

## MARITAIN AND THE METAPHYSICS OF COMMUNITY

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Maritain describes his social and political philosophy as "Thomistic personalism", a doctrine which he says is metaphysical in its foundations and which derives above all from an understanding of the "distinction between individuality and personality"<sup>(1)</sup> An individual is, for Maritain, a biological organism with a precise location in space and time while a person is being capable of knowledge and of containing, as knowledge, the characteristics of all that can be known. The union of them and the tension between them is the essence of the human condition.

In this paper, I want, first, to pose the basic question: Should social and political philosophy rest on a metaphysical foundation? Maritain realizes that this is a serious question, but he tends to tackle it obliquely. The central distinction between individual and person arises within the body of Thomistic metaphysics and that metaphysics has its own

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(1) Jacques Maritain, La Personne et le bien commun, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1946, tr. John J. Fitzgerald as The Person and the Common Good, New York: Scribner, 1947. In the introduction, Maritain says "Thomistic personalism stresses the metaphysical distinction between individuality and personality". This theme dominates the book, a collection of essays, the earliest of which originated as a lecture at Oxford in 1939. See especially pp. 1-4 of the English edition.

justification. But I want to suggest a somewhat more general foundation which also leads directly to a position like Maritain's.

I then want to pose questions about the foundations which Maritain adopts and to explore in particular what, after reviewing the many difficulties in the idea of individuality, he calls "the still deeper mystery of personality"<sup>(2)</sup> Basically, I shall argue that Maritain makes a good case, and that the person-individual distinction is a useful one. But I shall also urge that Maritain's system is incomplete or, more exactly perhaps, that it underemphasises certain crucial issues. Maritain's work in the 1940's, influenced by the sobering events of its time, tends to underplay man's relation to the larger universe and his role in it, and it does not give enough weight to certain difficulties about the idea of person, which need to be attended to if we are to avoid the contemporary "cults of personality" as well as to avoid the wanton destruction of our environment.

But that comes later. To begin with, it seems to come as a surprise to some people, these days, that "the metaphysics of community" should be a serious subject of discussion. It is not fashionable now, nor was it, as Maritain notes, fashionable when he wrote The Person and

the Common Good, to seek a metaphysical justification for our views about community. And yet the classical and continuing problem of the conflict between individual and community is necessarily a metaphysical one. If communities, as many people think, have no footing in reality, if they are simply invented by, us, then the situation is surely quite different from one which must obtain if communities exist as -- in some sense -- a natural kind. One who decides that the community is of no value, is, in the latter case, like the man who decides to tear down a house whereas, in the former case, he is in the much simpler situation of the man who decides not to build one. No permit is needed for not building a house and a much different argument is needed if one is to show that someone ought to build a house whether he wants one or not.

The example is mine and not Maritain's, but it has a point even though the situation is, of course, much more difficult than such a simple example suggests. Maritain, for instance, thinks that there is a natural community composed of us, of God, and whatever beings are to be found between us and God, and that one who ignores or disrupts (if that is possible) the relation between himself and God or the natural created relation in which he stands to his neighbour is in mortal danger. For there is a moral basis to these relations -- indeed these relations are themselves the basis of morality.

But he does not think, of course, that all the communities around us -- the nations, the states, the international communities or those made up of friends and neighbours, or lodge brothers, or gatherings of scholars -- are ordained or have some foundation in

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(2) Op. cit., p. 28. Maritain also uses the phrase "the ontological mystery of personality" in an essay entitled "Who is my Neighbour?" in Ransoming the Time, New York: Scribner, 1941, pp. 17-32; and similar expressions occur frequently in his writings.

nature. He does, however, think that the foundation for these various communities and the rules by which they are to be guided and guarded do stem from some basic community to which we all belong. The problem, in part, is to show just how it is that we belong and to show just what kinds of rules natural reason might suggest to us as binding if we knew the nature of our metaphysical situation. To know this we must know just what sorts of creatures we are, just what we are capable of, and just how we may fit into the universal plan.

While one set of Maritain's opponents thinks that the evidence that communities are simply created by us is overwhelming and that, therefore, no attention need be paid to such questions, one may imagine another set of critics for whom the problem is primarily a religious one to be settled perhaps by theology or by consulting the scripture. For these critics (less often heard in philosophical circles but perhaps growing in power in the daily practice of religion), natural reason in such matters is a snare and a delusion. For if it is a matter which stands between us and God, then why should we not simply expect that God will make his wishes known, and that probably he has done so already? How could our unaided reason add to the picture?

The answer to these critics must, in part, be an old one. Those who must get along in the world belong to no one religion, have heard no single message, and cannot be brought to acknowledge any single ecclesiastical authority. But the issue for Maritain and for those in his philosophical tradition goes deeper than that. Man

has natural reason and, as Aristotle noticed<sup>(3)</sup>, man's natural end is not simply given. Bees always build hives, Aristotle remarked, but men innovate. Bees do not go to school, but men have need to have an education. It is because reason in the sense of intelligent reflection on ends is a characteristic of human beings that this situation arises. Reason thus is central to man and to his natural ends and we have no choice but to reason about the conduct of our lives. One might think that for traditional tribal societies which seem to undergo little change over the centuries this is not so, but even a casual attention to the myths and stories of such peoples reveals constant conflicts over what to do -- collisions with the gods, with earth-bound spirits and with other humans.

This real sense of options makes it clear, I think, that even in religion it takes an act of reason to decide which revelation is worthy of attention. Faith may come to a man unbidden, but it is the nature of a rational being to put it to the question. Many beliefs come unbidden but those which are worthy objects of faith must surely be those to which reason offers some inclination and with which faith does not conflict. Faith may then go beyond it, but reason must light the way if we are to guard our basic humanity and our basic nature as rational animals.

This in itself suggests the reasons which make the application of metaphysics to social and political

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(3) Aristotle, Politics, I, 2, 1253a; VII, 14, 1332b.

theory a necessity and not simply an option. Yet one must ask: In what is reason itself grounded? Could not the universe be so ordered that reason was always or usually misleading?

Is there not a metaphysics of skepticism? Let us return for a moment to the first group of critics, those who say that no metaphysics is necessary or even relevant to our problem, that all communities are simply constructed to taste or as truces in the Hobbesian war of all against all. Their view must stem either from (i) the proposition that reality is so organized that every application of natural reason is fundamentally misleading, or (ii) the proposition that those applications of it, in particular, which stem from the direction of natural reason to the task of creating a theory of community are especially misleading.

Those who hold the first position hold, after all, that it is more reasonable to be skeptical of reason itself than not to be. This may seem to be an overt contradiction except, of course, that it might be the case that every application of reason to the world leads to logical disaster. Those who hold the second position hold that moral skepticism in particular is justified.

Let us begin, then, by exploring the worst case for the practical moralist. The worst case would be one in which no moral proposition about the social order was known to be true or false and in which the very idea of such a proposition was known to be self-contradictory. Curiously, however, this last seems never to be argued. Propositions such as "any world order which permits the human race to be utterly destroyed is unacceptable" and "any civic order which condemns human beings to freeze to

death in the streets is wrong" are rarely attacked as self-contradictory, though it is frequently said or implied<sup>(4)</sup> that we do not know whether or not they are true or false. It is sometimes argued, too, that something like this is the case: When we say "x is wrong" or "x is true" and also say that these propositions are true, we are adding something illicit to the idea of a true proposition. True propositions assert what is the case. Both "wrong" and "true" are "evaluative" expressions and thus do not simply state what is the case. It seems redundant to say "the proposition 'x is true' is true". But if we say "the proposition 'boiling cats alive is wrong' is true" it would be argued that what we are saying is misleading because "boiling cats alive is wrong" does not describe a state of affairs in the world but rather evaluates some other proposition such as "boiling cats alive is both good and fun". When we say that "boiling cats alive is wrong" we are merely adding another evaluation and making it seem that we are saying something about the world.

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(4) Bernard Williams, Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985, urges that since moral philosophy is not like science it cannot provide knowledge, though it can provide intelligent and useful reflections on life. The product of such reflections, however, could not be even a distant analogy to the knowledge that something is right or wrong.

But this analysis cannot be so easily sustained<sup>(5)</sup>. For two worlds, one in which humanity lives happily and one in which it has been obliterated, differ in obvious ways which, factually, include their openness to value. No great music or poetry can exist in the latter world. The pursuit of the best, as Matthew Arnold argued, is the pursuit of a world of which a great deal, factually, can be said. It is not, for instance, the pursuit of a world in which one first kills all the poets.

So it would seem then, that it is logically possible that some moral propositions should be true or false. But if that is so then it is one's duty to seek true moral propositions, whether one finds any or not. For if there are any and one could have found them but doesn't, then one is remiss. But this means 'that some moral propositions are true -- among them the proposition questions.

If reason bears on these questions, then the question of the status in the world of moral agents and of their relations to one another is an important one. Indeed, this is so in a way *which* leads quite directly to

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(5) I have pursued these questions at length in The Concept of Truth Assen: Royal Vangorcum; and New York: Humanities Press, 1969.

(6) For a different form of this argument see Leslie Armour, The Rational and the Real, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962, pp 70-87.

Maritain's distinction between individuals and persons. To act in the world one must have some footing in it -- one must be a creature capable of influencing other creatures and objects; one must be related to them and yet distinct from them. This is the basic sense of Maritain's "individual". But one must also be a moral agent, one's actions must count in a certain way and one must be aware not only of what the situation is at any given moment, but also, to some degree, of what it might become. For this one must transcend the immediate natural order. This is one of the roots of Maritain's basic sense of person.

2.

Maritain concedes that the notion of individual is not without difficulty. The notion of individual, things. It is often suggested that individuation is possible, therefore, first because entities in our universe, including ourselves, possess certain characteristics -- universals if you like -- which are shared with others and also because these characteristics are impressed upon or manifested through an element, matter, which renders them distinct. Smith belongs to the genus man because he is a rational animal. But he is distinct from other men because he occupies a unique region of space and time, an arrangement which is possible because matter is capable both of occupying space and time and of bearing the particular characteristics which are required. Maritain calls this

in a version of usual Thomistic language, "matter with its quantity designated".

But Maritain asserts that matter<sup>(7)</sup> is a "kind of non-being, a mere potency or ability to receive forms". Furthermore, he is an Aristotelean so that, while he accepts the reality of universals, he expects to find them in things. To say that creatures are individuated, therefore, by a combination of form and matter might seem to suggest that they are composed of two kinds of nothing which, miraculously, comes together to make something positive. Perhaps for this reason, Maritain adds that matter has "an avidity for being"; indeed, he says, it is an "avidity for being"<sup>(8)</sup>.

Alternatively, Maritain may mention the principle of "avidity" in order to lay the foundations of the multiplicity of things in the world. The result is rather like that of what might be called the negative form of the principle of sufficient reason. (Maritain speaks well of the positive form of the principle of sufficient reason elsewhere<sup>(9)</sup> so this is not so surprising.) According to the negative principle, things tend to exist unless something gets in their way; matter will exhibit as much richness of form as possible. What

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(7) The Person and the Common Good, (see footnote 1), p. 25.

(8) Ibid.

(9) For instance, A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being, London: Sheed and Ward, 1945, in the section headed "The Principle of Sufficient Reason", pp. 97-109.

prevents my typewriter from turning into a toad is that that the matter involved already has a form, and some transformation, therefore, is necessary if we are to make toads from typewriters. Matter always has some positive designation; but it gets this from its "avidity" -- its need for form if it is truly to be, a need sometimes called its "appetite" in Thomistic manuals<sup>(10)</sup>. It is this avidity which is, in Maritain's terms, its own positive nature.

It is normal, of course, to talk about the "privation" of matter in the Thomistic languages and privation may have a kind of dialectical relation to avidity. It may well be, however, that St. Thomas would have preferred the simple formulation which he offers in Summa Theologica I, Question 47, Article 1: Matter belongs to form and not form to matter" -- "...materia est propter formam et non e converso." Maritain may be extending his Thomistic metaphysics in a way which seems to make St. Thomas's matter join forces with Bergson's élan vital.

This is an important question for the metaphysics of community. For it gives an explanation without reference to values. It was certainly St. Thomas's view that the universe contains, distributively, the values which, taken as a whole, can only exist in God -- that God distributed the possibilities for goodness in the

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(10) Henri Grenier in Cours de philosophie, Quebec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1965, Vol. I., p. 140 speaks of "l'appétit de la matière première". though he refers to it as a "capacité passive".

universe so that it had no more evil in it than he intended, and that, since He was good, there is a strong tendency for the universe to exhibit the divine richness. This distribution of divine values is, I think, in the Thomistic scheme the primary explanation for the multiplicity of the universe and it may be that individuality is ultimately, therefore a matter of values. Each thing is distinct precisely because it has a distinct value in the whole. To ask what it is in these terms is to ask for its place in the divine or providential scheme of things.

It will turn out a little further on that this notion is very important for our understanding of the ways in which the human community is to be related to the larger community which embraces the universe as a whole. But, of course, the "avidity" principle and/or the negative form of the principle of sufficient reason can be defended. The signs of this avidity, of course, are that, whenever something is possible and does not exist, it turns out that this is so because matter has taken some other form which precluded it.

The difficulty is that, though such a principle helps to explain the multiplicity of things, it permits the possibility that many different things and creatures should be identical apart from the fact that they occupy different facets of space and time. The uniqueness of things, whatever it is that gives to each thing a value, must, surely, stem itself from a different principle, a principle of values and if one has such a principle, it is not clear that the "avidity" principle is, in any case, required.

Still, with or without the notion of avidity, it is clear that human beings, as individuals, occupy a special position in the universe. Either way, we are animals who think and reason and so we mix the virtues of the intellect with those of emotion and sensation. A whole array of values opens from this point. But it is clearly a set of values which must be co-operative. Human beings can frustrate one another's possibilities in ways which it is difficult for any other creature to match. They can only achieve their own humanity, as Kant insisted, by working together and dividing up the possibilities amongst them.

We have our roots in nature and owe to nature our possibilities, but we move beyond it just by the very way in which we are individuated. You and I are the persons we are because of the positions which we occupy in the present social order, in the unfolding of history, and, of course, in the relation which people have to whatever future is opened up for them. We are part of a process; our individuation is of such a kind that we are not mere individuals.

It is here that the difficulties begin. This transcendence of the mere individuation of matter is what gives to the problem of persons both its importance and its element of mystery. The most central source of Maritain's doctrine is probably St. Thomas's remark in *Summa Theologica*, (Part I, Q. 80. Art. 1) to the effect that the human soul, since it is capable of knowing either by sense or by intellect all that there is to know, is capable, thereby, of becoming in a sense everything. Of course the mode in which things are known is, for St. Thomas, a distinct mode of being; but it is

not an inferior one. Indeed, in the same article St. Thomas speaks of man's likeness to God in these terms.

The situation, then, is this: If man can replicate the universe in knowledge he is, at once, anchored in the universe at a place and a time, even if he is only the product of the "avidity" of being, and a creature within whom a whole universe may be contained. The perfection of man and the perfection of the universe become, in one sense, the same thing, and yet, in another sense, man has a role to play in the development of the universe as such. He is potentially both part and whole.

There is a kind of collision created by this situation and one must expect, therefore, a constant tension within human experience. Man as animal, as individuated matter, is tied not only to other men but to the whole universe and must co-operate with others and with nature to achieve his ends. Man, as what Maritain at this level calls person (though expressions like "the ontological mystery of personhood" recur frequently<sup>(11)</sup>), is so situated that each person has an absolute value which is scarcely less than the whole. From one perspective, one side of this nature demands co-operation and the other sees the perfection of the universe mirrored in its own being.

Equally, however, the situation can be looked at from a different perspective in which the roles are reversed. We are tied together by the fact that, if each of us did mirror the whole universe in knowledge, we

would be identical except for the particular perspective from which the knowledge was obtained. In theological terms, the beatific vision is, presumably, the same for all those who will enjoy it. Short of that, an evil done to one man must appear in the experience of every other man if each realizes anything like his potential. If it is real knowledge, the knowledge of evil done to others is as painful as evil done to oneself. Thus, really, in the end, no man can profit at the expense of another and we are tied together as persons even more strongly than we are tied together as individuals. Indeed, from the obverse perspective, we are radically distinct from one another-as individuals in a way that we never can be as persons. The community of individuals is never a perfect community: we are separated from each other in physical space and biological time. As persons we may genuinely overlap and form a real community.

But this helps us to understand the situation of the moral argument which I originally introduced. To be moral agents with real choices, we must have a footing in the world and so risk the perils of individuation as beings in space and time. If there are angels and they act in the world, they must act through our inner lives and so share our footing in the world. But to be moral at all we must transcend this individuation in the world and be able to grasp universal truths.

Even without the special concerns of Maritain's Thomistic metaphysic the problem would arise and in the same way. It is the condition of morality. A pressing question is about which perspective is to be dominant. Is it the one from which personhood is seen as inculcating the selfishness of one in whom the whole

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(11) See note 2 above.

universe can be replicated, or is it the perspective from which personhood is seen to draw us all together?

Maritain seems unworried by this question, chiefly, I am sure, because the first perspective is limited or mitigated by the fact of the existence of God. We cannot really replicate the whole universe within us, for God is beyond us and, therefore, the selfish potential of the existence of personhood is negated. Otherwise his public ethic might be defeated by a metaphysical call to selfishness. It is, indeed, for this reason that -- contrary to prevailing opinion in our day and Maritain's -- one must suppose the existence of God in order to substantiate the basic claims of morality.

For Maritain, of course, the existence of God is given by reason and faith alike and does not arise as a special problem for his social and political philosophy or for what I am calling here his metaphysics of community. He did, certainly, produce a "sixth way", a demonstration of his own for the existence of God<sup>(12)</sup> but he does not refer to it specifically in his writings on social and political philosophy.

All the same, it may be as well to notice here that we can exhibit this necessary condition for morality, if I am right, as a kind of Kantian postulate

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(12) Jacques Maritain, Approches to God, New York: Harper, 1954. The "sixth way" is an argument which proceeds from the nature of the human intellect to the existence of the divine intellect. It is, in fact, not unrelated to the main arguments here.

of pure practical reason. For I argued earlier that we do know the truth of certain moral propositions such as that it is my duty to make or to try to make correct moral judgements. But this duty would be lifted from us if we also knew that true moral propositions would be impossible without the existence of God and that God did not exist. At this point in the argument we know, apparently, that either God exists or morality breaks down in a logical difficulty. For if God does not exist there is no reason as to why the person should not pursue his own development until, in the inner world of knowledge within him, he becomes identical with the universe -- becomes himself, indeed, a curious kind of substitute for God. There seems on this view no loss of value whatever he does to others, for everything is replicated within him. But morality consists precisely in the transcendence of self-interest. This dilemma is not imaginary. It is the central dilemma of technological man who has discovered that he can do almost anything at all and who frequently sees no reason why he should not do what he wants.

By the previous argument, we know that true moral propositions exist. It is true that these propositions are, in their turn, about other possible moral propositions. For they assert the truth that it is one's duty to try to find true moral propositions. And they depend on the possibility of morality alone. Therefore one might think that the argument at best shows the possible existence of God. But the modal operators do not shift that way. The possibility of morality is based, in this view, on the actual existence of God, fo

if God does not exist there is no apparent disvalue in gross acts of selfishness.

This seems to me a more persuasive form of the claim about the postulates of pure practical reason than the ones put forward by Kant himself. The possibility, at any rate, exists that Maritain does not need to draw upon the particular combination of faith and reason which persuades him of the existence of God; and this is of importance for his metaphysics of community just because, as he constantly repeats, any political theory in which we can put our trust must be a theory for all men and not, for instance, merely a theory for believing Christians.

3.

We face, however, still another difficulty. Though in his various earlier writings, Maritain has warned about the dangers of "angelism"<sup>(13)</sup> and so forth, the essays in The Person and the Common Good, written in the years around the second world war -- before, during, and after -- tend to emphasize the uniqueness and

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(13) There is a specific warning about "angelism" in his commentary on Descartes in Trois réformateurs, 1932, translated as Three Reformers, New York: Scribner, 1940. See also the cautions against certain kinds of idealism in Réflexions sur l'intelligence, Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1924. His Aquinas Lecture at Marquette. St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942 also calls attention to the Thomistic account of the value of the whole universe although it does not emphasize it.

importance of the human person (as opposed even to the human individual) in a way which seems rather incautious to a contemporary eye accustomed to the problems of the environment and to the risk that man may render his planet -- perhaps even the whole visible universe -- a smouldering ruin.

Maritain represents Aquinas as saying that "(persons) alone are willed for their own sake"<sup>(14)</sup>. The passage is from Summa Contra Gentiles Book III, Section 112. In his footnote, however, Maritain cites another sentence: God "rules intellectual creatures as though he cared for them for their own sake". This suggests that something else is involved. And St. Thomas goes on to say "we do not understand this statement, that intellectual substances are ordered for their own sake, to mean that they are not more ultimately referred to God and to the perfection of the universe." So persons are created, after all, for the perfection of the universe as well as for their special relation to God. Certainly, apart from their duty to God which includes their duty to bring about the perfection of the universe they are to be regarded as ends in themselves.

St. Thomas certainly did say that "the person is the most noble being in all of nature" (Summa Theologica I, XXIX, 3). But perhaps one should recall that the passage is one in which he is talking about the trinity and the discussion is about divine persons. The statement is an analogy which draws upon persons as we

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(14) The Person and the Common Good, (see footnote 1), p. 7.

know them, but it properly signifies, says St. Thomas, a "subsistent individual of a rational nature in a sense we are such individuals, yet our rationality is imperfect and we are not perfectly so. The angels are closer and God is a perfectly rational individual.

There are, to be sure, other passages which might make one think that St. Thomas authorized precisely the position which Maritain has often been thought to adopt, the position that man is, without question, the master of all else in the universe. For instance in Summa Theologica, Part I, Question XCVI, Article 1, he sets out to show that all animals are naturally "subject to man". His chief argument is that man possesses "universal prudence", i.e., a general power of practical judgement which can be applied to any subject matter; whereas animals possess only limited capacities for specific occasions. This "natural domination" is extended in Article 2 to cover "all things" because "man contains all things within him"; i.e., man can in knowledge reproduce the universe within him. He has reason "which makes him like the angels"; powers of sensation "whereby he is like the animals"; "natural forces which liken him to plants"; and the "body itself wherein he is like to inanimate things". Man does not have dominion over the angels, because angels are rational beings and nothing can legitimately have dominion over reason, but he has legitimate dominion over everything else. One might, certainly, infer from this that man can dispose of the rest of creation according to his will just as God can dispose of man according to his will.

But there is still another line of thought in St. Thomas. Throughout Part I Questions XLVII, XLVIII,

and XLIX of the Summa Theologica St. Thomas argues -- against those who thought that God only made some things and that the rest of the world proceeded from secondary causes -- that God is responsible for the whole of creation, that all of it is good, and that all of it is intended to work together. In that case, each thing must have a value of its own. Aquinas argues that of course everything does have a value of its own. Satan, since he has being, has some good in him.

The obvious reconciliation of these propositions must come from the fact that man is limited by his relation to God. He is master only within the world, that is within the plan of God. And that is in fact what St. Thomas says in Contra Gentiles Book III, Chapter 150 in which he says "the end to which man is directed by the help of grace is above human nature." The issue is admittedly balanced on a razor's edge. In the same section St. Thomas says that, if we are enjoined (as he says we are in Scripture) against cruelty to animals, this rule must be because some good for man demands it. But if man expands his person because he is a knowing being then, of course, it follows that the valuable objects which are to be known must be protected. The picture ties together.

This was the most interesting question in the dispute between Charles De Koninck and his supporters with some of Maritain's friends, and, to a degree, with Maritain himself<sup>(15)</sup>

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(15) Charles De Koninck's position was originally  
Renvoi (suite)

preoccupied with the condition of the human person -- faced with the threats of assorted dictatorships and threatened with the very real possibility that the human rights which had begun to become realities in the long battle since the Renaissance might well be extinguished. De Koninck had spent his life in the study of science and was preoccupied with the development of what he was later to call "the hollow universe"<sup>(16)</sup>. We now face a situation, obviously, in which man's obligations to the universe are seriously in question.

If there is a principle regarding that relation in the metaphysics of community which Maritain and De Koninck largely shared, it is, surely, a principle of maximum variety. If God distributed the possibilities for goodness throughout the universe, then the maximum goodness can only be instantiated, on the one side, in God himself and, on the other, in a universe which preserves that maximum variety. Man, to be sure, has options in such a universe. No doubt every form of life exhibits values of its own which would be absent if it

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Renvoi (suite)

elaborated in De la primauté du bien commun contre les personnalistes, Québec: Editions de L'Université Laval, and Montréal, Fides, 1943. See also the critique by I. Th. Esctmann, "In Defence of Jacques Maritain", The Modern Schoolman, Vol. XXII, # 4, May 1945, pp. 183-208 and De Koninck's reply "In Defence of St. Thomas", Laval Theologique et Philosophique. Vol. 1, # 2, 1945, pp. 9-109.

(16) Charles de Koninck, The Hollow Universe, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1960; and Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1964.

were destroyed, but it may be that the values in the mosquito's way of life can be preserved without the anopheles mosquito, and it may that some accommodation between man and rat and man and cockroach is possible without encouraging the maximum distribution of instances of these creatures. But the universe, nevertheless, is not ours to do with as we please, and even if, (as Maritain says) St. Thomas thought<sup>(17)</sup> that God holds that the grace of one person is worth more than the whole of nature, that does not mean that either St. Thomas or God thinks that the value of nature is nothing at all.

I doubt that Maritain intended to deny any of this, but the principle stands in need of explicit statement. Such a philosophy can give the principle of variety some body and may perhaps extract us from the dilemma of having to choose between not caring about nature or deciding to accept nature as somehow immutable. The place of man requires that man discover the principle of variety and apply it intelligently.

4.

There is another problem which troubled De Koninck and others: Suppose we take the view that the development of "the person" or (as Maritain sometimes has it) of "personality" is the natural end of human beings.

Are we not, then, in danger of what has been called "the cult of personality"? Suppose that we argue in the following way: This development of persons to the

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(16) The Person and the Common Good, (see footnote 1), p. 10.

ultimate capacity of human beings through the kind of knowledge which reproduces the whole universe within us is not possible for all human beings. This is so partly because we lack the resources and partly because not everyone is capable of this development given the pedagogical and psychological techniques open to us at present.

What we can do, however, is to develop an elite or even a single individual. Since the development of everyone would, in any case, result in a lot of overlap or repetition, we can argue that developing this elite or even this single person is our best chance of bringing progress to the human race and the best use of existing resources.

We should not laugh at this argument. Though rarely stated so hardly, it is much accepted in practice. Is this not how one gets a Stalin or the kinds of elites which prosper in what are charmingly called the "people's democracies"? But is this not also how Americans justify having a Harvard and a Yale for a few while the many must make do, at best, with a host of misleadingly named community colleges" and underfunded branches of state universities? And, while we in Canada have neither Stalins nor Harvards, we do surely have elites and a system to produce them.

And then is there not something curious about promoting personalities? Maritain himself speaks of the "magnificent personality"<sup>(18)</sup> of Jesus, but it is not

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(18) Op. cit. p. 22.

clear what this means. Maritain certainly did not think that Jesus had the personality of the successful television evangelist. And in fact Jesus does not seem to have exercised much "force of personality" as we understand that phrase today. He was often abrasive. Only a few followed him and the sway of his personality did not, for the most part, prevent even them from denying him. The authorities seem to have feared something else -- that he might be the possessor of the truth. Pontius Pilate did not ask about his personality. He asked about truth, and the scripture suggests that he did not much want to hear the answer.

It is only, I think, if the role of the person is seen in the context of the universe at large that much progress can be expected in these matters. But I rather think that, if one takes seriously Maritain's position, one will come back to the position of the Italian philosopher Marsilio Ficino and the answer to these difficulties can perhaps be seen<sup>(19)</sup>.

The kind of view adopted by Maritain -- with its emphasis on the centrality of the person is, after all, even if latent in St. Thomas himself, a Renaissance doctrine which flourished most strongly in the modified neo-Platonism of the fifteenth century. It may first have been fully developed in the writings of Ficino, the

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(19) Marsilio Ficino, (Marsilio Ficino) Theologie platonicienne de l'immortalité des âmes, 3 vols., ed. and trans. Raymond Marcel, Paris: Belles Lettres, 1964-1970. (This edition contains the Latin text of the Platonica Theologica, c. 1475, together with a French translation.)

founder of the Florentine Academy. In the last half of the fourteenth century, Ficino made many adjustments to the philosophy of Plotinus, the chief of which was to locate the human soul at a central place in the universal order of things. According to him, the universe is bound together by love, a rather Augustinian notion (though there are many remarks of Maritain's which echo something of this idea<sup>(20)</sup>).

Since the human being extends in thought to the whole of the universe, his experience may be seen as embracing (ideally at least) all reality. When, as it were, nature has been turned into knowledge and knowledge into art through the application of love, and when all human beings participate in this ultimate love, the universe will have achieved its end, or as we might say in this discussion, its common good. Though I think Ficino is rightly called a neo-Platonist, he himself made something of being a Thomist and I have counted seventy-five references to St. Thomas in the text of his principal work on the soul.

Ficino at any rate was rightly called a "humanist", and the humanism of the Florentine Renaissance is one of the great streams of thought on which all sane men feed. But the question is whether or not this doctrine is enough. Ficino did not think that this doctrine turned the universe into a plaything for

human beings or deny value to its other components; for he imagined that human beings must learn to love all the things and creatures in it. It is rather that, in knowledge and in love, the human being is drawn out of himself and into the universe. Though the content is also transformed, these transformations are meant to include nature as knowledge and to add to it as art.

Maritain was quite deliberately, I am sure, trying to blend the Thomism of tradition with the liberalism of modern Europe -- to make the former relevant to the latter and to show that modern values could be saved only if they were put in a more traditional context. Both he and Ficino would claim that they were faithful to St. Thomas.

5.

This leaves us with a final difficulty: the problem of pluralism. I started by noticing that, even if one can hold that certain communities are natural, the communities which are natural and are thus justified by reference to metaphysics are not necessarily the communities in which we live or seem to live.

Canada, the Orange Lodge, the United Auto Workers Union and the University of Ottawa are not -- directly at least -- divine creations. What, therefore, is the relation between the communities of God and nature about which I have been talking and the actual communities in which we live our lives?

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(20) The expressions in The Person and the Common Good, (see footnote 1), pp. 28 and 29, for instance, might have come straight from Ficino on love and the universe.

In The rights of Man<sup>(21)</sup> Maritain says his conception of a society of free men is

"pluralist because it assumes that the development of the human person normally requires a plurality of autonomous communities which have their own rights, liberties and authority..."

On what does this plurality depend and what limits the rights, liberties and authority of its component institutions? Maritain speaks of the wills of persons freely coming together, and one answer is just that we choose those communities and are entitled to do so so long as we do no violence to the larger and higher communities to which we belong.

I think the idea of freedom does tie to the metaphysical justification of this plurality and that, metaphysically, it is needed to bring together the person and the individual.

The person is entitled to a deliberate decision. Communities are therefore not automatically created. In reality, the person will form alliances which seem comfortable. Culture will influence his choice of societies to which he wants to belong. Language will facilitate some alliances and hinder others. Collective institutions whose workings one understands will play an obviously important part.

Pluralism will, therefore, be the norm -- and justifiably so, for one cannot decide freely about things one does not understand. The limits, however will be

those which are given by the larger metaphysical community.

The implication is that there must be a global order, and international law, and a common forum where all men meet. And beyond this again there must be a common concern for the human function in the universe at large.

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(21) The Rights of Man, London: Geoffrey Blés, 1944, p. 15.