, "after" their "fore"-seen demerits that they are condemned, because they have withdrawn from divine grace by their free initiative of nihilating the first cause. In short, it is they themselves who have "discerned" or discriminated themselves for evil and for Hell, when at the end of their life they have irrevocably shattered the last grace offered. At that time they have forever preferred their own grandeur—to be to themselves their last end—to the supernatural beatitude which presupposes the love of God over and above all. They prefer Hell even while cursing it. They have that which they willed, that which they have themselves chosen as the supreme good; they have put their beatitude in themselves and they will hold fast to it, they are fixed in aversion to God.<sup>17</sup>

In this passage, as far as I can ascertain, we find little hint that at least some of the creatures who are in Hell because of their own acts will be "restored" in some fashion. It seems that this is their permanent location because of the nature of these acts. That is, they are where they ought to be, granted the nature of what they chose, that is, basically themselves over the gift offered to them.

Maritain's presentation of the "end of Satan," then, does make perplexing reading. If we can take him seriously, which is indeed a question, his "musings" would appear to provide a theory whereby there would, in fact, be no eternal punishment in the normal sense of that term as it has been understood in tradition.<sup>18</sup> Technically speaking, Maritain's position is not "heretical." We often hear stated the paradox that we must believe there is a Hell, but we do not have to believe anyone is in it. Assuming that the evidence of revelation does not in fact suggest that at least some, if not many, are in fact in Hell due

<sup>17</sup> Maritain, *God and the Permission of Evil*, p. 109.

<sup>18</sup> The following short passage from James Boswell indicates the view that a lack of transcendent punishment might have civil and social effects: "He (Samuel Johnson) strenuously opposed an argument by Sir Joshua Reynolds, that virtue was preferable to vice, considering this life only; and that a man would be virtuous were it only to preserve his character" (*Boswell's Life of Johnson* [London: Oxford, 1931], II, p. 259).

to their own choices of themselves, we might let Maritain's position go at that, a position with which he himself seems to disagree in his more direct teachings on evil and its consequences. At bottom, in Maritain, we see a very nuanced theory about the outcome of evil. His thesis about the end of Satan does, when spelled out, tend to separate, in the name of the divine goodness and mercy, free acts from their ultimate and expected effects in a manner that does not imply acknowledgment and forgiveness. Logically, knowledge of this happier ending would apparently lessen any solemnity or seriousness about the objective order of natural laws and commandments. Their deliberate violations would have no overly worrisome effect, granted that the loss of beatific vision itself, as a gift, could be something distressing.

## V

What remains to be examined about this position concerning the possible restoration of even the damned is the social or political implications such a view might have. Again, this might seem like an odd intellectual endeavor. There is a passage in Robert Browning that reads, "Infinite mercy, but, I wish, Infinite mercy, but, I wish, as infinite a justice too."<sup>19</sup> Justice, of course, is the political virtue, mercy a theological one. They do not blot each other out. Thomism, no doubt, strives to keep the distinction between mercy and justice in such a way as to preserve the essential meaning of both in a coherent view of the whole. Maritain's studies in social and political philosophy were intended to take what was good in modernity and relate it systematically with St. Thomas and the general Catholic tradition of social thought. Maritain thought this reconciliation could be smoothly accomplished on a principled basis.

At first sight, Maritain's social philosophy is quite tough-minded. His well-known critique of Machiavelli, the first and perhaps still the most disruptive of the modern political thinkers, sought to blend intelligence, strength, and morality.<sup>20</sup> Maritain seems to have had no delusions about the evil depths to which bad leaders and corrupt morals can lead a society, however sympathetic he was to the people involved. At the end of his

<sup>19</sup> Robert Browning, "The Heretic's Tragedy" in *The Poems and Plays by Robert Browning*, 1844-64, vol. 2 (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1928), i, 4, p. 433.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Maritain, "The End of Machiavellianism," in *Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, eds. Joseph Evans and Leo R. Ward (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 292-325. See James V. Schall, "Justice, Brains, and Strength," in *Jacques Maritain: The Philosopher in Society* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 1-20.

Marquette Lecture, Maritain rather graphically and with some attention to the history of philosophy touched on the importance of considering evil:

The French socialist, Georges Sorel, who was a friend of Charles Péguy, and whose books were carefully read by Mussolini and by Lenin, and who was fond of theology said one day that the crucial work of the philosophers, in the new age into which we are entering, would consist in recasting and penetrating more deeply into the problem of evil. As a matter of fact, we are surely called upon to build up a theory of evil if we are to interpret philosophically our time.<sup>21</sup>

A "theory" of evil is needed to interpret "philosophically" a given time, "our" time. Maritain added that the theory of St. Thomas on evil provided "the basic principles" for this worthy enterprise.

The notion of "recasting and penetrating more deeply into the problem of evil" must, in retrospect, be seen both in light of Maritain's "essay" on the "end of Satan" and in the light in which public life in modernity has deviated from the good, especially since the time of Maritain's own death, though he was aware of its direction. Does this "recasting" so change the very meaning of evil, however accurately its coming to be may be explained, such that what we normally worry about when doing evil, namely, its consequences, is no longer operative or operative with the same intensity? A theory of the forgiveness of evil, of course, presupposes that something seriously wrong has taken place. Forgiveness is not a mitigation of evil itself, but an acknowledgment of it.

In *Integral Humanism*, in 1936, Maritain wrote, with some evident exasperation: "It is high time for Christians to bring things back to truth, reintegrating in the fullness of their original source those hopes for justice and those nostalgias for communion on which the world's sorrow feeds and which are themselves misdirected, thus awakening a cultural and temporal force of Christian inspiration able to act on history and to be a support to men."<sup>22</sup> Obviously, supporting men and acting in history do relate to justice and communion. Maritain shows a certain impatience here. Earlier Christian thought and action are held to be somehow at fault for "not bringing things back to truth."

Midgley is wont to pose, in this regard, the question of whether Christianity, as a revelation of truth, would be any less true somehow if its basic

<sup>21</sup> Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil*, p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 6.

principles were never in fact incorporated into some or many cultural histories? If the answer to this question is, in fact, “no,” it casts the problem of the success or un-success of culturalization in a different light. Christianity, perhaps, its truth, may not depend on popular or wide-spread acceptance, however nice that might be and however much this seems to be at least an indirect purpose of evangelization. If Christ was rejected in His own time, we cannot think Him a failure if He is rejected in any time. The failure may be due to the rejectors.

This position is not the same as saying that Christianity ought not to be incorporated into a culture if possible, however imperfectly. But it does allow us to keep a certain distance from the criticism of Christianity for failing because it did not in modernity also accomplish a proper cultural and political incarnation. The reason for such a failure might, after all, following Maritain’s Thomist explanation of evil, be a free and abiding rejection by actual people of the basic elements of reason and grace that Christianity put into the world. No reader of Augustine would be surprised by this possibility.<sup>23</sup>

The rise of current theologies that propose to save everyone whether baptized or not, whether he holds or practices anything of Christianity or not—the world of interchangeable religious pluralisms—appears to be the result of the un-likelihood of successful Christian evangelization in the contemporary world.<sup>24</sup> If our culture is indeed a “culture of death,” however, perhaps it is the last thing into which Christianity ought to be incorporated. The moral decline of our public standards and life, however prosperous, does seem to follow a “logic” by which progressively the rational and moral standards of human worth are overturned in the name of philosophical principles such as “human rights,” which have come to mean any arbitrary rule that is proposed and enforced by legislature and courts. Our “humanism” is more secularist or even atheist than what Maritain called “integral.” Is it possible that Maritain’s underlying optimism that is revealed by the end of even Lucifer made him overly confident about the institutions and principles of modernity which seem, in retrospect, to have been working themselves out inexorably in a direction opposite to that which he might have envisaged following St. Thomas on the primary and secondary principles of natural law and their order?<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Robert Kraynak’s forthcoming book, *Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World* (Notre Dame, Indiana: The University of Notre Dame Press) re-proposes an Augustinian correction to these trends in Christianity that have been overly open to the theoretical positions of modern democratic theory.

<sup>24</sup> See Jacques Dupuis, *Jesus Christ and the Encounter with World Religions*, trans. Robert Barr (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> See *ST* I-II, q. 94.

Aidan Nichols recalled, however, that Maritain, in a famous chapter, rejected the modern notion of sovereignty as a concept to be applied to the head of state or to society. Sovereignty was originally a theological idea that referred to God. Thus, if we attribute such an idea to the state, as modern political theory often did, we have, implicitly, given the modern state quasi-divine powers, which in fact it often implicitly, at least, claims.<sup>26</sup> Maritain is aware of and often elaborates the dangers of theoretical explications of the state that provide no limits for its scope. Yet, his theory on the end of Satan would seem equally applicable to the end of the most famous of the modern tyrants and their lesser minions. With no effective eternal punishment or deterrent, the distinction between virtue and vice, good and evil, is made less graphic. Once this distinction is in practice diminished, it is difficult to find grounds to reject what was classically called vice and evil.

The question arises, moreover, about whether the democratic state itself had any boundaries so that Maritain's efforts to limit the state through establishment of modern democratic institutions might have had the opposite result.<sup>27</sup> Nichols puts the matter this way:

Secularism can scarcely be acknowledged by Christians as a good *per se* since the good of the creation (which Christian secularists claim to uphold) is only available to us within the resurrection order which is found restored and then (not a chronological but an ontological "then") transfigured. Secularism . . . was never *voted in* at all. It is simply what happened when traditional societies entered a liberal thought-world. Liberalism is the imposition on the person of the priorities of secularity and prosperity over against deeper needs, and why should that be supinely accepted? To a duty functioning Christian sensibility it can only be an impossible project, for it results from the extreme separation of the supernatural from the natural when in fact these realms interpenetrate utterly.<sup>28</sup>

No doubt, Maritain sought to preserve "the primacy of the spiritual." He did not want such an "extreme separation" of the supernatural and the natural. But if God in His power can blot out the consequences of the acts that are not forgiven by the normal processes in this world, it would seem that Kolnai is right, that there is danger of an absorption of everything into God in such a

<sup>26</sup> Aidan Nichols, O. P., *Christendom Awake!* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 79. See Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 28–53.

<sup>27</sup> See James V. Schall, "A Reflection on the Classical Tractate on Tyranny: The Problem of Democratic Tyranny," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 41 (1996), pp. 1–19.

<sup>28</sup> Nichols, *Christendom Awake!*, p. 80.



way that the distinction between intermediate creatures and God is diminished. Finite freedom, in the end, has little to fear or worry about if its results are of little ultimate consequence.

## VI

In his *The Peasant of the Garonne*, Maritain noted that “the history of the world progresses *at the same time* in the line of evil and in the line of good.”<sup>29</sup> What is the end of the “line of evil”? In this book, written later in his life (1966), but still a few years before his death (1973), Maritain discussed the question of the temporal end of man on this earth. He thought it a legitimate issue, though not the same as man’s ultimate destiny. He was concerned that there be a Christian contribution to this temporal end. Indeed, he held that there must be such a contribution if it were to be achieved at all. However, he did not think that we could produce any perfect society in this world. “The Christian can, and must, ask for the coming of the kingdom of God in glory, but is not entitled to ask for—nor to propose as the end of his temporal activity—a definite advent of justice and peace, and of human happiness, as the term of the progress of temporal history: this progress is not capable of any final term.”<sup>30</sup> Maritain thus appears to hold that the world can be improved and indeed is improving with the advent of certain modern democratic institutions. Whatever might happen, this improvement itself is not the Kingdom of God where, presumably, the end of Satan is to be accomplished.

Indeed, Maritain shows himself in *The Peasant of the Garonne* to be rather exasperated by Christians, especially clerics, who after Vatican II, seemed to have been suddenly converted to an inner-worldly project as the essence of Christianity.<sup>31</sup> Parodying ideas that he observed prevalent in the 60s, Maritain wrote:

<sup>29</sup> Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne*, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202. “But will the non-Christian (or even the non-Catholic) also understand the meaning and the reason for this distinction, and not be scandalized because in certain instances, the Christian (or the Catholic) must maintain at all costs the autonomy of the spiritual in regard to the temporal, and refuse to transform Christianity into a kind of theocratic agency charged with assuring the well-being of the world, universal peace, pay raises, and free room and board for all?” (*ibid.*, p. 82).

<sup>31</sup> “No one, however, has to look very far to marvel at the resources of human foolishness, and to understand that foolishness and theological faith can certainly keep house in the same brain, and hold a dialogue there—as everybody is doing now with everybody else—even though such contact is likely to prove unhealthy for the latter. I will have to come back to this, although it scarcely amuses me, in order to say something about the neo-modernism that flourishes today” (*ibid.*, p. 2).

The objective content of which the faith of our forefathers clung, all *that* is myth, like original sin for example (isn't our big job today to get rid of the horrendous guilt complex?), and like the Gospel of the Infancy of Christ, the resurrection of the body, and the creation. And the Christ of history, of course. The phenomenological method and form criticism have changed everything. The distinction between human nature and grace is a scholastic invention like transubstantiation. As for hell, why take the trouble to deny it, it is simpler to forget it, and that's probably what we had also better do with the Incarnation and the Trinity. Frankly, do the mass of Christians ever think of these things, or of the immortal soul and the future life?"<sup>32</sup>

I cite this rather acid passage because it does suggest that the basic Christian doctrines were quite operative in Maritain's soul at this time. In particular, he seems to have no problem with hell, but with those who would deny or ignore it. The devil is still an actor—"the world is the domain *at once* of man, of God, and of the devil."<sup>33</sup> Lucifer still seems to be a lost being.

With such observations in mind, what are we to make of the original question, namely, was Maritain's position on the sin of the angel in fact corruptive of his more straight-forward efforts to explain evil and to provide a valid Christian political philosophy? In part, the answer to this question will depend on whether we hold that Maritain's position on the sin of the angel, particularly the end of Satan, was something of an aberration, something so dubious that it need not be taken for the "real" Maritain. Perhaps we can take Maritain's word for it that these were merely tentative "musings" offered as a sort of "play" to see where ideas might lead but with no intention of undermining any basic position in philosophy or theology.<sup>34</sup>

We might also want simply to reject any notion of Limbo so that Maritain's proposed solution simply would not work.<sup>35</sup> Either God's salvific will

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> Maritain's "Foreword" to *God and the Permission of Evil* (1963) is of some interest in this regard: "This book has grown out of three seminars which I gave in May, 1963, to the Little Brothers of Jesus who take their studies in Toulouse. Their teachers are the theologians of the Dominican House of Studies in Toulouse. My job as a teacher is completely ended; what remains to me to do here on earth is of another order. The seminars in question were simply friendly conversations, altogether personal, by way of play, if I might put it, and by way of goodbye" (p. vii).

<sup>35</sup> "St. Thomas added that children who died un-baptized—before being able, in the act of freedom, to accept (or refuse) the grace of Christ offered to all—were doubtless deprived of beatitude and the vision of God, but would enter into a state of natural felicity exempt from all pain and sorrow. This doctrine of Limbo, scorned by so many of today's theologians who don't know what they are doing, should be recognized as a precious treasure of every intelligent Christian" (Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne*, p. 155, n. 21).

and power saved absolutely everyone or there were some free beings in hell. There could be no third alternative. Yet, Maritain himself did hold this position about Limbo throughout his life so it is not easy to remove its effects from his overall position. In practice, the doctrine served to provide the basis of a curious theological optimism that would mitigate or eliminate the seriousness of the moral and political structures of the actual world and the acts that take place within them. In a sense, Maritain's endeavor to enhance the importance within time of inner-worldly affairs as a part of the Christian position seems, with this position on the "end of Satan," to end up making us wonder whether any worldly event made any ultimate difference. The fact that the drift of modernity, within modern institutions, has continued in a radically anti-Christian direction can lead us to suspect some problem with this entire endeavor to "save" Lucifer, an endeavor the potential dangers of which Maritain himself seemed aware in much of his more formal writing.