

VI

THE DEGREES OF PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

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Les degrés du savoir puts before the mind of its reader a vast panorama of spiritual activity, of modes of wisdom, ranging from the natural sciences through metaphysics to the contemplation of the mystic. If these various degrees of wisdom are distinguished, however, we are asked not to be content with their otherness, but to see beyond to the way in which they cohere. "Distinguer pour unir," Maritain writes.

It is my task to say a few things about Maritain's moral epistemology as this is conveyed by his masterpiece, Les degrés du savoir. As it happens, it is in the course of his discussion of mysticism that he says the things which form the basis for my remarks. Maritain contrasts St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross by calling the former the Master of Communicable Wisdom and the latter the Master of Incommunicable Wisdom. In explaining what he means by these epithets, Maritain introduces the topic of the speculative and the practical.<sup>1</sup> The text is concerned with the practical and speculative as such for only a few pages,<sup>2</sup> but is supplemented by Annexe VII, which is considerably longer.<sup>3</sup> If the whole work is concerned with the degrees of wisdom, these remarks may be said to deal with the degrees of the practical. What I propose to do

is to:

1. convey as swiftly and accurately as I can the content of the two passages just mentioned,
2. say a few things about the relation of Maritain's doctrine to its sources in St. Thomas,
3. suggest the way in which the whole moral order is unified by Maritain's employment of the concept of degrees of practical knowledge.

No student of these passages in Les degrés du savoir can afford to avoid the remarkable work of Yves Simon, La critique de la connaissance morale.

## I

In the speculative order, the mind, taking its rise from the existent world, causes to emerge from this world universes of intelligibility more and more pure, with purity read in terms of distance from matter. Maritain has in mind the distinction of speculative science into natural philosophy, mathematics and metaphysics. The degrees of speculative knowledge, accordingly, are spoken of in terms of degrees of abstraction from matter. The movement in the practical order, on the other hand, is toward concrete existence, toward human action which is accomplished in the world from which speculation progressively distances itself. In the practical order it is not simply knowledge that is wanted, but a knowledge ordered to the direction or guidance of human action.

Maritain wishes to distinguish three levels of practical knowing: practical philosophy or moral philosophy, which he characterizes as speculatively practical; what he calls practically practical science; and, finally, prudence.

"La droite connaissance pratique comme regulatrice im-  
mediate de l'action, c'est la vertu de prudence."<sup>4</sup> Act-  
ually, Maritain first establishes a distinction between  
speculatively practical science and prudence. If both are  
action guiding, speculatively practical science is so only  
remotely, from afar, whereas, as we have just seen, prudence  
is the immediate guide of the concrete act hic et nunc.<sup>5</sup>  
The question then arises whether there is a science, a prac-  
tical science, between speculatively practical science and  
prudence. "Practically practical science" expresses Mari-  
tain's affirmative answer to this question, an answer prompted  
by St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>6</sup> How can this intermediary practical  
knowledge be characterized?

... il ne s'agit plus d'expliquer, de résoudre  
une vérité, même pratique, dans ses raisons et  
ses principes. Il s'agit de préparer l'action  
et d'en assigner les règles prochaines.<sup>7</sup>

Now, speculatively practical science is a type common  
to the three moral sciences recognized by Aristotle: ethics,  
economics, and politics.<sup>8</sup> What, then, would be examples of  
practically practical sciences? Maritain first lists some  
authors: Montaigne, Pascal, Nietzsche, Shakespeare, Racine,  
Baudelaire, Swift, Meredith, Balzac, Dostoevsky. These men  
should not be thought of as disinterested observers or psych-  
ologists, but as moralists, not in the sense of moral phil-  
osophers, but, rather, in the sense of practitioners (prac-  
ticiens) of the science of morals.

Mais c'est bien le dynamisme de l'Être humain  
qu'ils étudient, l'usage lui-même du libre  
arbitre, et donc la situation de l'homme par  
rapport à ses fins, en sorte que l'exactitude

et la profondeur de leurs vues ne dépendent pas seulement de l'acuité de leur regard, mais aussi de leur idée du bien et du mal, et des dispositions de leur propre coeur à l'égard du souverain bien.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear how this concept of practically practical science will serve Maritain in his characterization of the writings of St. John of the Cross by contrast with those of St. Thomas.

Par la même que la connaissance pratique est comme un mouvement de pensée continue qui descend vers l'action concrète à poser dans l'existence, son caractère pratique, présent dès l'origine, s'intensifie au fur et à mesure, pour devenir dans la prudence totalement dominateur.<sup>10</sup>

This is how Annexe VII opens, showing far more clearly than in the text the practical order viewed as the reverse of the speculative, so to speak. If the speculative moves away from the concrete and the material, up through philosophy of nature and mathematics to metaphysics, the practical is the movement toward the ever more concrete, which reaches its term in prudence, the immediate guide of action. A new note is struck now; what completes the practicality of the practical is will. Practical knowledge at all levels is action guiding, but it guides action more and more proximately as we move toward the realm of prudence.

Moral philosophy is speculatively practical knowledge as opposed to practically practical knowledge, which includes practically practical moral sciences as well as prudence, the prime instance of the practically practical. Moral philosophy remains intellectual in the sense that its truth does not imply nor engage right appetite nor affective

motion. If practical truth consists in the judgment's conformity with rectified appetite then moral philosophy is not true with practical truth. Maritain speaks of moral philosophy as scrutinizing its objects according to the laws of ontological analysis, dividendo et resolvendo, that is scrutinizing them in a speculative manner. The following passage sets forth the degrees of practical knowing as Maritain sees them.

Si, dans la philosophie pratique, la vérité ne consiste pas, comme dans la philosophie spéculative, purement et simplement dans le cognoscere, elle consiste du moins dans le cognoscere comme fondement du dirigere; tandis que dans le savoir pratiquement pratique elle consiste déjà dans le dirigere, mais en tant même que fondé dans le cognoscere; et dans la prudence elle ne consiste plus formellement que dans le dirigere lui-même.<sup>11</sup>

Maritain takes this to mean that the operable thing can be considered, as operable, in three ways. Finally, he repeats that the phrase "practically practical" refers, in a loose sense, to those moralists and novelists listed earlier, but in the strict sense to prudence. The terminology, accordingly, is gradually sharpened, or, as in this case, made more supple. Maritain began by asking if there was an intermediary between practical science and prudence. The answer was yes, and the suggestion was that we call the intermediary the practically practical. Now we learn that, in the strict sense, it is prudence that is practically practical.

It is no easy matter to grasp precisely what it is that Maritain means by the "practically practical" as opposed to

the "speculatively practical" and to "prudence." Sometimes he illustrates what he means by distinguishing between theoretical and practical medicine. The former would define and order and schematize such things as fevers, whereas the latter would prescribe such and such a potion to relieve a fever or perhaps the cause of the fever.<sup>12</sup>

The analogue of this in morals would be a theoretical ethics and a practical ethics. Theoretical ethics would be characterized, presumably, not simply by its greater remoteness from the action it would direct, its greater generality, but also by the fact that it proceeds dividendo et definiendo. But Maritain explicitly rejects this interpretation.<sup>13</sup> The mode of both speculatively practical and practically practical science is compositive as opposed to resolute.<sup>14</sup>

Maritain exemplifies the distinction by appealing to the difference between the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas in the Secunda Pars of the Summa Theologiae and the moral theology of an Alphonsus Ligouri. One senses what it is that the distinction is meant to point out. Surely the procedure of both the Prima Secundae and the Secunda Secundae is sufficiently different from that of a man giving quite circumstantial and concrete advice. The question, however, is this: Is the difference one of degree or one of kind? Maritain puts the question in this way: Is the habitus of moral philosophy identical to the habitus of practically practical moral science? He holds it to be probable that these are different habitus (and that prudence is a third habitus

distinct from both of them). Somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, given the origin of the distinction, he feels that there is no such distinction of habitus between practically practical science in the realm of the factibile and art. This distinction between the agibile and factibile, between the practically practical and completely practical in the two realms, is yet more surprising when we consider that earlier<sup>15</sup> the distinction between practically practical and completely practical had been attached to the distinction between facultas et usus. At that point, Maritain quickly added: "Sauf en ce qui concerne la prudence, laquelle, à la différence de l'art, s'étend à l'exercice actuel, car ne pas user de la prudence hic et nunc serait imprudence."<sup>16</sup>

The distinction between the speculatively practical and the practically practical is sometimes put in this way: the former is completely intellectual, whereas the latter already involves the appetitive condition of the knower, although not in the full way that prudence does.

Sans doute la rectitude de vouloir est-elle plus requise pour la prudence, qui seule considère le cas singulier hic et nunc, et qui seule descend jusqu'à l'imperium. Mais elle est nécessaire aussi, pour les raisons que nous venons d'indiquer, à la science pratiquement pratique.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, Maritain allows that sometimes the practitioners of practically practical science give bad advice and are wrong to a greater or lesser degree.<sup>18</sup> This, of course, is incompatible with the claim that such sciences depend upon the rectitude of the will.

There are difficulties, then, with the threefold

distinction Maritain wishes to make in the practical order. The distinction between moral philosophy and prudence poses no problem. It is the nature and status of practically practical science that puzzles the reader. This is not to say that he cannot easily see what it is Maritain wishes the phrase to denote. When we consider, for example, the distinction Thomas made between the judgment per modum cognitionis and the judgment per modum connaturalitatis in the matter of chastity, we seem to be confronted with two sorts of advice, that of the moral philosopher or theologian and that of the chaste man. The chaste man is not judging concerning some action of his own. Rather, he is putting himself in the shoes of his questioner and, guided by his own rectified appetite, giving a judgment as to what is to be done. What is to be done by another is his concern, that is, not what is to be done hinc et nunc by himself. There is no need to mention the use to which Maritain put connaturality in many areas beyond that in which it functions for Aquinas. Surely, when connaturality is used to distinguish between the judgment of prudence and advice given by the good man, which is in effect some version of, "Well, what I would do is . . .," we encounter little or no difficulty in recognizing a type of moral knowledge which falls between moral philosophy and the judgment of prudence as such. The question, in short, is not whether or not there is this intermediate knowledge, but how best to characterize it. I shall now look at the texts of St. Thomas which inspired Maritain, to see if they can cast light on his conception of practically practical knowledge.



## II

The second part of Annexe VII begins with a list of texts upon which Maritain relies for his conception of the distinction between the speculative and practical, and for his views on the degrees of practical knowledge. On p. 907 we find a schema devised to show the distinction between speculative and practical knowledge as well as between the degrees of practical knowledge. What is the relation between Maritain's threefold distinction of practical knowledge and the threefold distinction Thomas offers in perhaps the most important text cited, Summa Theologiae, Ia. q. 14, a. 16? Asking whether God has speculative or practical knowledge of creatures, Thomas begins with a distinction which Maritain quotes:

Scientia potest dici speculativa primo ex parte rerum scitarum, quae non sunt operabiles a sciente, sicut est scientia hominis de rebus naturalibus, vel divinis. Secundo quantum ad modum sciendi; ut puta, si aedificator consideret domum definiendo et dividendo, et considerando universalia praedicata ipsius. Hoc siquidem est operabilia modo speculativo considerare, et non secundum quod operabilia sunt. Operabile enim est aliquid per applicationem formae ad materiam, non per resolutionem compositi in principia universalia formalia....<sup>19</sup>

At this point, Maritain's quote stops. The text from Thomas continues in the original as follows:

Tertio, quantum ad finem. Nam intellectus practicus differt fine a speculativo, sicut dicitur. Intellectus enim practicus ordinatur ad finem operationis; finis autem intellectus speculativi est consideratio veritatis. Unde si quis aedificator consideret qualiter posset fieri aliqua domus, non ordinans ad finem operationis, sed ad cognoscendum tantum, erit, quantum ad finem, speculativa consideratio;

tamen de re operabili.<sup>20</sup>

Clearly, since there is a plurality of criteria for speculative and practical knowledge, it is possible that speculative and practical knowledge exist in degrees. That is, a given instance of knowing can be, with regard to one or more criteria, speculative, and with regard to the others practical, and vice versa. Of course, a given instance of knowing can be speculative or practical with regard to all the criteria and thus be, respectively, completely speculative or completely practical. This text of St. Thomas, then, is just what we want if we wish to know how we might speak of degrees of practical knowledge.

We can see why Maritain did not quote the portion of the text that goes on to discuss the end as a criterion when we notice that he has already discussed the end even before setting down his schema. At this point, Maritain is influenced by a remark of Cajetan's in the Cardinal's commentary on the exact passage we have quoted. Cajetan wants us to distinguish between finis cognitionis vel scientiae and finis cognoscentis vel scientis, the end of the knowledge and the end of the knower. Maritain accepts the importance of this distinction and argues that it is only the ordination of knowledge to an end other than knowledge that noetic or epistemology has to consider; whether or not an agent actually uses this knowledge to achieve the end toward which the knowledge is ordered is a matter of free will and cannot enter into the specification of a habitus.<sup>21</sup> It may be

that Maritain is here misled by Cajetan and tends to conflate two of the criteria Thomas has set down, namely mode and end, since mode provides the ordination of knowledge to operation which Cajetan seems to mean by finis scientiae.

What, on the basis of the text of Thomas, might one give as the degrees of practical knowledge? The object considered is either something we can do or make, or it is not. If it is, it is an operable object and knowledge of it will be so far practical. Yet the way of knowing the operable object may be either by way of dividing and defining and classifying or in an action-guiding manner, e.g., knowledge expressed in precepts. The latter would be instances of what Thomas means by a compositive way of knowing. Thus to know an operable object in a compositive manner is to know it more practically than to know an operable object in a resolute or analytical manner. Thirdly, if one is actually putting this knowledge to use, if he is acting, then his end or purpose is practical. Knowledge can only be put to use if it is knowledge of an operable object in a compositive manner, so we are here faced with completely practical knowledge.

How does this stratification of practical knowledge answer to Maritain's? Let us call the degrees of practical knowledge suggested by this text of Thomas "minimally practical knowledge," "virtually practical knowledge" and "completely practical knowledge." Is minimally practical knowledge identical with speculatively practical knowledge?

Perhaps it is, perhaps it is not. On the one hand, Maritain explicitly denies that moral philosophy, which is an instance of speculatively practical knowledge, can be characterized as knowing an operable object in a speculative way. But to define virtue, to discuss the species of a given virtue, would be instances of minimally practical knowledge and are clearly activities we associate with moral philosophy. Need we take this denial of Maritain's so literally? If not, it is fairly clear that minimally and speculatively practical knowledge could be identified.

We can identify equally, I think, what in both schemas is called completely practical knowledge, at least when we are talking of moral knowledge; completely practical knowledge in the moral order will be manifested by prudence - and by its opposite.

Thus, we return to practically practical knowledge; is it identical with virtually practical knowledge? The difficulty with maintaining their identity stems from Maritain's view that practically practical knowledge is manifested in advice of a concrete and particular nature, though of some low level of generality. But that "The good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided," the first and most general principle of the practical order, seems to satisfy the criteria of virtually practical knowledge. It is action-guiding advice, although of a breathtaking order of generality. Indeed, if we consider the famous text of Prima Secunda, q. 94, a. 4, which asks whether there are one or many precepts of natural law, we will note a progression from the ratio boni

(the good is that which all things desire) to the first precept (the good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided). Definitions, divisions and classifications are presupposed to the formulation of practical precepts. If precepts capture the two criteria of virtually practical knowledge - operable object and compositive mode - then there would seem to be homogeneity of type of practical knowledge from the most general sort of advice to the least general sort of advice. This suggests that what we have called minimally practical knowledge should be regarded as a moment in moral philosophy, not a rival to it, such that moral philosophy is best seen as aiming at the giving of very general advice, at the outset, and continuing toward the concrete by giving more and more circumstantial judgments as to what should be done and what avoided. On the basis of the text of Thomas, there is no way in which one could distinguish between what Maritain calls speculatively practical and practically practical knowledge. Both would be concerned with an operable object in a compositive way; the fact that one is more and the other is less general does not seem to provide a means for formally distinguishing between them.

### III

Now Maritain has offered his scheme of the degrees of practical knowledge, not simply as an exegesis of St. Thomas, but rather as inspired by his writing. I can find no claim in the passages of Les degrés du savoir which I am examining that what Maritain is saying is meant as a simple restatement

of Aquinas. That his schema is not identical with that we can construct from Thomas is perhaps sufficiently clear from what I have just said. It is not on the exegetical level, therefore, that we shall find the value and power of the pages before us.

The great power of these remarks on the moral order is to be found in Maritain's insistence that however we distinguish degrees or types or levels - and we must - we are finally dealing with a unity, something which coheres. He is far more interested, finally, in that concrete coherence than he is in the abstract distinctions. This is evident, I think, in the offhand but insistent remark, to be found both in the text and in the Annexe, that Maritain himself does not think that any purely philosophical ethics can address itself to man's actual condition. I want to end by showing how, whatever difficulties we may find in relating his various remarks about practically practical science to one another, Maritain's conception of this science draws our attention to a fact about moral science very difficult, indeed, to ignore.

One of the points of the doctrine of natural law is to show that whatever their fallen moral condition, taken singly or as a society, men can arrive at some true knowledge as to what is perfective of the kind of agent we are. That is, bad morals are held to be unable completely to snuff out a person's capacity to form true judgments as to what he ought to do. But such judgments are very general, so general that they do not engage or threaten our moral character.

The womanizer can, when jaded, wax eloquent on the value of chastity. More particular judgments, however, can have for the judge applications which he will find it difficult to ignore, and the more difficult as the judgment becomes more circumstantial. Indeed, if our moral character is bad, we may be incapable of formulating particular practical judgments appropriate to our own condition. In the case of particular judgments, singular judgments, this is easy to see. Qualis unusquisque est, talis finis ei videtur. Our singular judgments manifest the moral character that is ours. Only the good man can truly perceive the demands of the good in concrete singular circumstances.

What Maritain's conception of practically practical science draws attention to is a further fact; even at the level of theory, of generalization, what we say will by and large reflect what we are. What is called rationalization is only one instance of this, but it is a sufficient instance. Are we not often aware that we are tailoring our general conceptions of what is to be done or avoided to what our acquired dispositions are? If this is so, then it will be all the more so in the example provided by Thomas of a man giving advice on the demands of chastity, not per modum cognitionis but per modum inclinationis. His advice will reflect what he is, not just what he knows. One of the lessons of Maritain's conception of the practically practical, as applied to moral knowledge, is that our judgments per modum cognitionis may also, in their own way, reflect what we are.

#### NOTES

1. Jacques Maritain, Les degrés du savoir, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer et Cie, 1948), p. 616. All following notes refer to this work.
2. pp. 618-27.
3. pp. 901-18.
4. p. 623.
5. p. 621.
6. p. 624.
7. Ibid.
8. p. 620.
9. p. 627.
10. p. 901.
11. p. 905.
12. Cf. p. 915.
13. Cf. p. 909. "...Saint Thomas, quand il parle de la science de mode spéculatif d'un objet d'opération, ne pense pas à la connaissance que nous appelons ici spéculativement pratique, par exemple à la philosophie morale ... il pense à une connaissance purement spéculative d'un objet qui par ailleurs se trouve être operable." However, Cf. p. 620.
14. p. 914.
15. pp. 906-7.
16. p. 907, note 1.
17. p. 915, note 1.
18. p. 917, note 1.
19. p. 908.
20. St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Ia, q. 14, a. 16.



1. pp. 906-7. It is in a footnote to the text on p. 907 that Maritain observes that this distinction does not seem applicable in prudence.

COMMENTARY ON  
"The Degrees of Practical Knowledge"  
by Ralph McInerny

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What I take to be the basic thrust of Professor McInerny's paper is the concern with the unity or coherence of Maritain's position on the different kinds of activity that can be called moral thought or knowledge. I should note first that I think Professor McInerny is correct in distinguishing Maritain's description of the different sorts of moral knowledge we possess from that of St. Thomas. Maritain's schema of the kinds of moral knowledge differs from that of St. Thomas, not as something opposed to it, but as something inspired by it and as a position that has to be considered as correct or incorrect in its own right.

Without undermining Professor McInerny's concern for the overall unity of Maritain's position, which is clearly critical for a proper understanding of this matter, I would like to explore the importance of the distinctions Maritain finds within the one area called moral knowledge. It would seem that the unity and the distinction of the different levels of moral knowledge have the same source; what is known in them is known in relation to the achievement of an end. Since all moral knowledge is characterized by a concern for the end of action, at times, it can be seen as being one

activity. This explains why the same thing seems to be done in some sense both in acting morally and in speculating more generally about moral issues.

Even though there is a unity of some sort between the different sorts of moral knowledge, Maritain tries very hard to establish a distinction between three sorts of knowledge in the area of morality. The distinctions between these three kinds of knowledge are made in terms of their proximity to or distance from action. The distinctions between the three sorts of moral thought, however, are not as clear as the distinctions Maritain makes between the different speculative sciences. The speculative sciences are distinguished in terms of the freedom of their objects from involvement in matter and motion. If we compare the highest levels of thought in the speculative and practical orders (highest in the sense of most abstract), we find that while metaphysics may study something actually or possibly free from matter and motion, moral philosophy (speculatively practical science) is not free from an orientation to or involvement with moral action. It exists because of that orientation to moral action. In other words, we do not get the kinds of distinct levels of freedom from one thing in the practical sciences as we do in the speculative sciences.

In spite of the unity between the speculatively practical and practically practical sciences, Maritain definitely speaks of three sorts of thinking and doing, and he describes them as having recognizable differences:

Although truth in moral philosophy does not consist purely and simply in cognoscere as it does in speculative philosophy, it does at least consist in cognoscere as the foundation of dirigere; whereas, in practically practical science truth consists in dirigere indeed, but as based on cognoscere, and in prudence, it consists formally simply and solely in dirigere itself.<sup>1</sup>

Now what are we to make of this? If I may imitate Professor McInerny, I would like to argue that Maritain's conception of the different levels of thought and decision in action draws our attention to a fact about moral science that it would be very difficult, indeed, to ignore.

As St. Thomas points out, there is a general kind of knowledge about morals which is broadly true, and then there are particular circumstances where clarity about what is right and wrong is difficult to achieve. These levels can be seen as relevant to McInerny's morally bad man who may be a competent philosopher in the area of general ethical theory (or at least a good imitation of one), but who may be incapable of formulating particular judgments appropriate to the circumstances in which he actually finds himself. Indeed, it may be the case that he is a scoundrel. A parallel can be seen on a more practical level (that inhabited by non-philosophers). It seems to me, on the basis of experience, that many people are capable of arguing with great sophistication and accuracy on a general level about right and wrong but simply cannot think or act correctly when it comes to the concrete circumstances in which they find themselves. Some might say that they have splinters in their eyes. Thus the actual value of their arguments

differs at the speculatively practical and the practically practical levels. They may well have genuinely true knowledge of the speculatively practical order, but they have erroneous opinions on the practically practical level.

It would seem that Maritain's outline of the three levels of moral knowledge in terms of both intellect and will provides a framework within which we can seek an explanation of why some people have facility at the more general levels of moral knowledge, along with blindness at the more concrete and specific levels. This is why exploration of the distinctions that hold within the overall unity of moral knowledge would help us to understand the moral sciences better.

Having said this, I would like to focus on what seems to be the most confusing and frustrating part of Maritain's description of the practical sciences, the matter of practically practical science (the practically practical science that is more general as distinguished from prudence). Maritain insists that there is a science between speculatively practical science and prudence. He raises the question of this intermediate sort of knowledge and gives his answer thus:

Is there not an intermediate zone of knowledge between prudence and speculatively practical science? Explicating the principles of St. Thomas, we would answer: yes! There is a practical science in the strict sense of the word. We may call it practically practical science. This is a science because even though it is much more particularized than moral theology or ethics, even though it considers the details of cases, it nevertheless moves within the uni-

versal and the raisons d'être as within its proper object. But as to the fundamental equipment of knowledge itself or as to the structure of notions and definitions, its procedure follows a wholly different mode than does ethics or moral theology. The very method of science is reversed. The whole mode of science here is practical. What does that mean? It means that there is no question here of explaining and resolving a truth, even a practical truth, into its reasons and principles. The question is to prepare for action and to assign its proximate rules. And, since action is a concrete thing which must be thought in its concretion before being posited in being, knowledge here, instead of analyzing, composes; I refer to the fashion in which the relation of truth is established between this knowledge and its object.<sup>2</sup>

The problem with the characterization of the practically practical knowledge of ethical matters is that it is not completely clear at this point what Maritain is talking about. It is necessary to examine what clues Maritain gives us as to the nature of this knowledge and to speculate, on that basis, as to what practically practical knowledge might be.

This kind of science is described as not being concerned with resolving a practical truth into its reasons and principles, as moral philosophy is. Rather, it prepares a practical truth for action and assigns its proximate rules. This sort of knowledge is said to presuppose a right disposition. Even though this is true, it is not the same as prudence, although prudence is said by Maritain to be practically practical in the strictest sense. To assist us, Maritain gives examples of the sorts of writers who have produced this kind of moral science, listing: Montaigne,

pascal, Nietzsche, Shakespeare, Racine, Baudelaire, Swift, Meredith, Balzac, Dostoievsky and St. Alphonsus Ligouri. The problem with this list of names is that the examples from philosophy, theology, and literature do not suggest any one univocally identifiable activity.

I think some resolution of this difficulty can be found in the language of Maritain. He uses the plural "sciences" rather than the singular "science" when referring to this sort of activity:

We are inclined to believe that philosophers, especially in modern times, have often seriously neglected the importance of these sciences which belong to a wholly different order than their own.

I think Maritain's use of the plural in respect to these sciences is perhaps a key to his thought. He holds that there are a number of things human beings do that are somewhat distant from action itself, but which are in themselves oriented to action rather than to knowing, even though they are based on knowing. The sense of plurality of practically practical sciences found in Maritain's language parallels the sense of plurality of these sciences found in the list of authors we reviewed earlier. We can conclude, then, that there is a group of similar human activities that can be called generally practically practical sciences.

I think Professor McInerney's analysis helps us clarify some important issues concerning the nature of this kind of knowledge. It seems that the differences between thinkers in this area are very much influenced by their acquired

dispositions. It is not a matter of being able to come more or less close to specific actions that differentiates these thinkers from each other; it is the matter of how they are disposed to action. Any attempt to create a parallel with the degrees of speculative science within this area is inaccurate. As Maritain explains:

The accuracy and depth of their views do not depend only upon their keenness of sight, but also upon their idea of good and evil and the dispositions of their heart toward a sovereign good.<sup>4</sup>

In this area of thought, then, more than intellectual virtuosity is needed if one is to reach truth since the end governs even more than in the speculatively practical area of moral philosophy. So our scoundrel may do moral philosophy well insofar as he is good at knowing and explaining things, but may produce very questionable practically practical science, as well as displaying morally questionable or even morally unacceptable action in concrete circumstances. The reason for his failure in the second two cases is that orientation, or disposition, is critical at these levels.

The level of practically practical knowledge is different from moral philosophy and prudence, according to Maritain. It seems to me that greater work at clarifying just what this level is and what takes place in it would help distinguish the different sorts of moral thought and action more fully, in turn enabling them to be united more effectively.



NOTES

1. Jacques Maritain, The Degrees of Knowledge, trans. Gerald B. Phelan, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p. 458. The following notes refer to this work.
2. pp. 314-15.
3. p. 315. (Emphasis added.)
4. p. 316.