

## ***BOOK REVIEWS***

*Out of a Kantian Chrysalis? A Maritainian Critique of Fr. Maréchal.* By Ronald McCamy. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1998. Paperback (ISBN 0-8204-3722-0) \$24.95, 200pp.

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This is a difficult book, although it is useful in its exposition of Maritain's critical response to Fr. Joseph Maréchal's efforts to reinterpret St. Thomas using the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. It reviews their debate, which appeared in issues of the *Revue thomiste* in 1924, background to this topic in earlier commentators on the relation of Maréchal to Maritain, suggesting that this debate is a cornerstone on the road to contemporary Catholic pluralism in religion and philosophy, and the possible development of the debate, comparing the response of Maréchal to other critics and the ways their criticisms are suggested in Maritain's other works. The value of McCamy's endeavour is also found in its sustained treatment of the debate as one regarding the epistemological issue of the realism of Maritain versus the modern and indeed the post-modern critique of the mind's access to external reality.

The title of McCamy's book derives from one of Maritain's remarks, during the debate, expressing incredulity about the possible success of Maréchal's attempt to make a scholastic butterfly emerge from a Kantian chrysalis. Without the intuition of the concept, in the case of the structures unique to the reasoning mind in the ideas of God, immortality and freedom, it is impossible to accord these the same reality as the understanding of objects in space and time, and they are merely subjective, regulative concepts in the critical philosophy of Kant. But in the work of St. Thomas, such concepts have a superior reality accessible to human minds. Maréchal's intention was to develop the philosophy of Kant in the direction of the doctrine on which these regulative concepts are grounded in finite intellects' approach to the objective of their striving in the absolute identity of the idea and its object that occurs in the infinite intellect. The idea of this point of reference enables one to grasp a relativism in which the approach to understanding this absolute is conditioned historically, such that there necessarily

occurs a plurality of differing approaches to the absolute among religious and philosophical ideas.

Their debate was initiated in a footnote to an article of Maritain, in the *Revue thomiste*, on the first three volumes (alone available at the time) of Maréchal's *Le point de départ de la métaphysique*, in which he approached Maréchal's synthesis as a form of modern philosophical idealism, as developed in Descartes and further developed in Kant. The error was the same. According to St. Thomas, a knowledge of the singular derives from a recognition of the identity in difference of individuals, as revealed through the senses, and the universal in the mind. The immediate knowledge of the universal is the basis of the understanding of the reality of being and the principle of identity on which knowledge of the real throughout being is based. But Descartes, while recognizing the latter point, failed to recognize the need to maintain the recognition of the *other as other* in the process of knowing a singular object. Epistemology starts to resemble psychology, as in Kant, if the mind is unable to move outside of itself. Because the mind's perception is then contingent in every respect, the principles of identity, excluded middle and noncontradiction are undermined. Maritain therefore objected that Maréchal's taking the "phenomenal object" as a starting point in knowledge would be self-defeating. Our knowledge would be an interpretation of the data of the senses in terms of human *a priori*. A conception of knowledge like this would make the object of knowledge a third reality constructed through this process, whereas St. Thomas insisted that knower and known do not form a third reality, and this would be to misrepresent the nature of *a prioricity* according to St. Thomas, which stems from an objective reality, which is like a form through which the potentiality of the mind is realized in act. Moreover, it is wrong to suggest that the active intellect brings out the intelligible aspect of the object through a synthesis in which the mind imposes its own "inquantitative unity" (p. 60).

To respond, Maréchal insisted that Maritain and he agreed that the phenomenal object is an impossible ground for metaphysics. As such, it is absurd, but historical factors, such as Kant's critique, compel the contemporary metaphysician to take this as a starting point in understanding the need for an alternative ground. Maréchal held that Maritain failed to understand the prospects for a modern solution to the epistemological issue, as a result of his failure to distinguish the *a priori* synthesis as "statically formal" and as "dynamically finalistic" (p. 73)—ideas developed in the latter way signify, rather than representing, their objects, and the process of the critique of the phenomenological object in Maréchal's revision of Kant is metaphysical, rather than transcendental. The critique thus issues in a series of "objectivating" reflections on the object of knowledge, comparable to the series of the grades of causation in St. Thomas. Maritain found the situation in which knowledge depends on this objectification of the object to contradict St. Thomas, who

insisted that knowledge derives from the experience of the reality of the object. In 1924, Maréchal promised to resolve the difficulties with the publication of the fifth volume, which would be the one in which he moved from exegesis to setting out his own position.

The fifth volume appeared in 1926, and this shifted the debate to consideration of the identity of knower and known, St. Thomas's doctrine of the object having to share a nature with the subject of knowledge, and his doctrine of the mind's resemblance to matter in its reception of form in the act by which it knows its object. These are grounds for the identification of the series of objectifications and the series of causes in St. Thomas. Although Maréchal recognized that the intelligible aspect of the object of knowledge is not its reality, or what it is in itself, he appeared to regard the process with which, Maritain suggested, the comparison is made of the idea and the nature of its object in experience as a step in the overall process of the objectification of the object. The debate began to centre on the nature of the active intellect. Maréchal regarded this as "an immanent drive toward intelligibility" (p. 115), conditioned, not by an external object, but by an idea of the "unity of Being itself" (p. 116), which is supported in as much as according to St. Thomas, God, in whose nature the nature of the mind is realized, has no unrealized potency and is pure act. Maréchal therefore admitted that he opposed the scholastics in as much as in their tradition the object is radically opposed to the subject in knowledge, and his revision of Kant's critique also enabled Maréchal to reaffirm with greater conviction the argument found in Kant for God's existence, on grounds of its being a necessary condition for any satisfaction of the mind's drive toward the most intelligible state of being.

In the concluding chapter of McCamy's book, he develops the debate through consideration, for example, of Maritain's objection to Pierre Rousselot; his position was like Maréchal's in as much as the divine exemplar is taken as the model for the development of knowledge in finite intellects. But from Maritain's viewpoint, finite intellects differ from the infinite in precisely such a lack of limitation as to be able to determine the concept through itself. Francis-Xavier Maquart, for this reason, objected to Maréchal's interpretation on grounds that Kant's categories cannot take the finite intellect to the thing in itself. Maréchal's response to this type of objection is that the idea of the divine exemplar in the finite intellect determines its objectivity, as a criterion contained in each individual. This position as an interpretation of St. Thomas's epistemology depends on one's reading of the finite intellect's need to return to the sensory image of the object to test the idea of its intelligible aspect. Maritain and Maquart held that to return in this way is the same as to compare the image as the particular to its intelligible aspect, the universal. Maréchal had in mind the return to the image as a return to the matter informed through this idea. However, if the identity of the object known and the idea is one of the form of the intelligible

aspect, it is difficult to accept that this is something added to, rather than something present in, the image.

The title of the concluding chapter of McCamy's book, "Transcendental Transposition or Philosophical Plasmodium," employs a term of biology, *plasmodium*, which refers to a cell in which there are diverse nuclei or to certain types of slime or deadly parasite. As a metaphor for pluralism in religion and philosophy, it is useful in understanding McCamy's concluding remarks. Maritain's position was one on which transcendentalism in the interpretation of St. Thomas introduces a self-defeating critique of knowledge, such that it drives a wedge between reality and its own pronouncements on it. Even if the idea of the divine exemplar is in the mind, it is there as a finite mode of being, rather than as the divine exemplar of being as it is in itself. McCamy considers the contemporary religious pluralism of Hick as resting, again, on a misinterpretation of the St. Thomas's insistence on the need for the object to be received in the finite intellect in accordance with the finite intellect's own nature, which is not the diverse, material, biological being of the subject, but its perfection in its universality and intelligibility.

Although McCamy competently develops the argument in favour of Maritain's position in this debate, a reader wants to know more about the nature of the absolute, as it is never discussed in any detail. Hegel's conception of the absolute gives rise to a pluralism very different from the religious pluralism of Hick, for example, as the latter sees the reality expressed in diverse religious concepts as the "noumenal" in Kant's sense, or as a substance in the sense of Locke's pure potentiality, and Hegel's absolute is the complete articulation of this potentiality. Any attempt to know the absolute in this sense is perhaps self-defeating, as every idea of it introduces a difference and this too must be included in the complete articulation of this nature, whereas the potentiality of being as experienced in ourselves is arguable everywhere the same. A survey of ideas of the absolute as developed in the 19th century debates in the United Kingdom and in the works of the 20th-century idealists might have introduced further, interesting considerations. Although McCamy suggests an understanding of the criterion for the development of the idea of the absolute, as the unity of idea and reality, an investigation of diverse ways of interpreting, and trying to develop an idea to meet, this criterion would have infused the debate with greater potential to contribute to our understanding of the issue.