

# ***MARITAIN, CANADA, AND THE SCHOLASTIC TRADITION***

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## **I. A Cultural Puzzle**

When Elizabeth Trott and I were working our way across Canada in search of the history of Canadian philosophy, we met skeptics—some of whom even doubted that Canadian intellectual life should be taken seriously. But a surprising number, even of those, said: “Well, we *do* have the Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, you know.” The words made their way from our book<sup>1</sup> to John Robert Colombo’s *Dictionary of Canadian Quotations*.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Colombo was working more than twenty years after we began and, when he reported his find to Dr Trott, he said the remark about the Institute sounded truly strange to him. His tone of voice suggested that it was almost as if someone were asked about culture in California and said: “Well, they do have Mickey Mouse”. But they were meant in all seriousness at the time. They were a recognition of a major element in our cultural life, and they appeared to many people to be richly deserved.

What the Institute stood for in the minds of Canadian intellectuals is not easy to say. To most of them it called to mind Maritain and Gilson, even though it is very likely that Gerald Phelan, Henry Carr, and a number of others did more of the hard work than either of them. Phelan and Carr certainly deserve much of the credit for the Institute’s surprising eminence.

The Institute was a focus for a much larger phenomenon which stretched out into the University of Toronto. The main link between it and the University was George Brett, long the head of the Department of Philosophy and Dean of

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, *The Faces of Reason, an Essay on Philosophy and Culture in English Canada, 1850-1950*, Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Toronto: Stoddart, 1991.

Graduate Studies. But the developing pattern of ideas that many people had in mind may well have owed more to Charles Cochrane than to anyone actually attached to the Institute. Certainly Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture*<sup>3</sup> turned out to be the archetypical work of the larger movement. And of the two best known names, Gilson and Maritain, Gilson certainly was more central to the academic movement than Maritain.

Nowadays the Institute simply stands, I think, for what its name implies: A centre for the study—sometimes almost the re-creation—and analysis of mediaeval texts. Mediaeval philosophy is now, in fact, more respectable as an academic concern than it was sixty or seventy years ago. But philosophy as such does not now dominate the Institute.

In its first two or three decades after its founding in 1928—the thirties, the forties, and on into the fifties—the Institute was seen by the larger community as a centre for the revitalisation of western culture, for the rediscovery of things that had been lost and for the reintegration of the ideas of an earlier age into contemporary culture.

In this context Maritain's was certainly the name that came most often to people's minds. Indeed, Gerald McCool has suggested that it was Maritain who most nearly instantiated the hopes of the Encyclical of 1879. McCool sees those hopes as exactly "the reintegration of mediaeval scholastic thought into contemporary culture."<sup>4</sup>

To understand what is at issue we must get some idea of what might have been lost, what might have been found, and what their significance was. For this, we first must look at Maritain himself and at his relation to the philosophical tradition or traditions that are associated with his name. We must do so from the rather special perspective of his role in Canada. Then we must look at the situation in Canada.

## **II. Maritain in Context**

It is worthwhile to begin by reminding ourselves just how hard it is to pin Maritain down. Neither his biography nor his doctrines really fit any simple pattern. Jacques Maritain was, of course, a French convert to Catholicism whose religious life has made him in the minds of a not-insignificant group of people a candidate for canonisation. But there was always a tinge of what many people think of as Protestant independence about him, and he stood against the mainstream of Catholic opinion in the Spanish civil war and on other occasions.

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<sup>3</sup> Oxford: The University Press, 1940, revised edition, 1944.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald McCool, S.J., *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1989.

In his own mind—though not in Étienne Gilson’s—he was a Thomist.<sup>5</sup> He had been an admirer of Henri Bergson for whom he never lost his respect despite his trenchant criticism. His early fascination with Bergson’s intuitionism may well have influenced the view he took of the problem of intuition in the reading of St. Thomas. I do not think he ever lost his suspicion of mechanical biological theory. And this doubt about reductionist biology certainly came from reading and listening to Bergson.

He was a one-time royalist who became a major champion of democracy and a leading figure in the establishment of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. In economics he was a critic of capitalism and the inspiration of many post-war European politicians, not all of whom, be it said, won his approval. He was thought rather too individualistic by thinkers like Charles De Koninck, but there is little doubt that he was not thought individualistic enough by some of his more conservative admirers.

Unlike Gilson, he always stood outside the public university system in France, though in Toronto—despite the initially ambiguous status of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies—the state-owned and run University of Toronto certainly took pride in his presence. In education, he was a traditionalist in the sense of John Henry Newman, which is to say that, much as he valued the continuity of western civilisation, he was in many respects a radical.

Maritain, was a sociable man whose house at Meudon in the Paris suburbs was long the site of a salon in the grand French tradition. Many of the intellectuals of the day met there. Yet there is no doubt that it was Maritain’s philosophy that attracted people in Toronto for most of whom he was a name on the printed page. But this is not so easy to pin down either.

In one sense he has been tidily located in a suitable drawer by people like Gerald McCool, Géry Prouvost, and most recently Ronald McCamy. The practice of dividing the Thomists of Maritain’s period into three groups is quite deeply entrenched. One group, which is said to include Maritain, followed what is sometimes called the “tradition” of Thomistic interpretation which runs from St. Thomas himself through Cajetan and John of St. Thomas. Another group, thought of perhaps by the first group as strict antiquarians, preferred to go back to St. Thomas himself and to take their wine, as they would say, undiluted or, as their opponents might say, without adequate aging. The most distinguished member of this group is supposed to have been Gilson. The third group is identified by McCool as the authors of “transcendental Thomism.” It is associated with Joseph Maréchal. This last group included a good many thinkers whose concern was with the subjective aspects of knowledge and with the notion of an immanent God to

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<sup>5</sup> See Gilson’s letter to Maritain, 18 March 1974 (Gilson Archives, Toronto); printed in Géry Prouvost, ed, *Étienne Gilson-Jacques Maritain Correspondance*, Paris: J. Vrin, 1991, pp. 275-276.

be found, as Augustine said, within. The main stream of this third group was associated with Kant and with the attempt to open scholastic tradition to the Kantian insights. Its ties shaded off into other groups including some German theologians, especially at Tübingen, and with the Italian followers of Gioberti and Rosmini, who, in their turn, could trace their intellectual roots back to Nicolas Malebranche. This third group played a relatively small part in the Toronto phenomenon, though many French-speaking Canadian philosophers were educated at Louvain and came home with some of its doctrines, and others who were educated in Rome undoubtedly read Gioberti and Rosmini though they did not often advertise the sources of some of their ideas. For a time Rosmini was very popular in Québec and the condemnation of his work in 1848 came as a shock. One can find traces of his ideas much later but they did not spread to English Canada.

Whatever one thinks of this tripartite division, however, it is not clear that either Maritain or Gilson fits into it very well. It is true that Maritain believed that the foundation of philosophy in a very real sense was, as McCool says,<sup>6</sup> an “eidetic intuition” of being, and this separated him from Gilson who believed that such a doctrine betrayed a serious misunderstanding of the views of St. Thomas as they were expressed in a treatise called *In Boethium de Trinitate*.<sup>7</sup> Maritain’s view may look more plausible on careful readings of the traditional interpretations of St. Thomas, but Gilson has a good deal of scholarly backing for his claims.

It is also true that this seemingly arcane dispute is not so distant from real concerns as one might imagine. Maritain’s preoccupation with intuition not only shows his continuing affinity with a central aspect of Bergson’s philosophy, it ties him to a variety of quasi-contemporary movements.

Maritain’s openness to recent developments, combined with his ability to integrate his work into a long tradition and to stay within the apparent umbrella of orthodoxy, constituted much of his appeal to the wider intellectual community. And it was Gilson’s habit of seeming always to search for faithful renderings of the distant past that constituted much of his appeal for George Brett, whose long tenure at Toronto was devoted to promoting the historical study of philosophy.

But all this said, one is compelled to wonder. Maritain in fact did spend much of his working life on the history of philosophy. True, his views—of Descartes, for example—were often somewhat eccentric, and his fondness for Cardinal Cajetan is something many people found it difficult to explain on purely historical grounds. Yet there is no doubt that he wanted historical continuity.

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<sup>6</sup> *Catholic Theology*, p. 254.

<sup>7</sup> For an extended discussion of Gilson’s view of Maritain, see McCool, *Catholic Theology*, pp. 253-255.

Gilson's view of history was very different. Gilson wanted the true St. Thomas, but he disputed most claims to historical continuity. His early work was certainly devoted to showing that Descartes had drawn much more on scholastic sources than was usually believed, but the idea of a unified mediaeval scholastic tradition was something that he denied. Gilson was a man whose mind fastened on particular texts like barnacles to a rock. Maritain was a man who saw texts as the expression of continuing traditions. Both positions have their obvious weaknesses.

To establish continuities one must seek for ideas which link variant statements and therefore deal with similarities rather than identities. Inevitably, Maritain was accused of losing St. Thomas along the way. But those who take Gilson's view must face the fact that texts are not self-explanatory, and that, in reading them, one must establish a context and determine not just how the words were used when they were written but how they got that way.

The texts of St. Thomas are rooted in a complex history—in Plato, Neoplatonism, Augustine, Aristotle, and the Arab philosophers of Thomas's own time. It was a very Aristotelian St. Thomas who figured in the disputes of the period which concerns us here, but Aristotle played a complex role in Thomistic philosophy and was valued in a special way for his usefulness in dealing with the Arab philosophers.

Not just past history is relevant. The later scholastics discovered difficulties in Thomas's texts and their ruminations help us to see how the texts might be read.

Even in these respects, though, it is not really so easy to separate Maritain and Gilson as practitioners whose work is based on different principles. Gilson's early work on the Cartesian sources revealed much about the later scholastics. Eustachius a Sancto Paulo—without an understanding of whose work Descartes would remain in my view unintelligible, and who is in many ways our best and closest link to the scholastic tradition—was well-known to Gilson but, so far as I know, played no role in Maritain's thinking. Gilson, of course, wrote books about Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, the leading figures of the rival Augustinian tradition. He seems, alas, to have much less natural feeling for their work than he had for St. Thomas, but no one is equally receptive to all philosophers, and Maritain did not write about them with great insight either.

Gilson certainly turned his back on the "transcendental Thomists" and their ilk, and Maritain generally expressed the same rather low opinion of them. But Maritain's preoccupation with intuitions of being gave him a natural link to Rosmini and perhaps even to Gioberti who, in turn, are thought, as I said, by McCool (not unreasonably) to have real affinities to the transcendental Thomists. It is true that the Maritain and Rosmini would have given different meanings to the idea of intuition, but they are well within hailing distance of one another.

And if Gilson did not like the transcendental Thomists, he was not exactly a slave to the texts of St. Thomas either. *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*<sup>8</sup> deals with philosophical phenomena and ideas which could not have occurred to St. Thomas for the obvious reason that it must take account of much that happened after his time, and *God and Philosophy*<sup>9</sup> breaks some genuinely new ground.

In any case the great complexity of the philosophy of St. Thomas—especially the fact that it entwines important Neoplatonic elements with its Aristotelianism—means that anyone who studies it is likely to be driven from whatever neat classification we may seek to impose on them. Whether this justifies McCool's belief that there is an irreducible plurality to such a philosophy is quite another matter.

The point that emerges out of this is that Maritain managed to combine religious orthodoxy, a firm attachment to at least some Thomistic principles, and an openness to a range of modern ideas. As much as anything else, it was Maritain's style and his vigour that made an impression in Toronto.

### **III. The Canadian Background**

In Toronto, Maritain was a success. Much of the rest of English Canada is another matter, as we shall see. But Maritain's influence in Toronto was undeniable. One might not like his reading of Descartes, but one had to be entertained by his assaults on the attempts of Cartesians to usurp the powers of the angels and his assessment of the low-minded results which this high-minded project engendered. One might not like it, but one is stimulated to go back and to read Descartes, as the Archbishop of Dublin, Desmond Connell, was stimulated to go back and read Malebranche. Such stimulation was not always applauded by everyone in Rome, but it was a breath of fresh air to many Catholic intellectuals.

Nowhere was this more evidently the case than in Toronto. The situation in Toronto and in much of traditionalist Central Canada was special. Canada was a new country, founded on hope, accustomed to the rhetoric of great expectations, but in fact foundering in a depression just at the moment when its genuine independence was becoming a fact. Everywhere in the world, of course, the aftermath of the First World War was a time in which it became obvious that Nineteenth Century ideas of continuous human progress had been shattered.

Intellectually, English and French Canada were very different, much further apart than they are now, even though separatism was hardly a going concern in the nineteen-thirties. Québec was a small, relatively closed society. The Church ran nearly all its major educational institutions, its hospitals and its charities. This was not just true of the Catholic Church and the French-speaking community.

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<sup>8</sup> London: Sheed and Ward, 1938.

<sup>9</sup> New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1941.

Two of the three English language universities had church ties, Sir George Williams through the YMCA and Bishop's through the Anglican Church. And McGill had Presbyterian origins which were not exactly hidden. The state did not simply fade into the background—someone had to build the roads—but its functions were strictly limited.

The French-speaking community was a genuine organic society, one in which Charles De Koninck's idea of the common good seemed natural. The common good was something which depended on the fact that everyone had a role to play in bringing it about and the result was something shared.

It is not true that Québec philosophers all agreed with one another. On the contrary, they engaged in as much dispute as any philosophers anywhere, perhaps more, because they generally understood one another. They tended to frame their disputes within the philosophy of St. Thomas, but the complexity of that philosophy allowed them plenty of room.

Thomism came to Québec long before the Encyclical of 1879. One reason is that, after the events of 1837, French-speaking intellectuals tended to close ranks. They could present a common front to outsiders while going on with their arguments among themselves. Since philosophers in English Canada, with notable exceptions like George Blewett and John Watson, did not trouble to discover the niceties of Thomist scholarship, this was an easy trick to pull off. Immigration had already begun to change Québec Society, but, outside Montréal, it did not have much visible impact.

Philosophy in the English part of Central Canada had undergone a different evolution. Upper Canada, in fact, was dominantly Irish in population, but it was dominantly Scottish in intellectual life. The universities were modelled after Scottish institutions, and the philosophers they recruited came, more often than not, from Scotland. The Scottish philosophy of "common sense" had a brief moment of domination, but the growth in the universities, from 1870 onwards, coincided with the arrival of a modified Hegelian idealism. At Queen's, Toronto, Dalhousie and McGill, the great men—John Clark Murray, John Watson, Jacob Gould Schurman and George Blewett—were idealist system builders. Murray and Watson were born in Scotland, but Blewett and Jacob Gould Schurman (a Prince Edward Islander who later became the president of Cornell University and the founder of the *Philosophical Review*) was Canadian born. All four constructed optimistic systems, more pluralistic than most of their British and American counterparts, and founded on the tradition of philosophical federalism.

The community in which they worked had a commitment to historical continuity. It had opted out of the American Revolution and it had been joined by many Americans who also believed in historical continuity. Much of the attraction of Hegelianism was based on this commitment.

The universities had denominational origins, but the philosophers subverted them. Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist institutions all hired their

own philosophers, but the common search for rational foundations of religion produced a common rationality. They hoped, indeed, to extend this foundation beyond the limits of Protestantism, and even the ultra-orthodox Mgr. L. A. Pâquet praised Watson for his reading of St. Thomas, much as he deplored his Hegelianism. Blewett went further and wrote about St. Thomas.<sup>10</sup>

But Blewett died in 1912 in his thirty-ninth year. Murray died in 1917. Schurman had moved the United States in early middle age. John Watson laboured on into his nineties at Queen's, but his influence had worn thin by the end of the nineteen-twenties.

Blewett was in fact the last great system-builder at Toronto. Philosophy thereafter took a marked historical turn. Some of this was due to Blewett himself who believed firmly that advances to the future of philosophy could only be achieved through a greater understanding of the great systems of the past. But Blewett believed that one must always build the past into something new—something that took account of the additional human experience which each generation produces. He agreed with Newman: Old concepts may remain true but they are always deepened by their application to changing experience. Brett had a stronger passion for the past for its own sake. It was Brett's department that Harold Innis described as "killed, stuffed, and properly labelled."<sup>11</sup>

Outside Toronto there were universities in Hamilton and London in which much the same philosophical traditions had obtained. Speculative philosophy survived at the University of Western Ontario because A. H. Johnson had been a student in the graduate seminar at Harvard in which Alfred North Whitehead produced *Process and Reality*. And he continued Whitehead's work.

Philosophy reached west to Winnipeg where Rupert Lodge, much derided by George Brett and his friends in Toronto, tried to turn the later philosophy of Bernard Bosanquet into a new kind of pluralism. It also reached to Alberta where John Macdonald, a pupil of John Watson's, struggled in the philosophy of education to ward off the followers of John Dewey and to maintain the belief (which was already scoffed at as decadent doctrine) that there is, somewhere, an absolute truth.

By the 1940's philosophy arrived briefly in British Columbia in the person of John Irving who speculated that there might be intelligent life outside Toronto. He decided that this was uncertain and returned to Toronto, leaving philosophy as part of a union with the Department of Psychology. Catholic Philosophy had not reached the Pacific.

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<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., "The Theism of St. Thomas," in *The Study of Nature and the Vision of God*, Toronto; William Briggs, 1907, pp. 333-348.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Robin Neill in *A New Theory of Value: The Canadian Economics of H. A. Innis*, Toronto: the University Press, 1972, p. 78.

When I was a student the University of British Columbia (in the years from 1947 to 1952), one temporary lecturer—who had also been at Queen’s and Toronto—occasionally digressed to tell us about Gilson and Maritain, but such matters were not an official part of any course, and he was dismissed on the ground that he was a natural drunk.

Father Laurence Shook, in his *Catholic Post-Secondary Education in English-Speaking Canada: A History*,<sup>12</sup> described the curious story of Father Henry Carr’s adventures in British Columbia. Carr came to U.B.C. in 1951. It was decided that he could not teach philosophy or even mediaeval history—or anything else, for that matter, into which he might sneak his beliefs. But he was allowed to teach Greek and Latin.

Norman MacKenzie, the university president, believed in the Canadian tradition of the “federated university” and thought that one day a Catholic college might take its place beside those of the Presbyterian, Anglican and United Churches. He supposed that having Carr on the campus, in whatever capacity, might be helpful.

The faculty promptly ruled that Carr could come but he could not appear in a classroom in clerical dress. The student daily newspaper, of which I was the editor at the time, decided that this was a gross outrage. Father Carr, who normally went about in a cassock, drew the line as finely as he could. He arrived on campus in his cassock and changed in his office only long enough to teach his class. The ensuing row made a good deal of news. Father Shook in his book attributed the student protest to a desire by the newspaper’s editors to make a *casus belli* with the administration. In fact, although we were not at all averse to wars with the administration, Norman Mackenzie usually befriended me, and he was as outraged as I was. The intellectual climate is significant. We had been fighting a series of battles over the importation of American fundamentalist evangelists and demanding that they debate us on the intellectual concerns proper to religion—a task which often fell to me. Many people thought that the student newspaper was anti-religious because at the time the notion that there is such a thing as rational religion was rather foreign to the British Columbian mind. We saw Father Carr as a hope, and our complaint was that he was not allowed to teach a philosophy course. For, apart from the one unhappy lecturer of whom I spoke, the philosophy department consisted of people for whom religion and reason could not possibly go together.

What I had heard of Maritain and Gilson certainly encouraged me to believe that there might be something else in philosophy, and I see now, looking at my shelf, that some of their books were among the first philosophy books I bought, but when we talk about Maritain’s influence in English Canada, we are really

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<sup>12</sup> Toronto: the University Press, 1971.

talking about Central Canada and the near west. Mostly we are talking about intellectual life in Toronto.

The intellectual attraction of Maritain in this situation was precisely that he seemed to be the man who might achieve Blewett's aims—someone whose studies of the philosophical past were stimulated by the problems of the present, and who showed signs of being able to make the past relevant to the future. This intersected with another strong current of thought in Toronto,.

That strand of thought issued in a celebrated book: Charles Cochrane's *Christianity and Classical Culture*.<sup>13</sup> Cochrane's book was about classical rationality and the way in which it was ruptured by Christianity. The struggles of Augustine to weave a new pattern and the great insights which came from it are its main themes. The philosophy of the High Middle Ages can be seen as the further struggle to weave more of this tapestry in order to include the new world pictures generated by Arab science, the Aristotelian revival, and the creation of a new and significantly different civilisation.

Gilson argued that mediaeval thought in fact divided—perhaps even fragmented—in the course of addressing these challenges, or perhaps in the course of addressing some of them and ignoring others. Certainly, if one thinks of the great mediaeval syntheses as the works of St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, there are at least two and perhaps three philosophical outlooks. Some people think that the main direction since has been downhill. This belief is not confined to Platonists who believe in principle that we are ever further from the golden age. Some are Thomists. Others like, Hannah Arendt, who saw the peak in Duns Scotus, are among the people thought to be contemporary and perhaps even “with it.”

At any rate, the intellectual mood in Toronto through the nineteen-thirties and forties favoured the view that western civilisation had suffered a great loss, and it also favoured the search for the means with which to recover the lost treasures.

#### **IV. What Maritain Could Do**

Maritain seemed to be a man who understood the times. He recommended that philosophers should drop what they added after Descartes. But he feared that philosophers in general had abandoned their task. “As a rule philosophers take care not to wear themselves out with such cleansing; and our children of Descartes prefer to carry on with their easier and more profitable task of destroying reason with their Grand Sophistry, their parenthesis of reality, and their Phenomenalising of philosophic knowledge itself, for which they would like so much to find a place in the amusement parks, the night clubs and the dream

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<sup>13</sup> Oxford: The University Press, 1940, revised edition, 1944.

factories of the world of technocracy.”<sup>14</sup> In one sentence the orthodox Cartesians, the logical positivists, the Husserlian phenomenologists and, I rather think, the existentialists as well, are shot down. In a footnote he exempts “some Thomists” from his criticism. *Some*.

Nevertheless, Maritain was a man who seemed to be clearly aware of what was going on in science, and certainly of the economic and political problems of the time. His going back portended a new synthesis, not a mere reversal. The young intellectuals who began to take charge—Harold Innis, for instance and, later, Northrop Frye—also favoured the view that the past should be used to shape the future, that rethinking the past was necessary. Lamentation had its place and so did historical scholarship. But it had to be put to some use.

## **V. The Uses of Maritain**

To what use might one put Maritain’s work? The central worrying issue is one which still remains: Are we faced with a choice between a kind of reductionist science and an outright intrusion of irrationalism? Cochrane’s thesis was that Augustine was able to introduce a measure of mysticism—or at least a measure of what transcends the limits of reason—without destroying the rational outlook on life. The Christian “millennial vision,” Cochrane said, “is not a myth, the unsubstantiated dream of a Golden age.... Nor is its attainment contingent on the presumed activity of demonic forces.... On the contrary it is a prospect held out to human beings, a prospect for which they are called upon to work and fight because it constitutes the fulfilment of their humanity.”<sup>15</sup> To Maritain, this may have sounded a touch Pelagian. Curiously Cochrane’s book, which centres on Augustine, contains only one extended reference to Pelagius,<sup>16</sup> but he believed that he could defend Augustine and at the same time maintain his own view of human activity.

Maritain, however, clearly shared the view that we must struggle to make the world better. He also believed that, if Christianity did so, it must do it in a manner both democratic and orderly. In Toronto, Father Eschmann read Maritain in a way that seemed, as I noted, to Charles De Koninck at Laval far too individualistic. A considerable row erupted, though I do not think that Maritain would have objected to De Koninck’s central claim—the claim that the world is organised so that there is a common good which is attainable if and only if each of us fulfils a particular function, and that each person who does what he or she ought to do will prove to be an element in a universal providential order.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Le paysan de la Garonne*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966; tr. Michael Cuddihy and Elizabeth Hughes as *The Peasant of the Garonne*, New York: Macmillan, 1968, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Christianity and Classical Culture*, pp. 514-515.

<sup>16</sup> *Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 452.

<sup>17</sup> I. Th. Eschmann “In Defence of Jacques Maritain,” *The Modern Schoolman*, Vol. XXII, 1945, No. 4, pp. 183-208. Eschmann was replying to De Koninck’s *De la primauté du bien*

One obvious advantage of Augustine's own theories and of the Augustinian tradition was that what was marked out for occupation was a territory that the physicists did not want. In Augustine's world the laws of physics are no doubt significant, but they are emanations which have a relatively low degree of reality. Time, beloved of physicists, is a mere distension of the soul, and space is not much better. Augustine's theory, as Armand Maurer insisted, is based on "inferiority."<sup>18</sup> God is within. God is also truth and truth is God, and one should fear only ignorance. But to get at this truth one looks within.

The problems posed by this inner truth, its workings, and the relation it has to the world outside are problems which have ever since occupied philosophers for whom Christianity is important. The Augustinian tradition in this respect perhaps came to full fruition in the philosophy of Bonaventure, for whom the world as the physicists describe it is—as St. Augustine had anyhow suggested in *De Trinitate*—symbolic of the world beyond.<sup>19</sup> Bonaventure did not dispute the physicists' right to their world, but their world did not trespass on the realities beyond and behind it. Bonaventure saw the world as a great stage set on which a drama was played out. In the course this drama, from the bare beginnings of fallen man, high grade minds, souls and spirits were forged. Some or all of them might one day find themselves outside the theatre and capable of facing God's reality. The knowledge we really have is subjective in origin, and is rendered objective through the right and common use of the Scripture, meditation, and the offices of the Church. Reason and faith might ultimately combine in mystical experience of a kind which would prove to be its own authentication, but only if it was obtained at the end of the path Bonaventure describes in the *Itinerarium*.

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*commun contre les personnalistes*, Montréal: Fides, 1943. De Koninck responded with "In Defence of St. Thomas," *Laval théologique et philosophique*, Vol. 1, No.2, 1945, pp.1-102.

<sup>18</sup> *Medieval Philosophy*, New York: Random House, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Bonaventure's *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* was written in 1259. For the text see *Opera Omnia*, Quaracchi: Collegii a S. Bonaventura, 1882-1902. There are a number of English translations, most recently that of Philotheus Boehner with notes and re-editing by Stephen F. Brown, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993. Bonaventure offers six steps, arranged in pairs. The first pair deals with our knowledge of the external world followed by a critique of sensory knowledge. The second pair begins with self-knowledge and then goes on to the faculties of memory, intelligence and will, showing how each is inadequate without God and how God can sustain it. The fifth step reflects again on the nature of knowledge and the last reveals the mystical vision. Bonaventure insists that we are to see God through every thing that we meet and we must consider the world not as a collection of things but "as vestiges of God." He speaks of what enters into the soul as "similitudes," p. 13 at Section 4 (Boehner-Brown). A recent commentator, Matthew M. Benedictis insists that for Bonaventure all created things should be looked upon "only as symbols of something higher and more real." See *The Social Thought of St. Bonaventure*, Washington: Catholic University Press, reprinted Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1972, p. 42.

Within the Augustinian tradition the concern to find a basis for objectivity in the mind's contact with the actual objects of the world varied widely. Perhaps it was relatively slight in Bonaventure and quite strong in Duns Scotus. Within this tradition, modern man, it was thought by its (often Franciscan) proponents, might regain his losses without directly confronting the sciences.

The Thomistic tradition to which Maritain claimed allegiance was much more concerned with the position of the sciences. One may speculate that this concern had to do with the events of the high Middle Ages—with the encroachments of Islamic science and mathematics and, of course, with the reading of Aristotle. However much he was concerned with immediate intuition, Maritain wanted to take this route, too.

But he also wanted to avoid head-on clashes with the scientific world view. His way of doing it was first of all to distinguish between natural science and the philosophy of nature and then to distinguish between both and metaphysics proper. Each of these followed on its predecessor.<sup>20</sup> Philosophy of Nature was a reflection on what scientists did and it produced, Maritain thought, what he called "critical realism." Metaphysics proper dealt with the great and ultimate questions, especially those about God. Knowledge was to be thought of as a series of abstractions from nature and such a procedure presupposed always that there was a genuine external reality.

This scheme produced considerable interest in French Canada, including some detailed criticism by Charles De Koninck, whose last major unpublished work was a text on the philosophy of nature.<sup>21</sup> But so far as I can tell the details of Maritain's "philosophy of science" created little interest in English Canada.<sup>22</sup> The balance was attractive and people could get on with their business without worrying too much, perhaps, about how science might collide with religion. Maritain's project did not, of course, end there. *Distinguer pour unir, ou les degrés du savoir* goes on in the Augustinian way to end with the mysticism of

<sup>20</sup> *Distinguer pour unir, ou les degrés du savoir*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer. Originally published in 1932, the work went through eight editions with additional prefaces and minor changes up to 1963. It appears as Vol. IV of the collected *Oeuvres complètes de Jacques et Raïssa Maritain*, Éditions Universitaires de Fribourg, Suisse, 1983. There is an English translation by Gerald B. Phelan, *Distinguish to Unite or The Degrees of Knowledge*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1959.

<sup>21</sup> De Koninck's most impressive work was *The Hollow Universe*, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962, but pieces of the work in progress appeared as "Abstraction from Matter" in *Laval théologique et philosophique*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1937, pp. 133-196, and Vol. 16, 1960, pp. 169-188.

<sup>22</sup> Exceptions include Armand Maurer's "A Neglected Thomistic Text on the Foundations of Mathematics," *Mediaeval Studies*, Vol. 21, 1959, pp. 185-192; and Jean-Louis Allard, "Maritain's Epistemology of Modern Science," in *Jacques Maritain's The Degrees of Knowledge*, St. Louis: American Maritain Association, 1981.

John of the Cross. The world is finally put together again in a very traditional way. But it was not that, again, which inspired English Canada, for it would be hard to find a philosopher in English Canada who was induced by Maritain to take any of the great mystics as a subject matter for purely philosophical reflection. History and what one might call “pure theology” are another matter. By contrast, the bibliography produced by Jean-Louis Allard and Pierre Germain shows a fairly rich literature on moral, social and political topics.<sup>23</sup> Maritain had a considerable impact on Canadian public life. The late Mr. Justice Mark MacGuigan, perhaps our most distinguished philosopher of law, was a Maritainian who played an important role as Minister of Justice in the creation of the Canadian Charter of Rights. And Maritain was often in evidence behind the scenes. Norah Michener, the wife of a cabinet minister and Governor-General, wrote an important book on his philosophy of human nature.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, many of Maritain’s social and political ideas remain firmly implanted in the national cultural fabric, but events profoundly changed the intellectual climate which led to the quotation about the Institute of Mediaeval Studies with which I began this paper.

## VI. Cultural Change

The University of Toronto produced no more great speculative philosophers. Emil Fackenheim became a much quoted figure just as he prepared to move to Israel. He helped create the new Hegelian movement, but the impetus was largely historical. The passion for the history of philosophy remained for a time, but the tide of analytic philosophy—sparked by the large-scale importation of philosophers from the United States and Britain—washed away the passion. In the preface to his book *Perfectionism*, Thomas Hurka apologises for having been educated a little too early, and so for retaining some signs of the historical passion.<sup>25</sup> What remained of the passion turned into antiquarianism—the study of the history of philosophy for its own sake. In some places the turn of the tide was quite startling. In the nineteen-seventies at the University of Waterloo there was a long row between the philosophers at the university proper and the affiliated Catholic St. Jerome’s College. The university department refused to accept St. Jerome’s courses for credit in its honours programme and continued to resist even when ordered to do so by the university senate. What was taught at St. Jerome’s was not, they said, philosophy as they understood it.

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<sup>23</sup> Jean-Louis Allard and Pierre Germain, *Répertoire bibliographique sur la vie et l’oeuvre de Jacques et Raïssa Maritain*, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Department of Philosophy, 1994.

<sup>24</sup> *Maritain on the Nature of Man in a Christian Democracy*, Hull, PQ: Éditions L’Éclair, 1955.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1993.

The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies also changed. Gerald Phelan, the original leader moved on to Notre Dame after an administrative dispute with the Basilian Fathers. The hiring practices of the Institute followed, not unnaturally, the standards which universities customarily use. Universities look for people whose detailed scholarly work pleases their peers, not for people who can communicate large ideas to a general public. The Institute in fact probably never thought of itself as having this larger role. It seemed to be a happy accident that it performed this function. In any case, public philosophers had become very rare. George Grant was perhaps the last one that we had in Canada.

The culture changed. Mass production, mass communications and globalisation all conspired to create a picture of the human being which would fit the economic system. The ideal picture of the human being was that of one who could be trained to be a piece of machinery which could be moved and plugged into whatever function as producer and consumer the system regarded as optimal. The implausibility of seeing the human being as a collection of bits of matter or a linked sequence of electro-magnetic fields was overcome by the evident efficiency of such a picture. Philosophers were not lacking who were prepared to announce that various kinds of reductive materialism were true.

In his 1951 report to the Massey Commission, George Grant said that it would soon be very difficult to teach the kind of philosophy Maritain espoused. Such a thing, he said, would be confined to a small number of independent church-related colleges.<sup>26</sup> At Waterloo, at least, he proved to be right.

Yet the vision Charles Cochrane ascribed to Christian philosophy—the vision of “an abundant life of the fully integrated will” which issues finally in a genuine community of mutually affectionate and interdependent beings fit for an eternal life—seems to be something still worth investigating and very likely worth the enormous work and struggle which Cochrane thought would be needed to bring it about.

It is not possible without an integrated philosophy. Maritain made a valiant effort to provide it, and I have sympathy with those who think that what limited its influence was mainly the dehumanising economy and the philosophers who, as my old teacher Ruth Saw liked to say, “sold the pass.”

## **VII. Into the Future**

Still, we will find some other elements that must figure in our speculations if we look more closely, as we in this society are bound to do, at the philosophy of Maritain. One of the issues has to do with pluralism. In a society such as ours integration must provide the basis for a peaceful plurality.

Gerald McCool, as I said near the beginning of this paper, saw the Thomism of Maritain’s time as fragmenting into a pluralism which could not easily—not

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<sup>26</sup> *The Arts, Letters and Sciences in Canada*, Ottawa: the Queen’s Printer, 1951.

ever if I read him rightly—be reunified. McCool saw this as inevitable. McCool's tripartite division is, as I said, debatable. But it is certain that there are two perspectives—the "interiority" which Armand Maurer thought central to the whole Augustinian tradition, and the concentration on what we might call objects whose nature it is to be distinct from us, which many people have found central to Thomism. I suppose it is fair to say that Maritain tried to combine them. He certainly insisted on immediate intuition as a starting point, and whether one thinks that this is ultimately an "interior vision" or whether one thinks of it as an immediate intuition of something essentially external to us, it addresses a primary concern of the tradition which runs from Augustine to Rosmini and beyond.

Maritain, indeed, thinks there is a kind of inner light but that what it reveals is by its nature objectively there.<sup>27</sup> This is pretty much what Rosmini said, too. At the same time, of course, Maritain allowed for a natural progression from sensory knowledge of the world, to the philosophical understanding of science, to metaphysics and ultimately to a mystical vision. In this order of things there is in fact a level at which the objects of the world can be approached in a manner which is metaphysically neutral and is open to the sciences. The usefulness of this view in the struggle to find some way in which to avoid the collision of science with religion and philosophy is no doubt significant.

We need, however, to look at pluralism from two deeper levels, for there are ways of seeing it which are not threatening to the ideas of objective truth to which Maritain believed we must cling with all our might. And unless we understand this we have little hope of finding the kind of synthesis with which another public philosopher might make a mark on the world.

To begin with, one can indeed look at the world from the perspective of the knowing subject. We can make the objects which fill the world our primary perspective. The perspective of the logical structure which makes the whole thing intelligible is also available to us. From the subjective point of view everything unfolds in and through our own experience and our lives. The subject is the moving centre of that experience. The content of experience changes, but the centre is eternal and unchanging. From the point of view of what is in the world, the subject recedes and has the status of a neutral knower whose nature is uncovered in the same way that the natures of other things are uncovered. (And so Cardinal Cajetan thought that we could not prove the immortality of the soul.) The invariants are then the laws of physics and, I would hope, the invariant laws of a basic common morality. From the point of view of the logical structure of the world, both subjects and the things in the world are contingent values of bound variables. The eternal reality is the logical structure.

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<sup>27</sup> At any rate this is the language of "The True Subject of Metaphysics" in *Preface to Metaphysics*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1940, pp. 44-61.

Now we cannot quite look at the world from these three viewpoints simultaneously, though we can trace the common underlying results of a careful analysis of them.<sup>28</sup> We cannot infer the nature and laws of the objects from the subjective stance—which is to say that we cannot do physics out of our heads. But from our knowledge of the external world we cannot reach that inner light which Augustine and Maritain alike think illumines our lives. This is just to say that the study of physics does not illumine the inner life, and perhaps the study of rat psychology does not do so very well, either. Mathematics and logic, however, are neither subjective phenomena nor simple elements of the objective world. You cannot get rid of the number 2. But you cannot smell it either. And all discourse about the world requires some logic.

We can build these systems, but we cannot abandon any of them. You cannot replace the Augustinian tradition with the Thomistic one, and neither of them will give you quite the philosophy of Kurt Gödel. Gödel wrote to his mother saying he could prove the existence of God. We do not yet have all the proof, I think, but his God will be the God of Platonic realism and mathematical idealism.<sup>29</sup>

Only, I suppose, the God who appears in philosophies like those of Maritain could grasp all three perspectives *at once*—and then only because he is a Trinitarian. This is to say Maritain's God is the author of the world, appears in the world, and is the providential order of the world. We can see that we need all three perspectives, but a literal union of them is another matter.

But though we cannot shift perspectives in a way which perfectly unifies them, we can understand this situation in another way. All possible systems are interpretations. That is what the world is like. The data which come to us are no doubt real enough, but seeing something is more like reading words on a page than like getting grit in your eye. "Seeing," as Gilbert Ryle insisted, is an achievement verb.<sup>30</sup> To see something is to get it right.

Now it is perfectly possible to go outside and see a motor car, alas it is all too easy. One can interpret all the phenomena involved in terms of the criteria for what counts as a motor car, and very likely what seems to be a motor car will turn out to be one. The hopes of car dealers and the parking police are usually borne out. But the same phenomena can all be seen in a kind of Berkeleyan way as events in your mind. The fact that you can see a motor car counts as evidence that

<sup>28</sup> I have tried to write books from each of these standpoints—*The Rational and the Real*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962; *Logic and Reality*, Assen: Royal Van Gorcum and New York: Humanities Press, 1972, and *Being and Idea*, Georg Olms: Hildesheim, 1992. I try to relate each perspective to the others.

<sup>29</sup> For what we have, see Jordan Howard Sobel, "Gödel's Ontological Proof" in Judith Jarvis Thomson, ed., *On Being and Seeing, essays for Richard Cartwright*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, pp. 241-262.

<sup>30</sup> See *Dilemmas*, Cambridge: the University Press, 1956, Chapter 7 and also *The Concept of Mind*, London: Hutchinson, 1949, Chapter 7.

you are human, that your eyesight is fairly normal and so on. The subject does not appear in one story and the object does not appear in the other.

There are more complete stories, too, those of automotive engineers and physicists, and those in which the subject, as Bonaventure hoped, sees through the stained glass window of perception to the light which is beyond it. And all these are possible.

Notice that the pluralism here is in no way destructive. What counts in these stories depends on what criteria there are and how well they are chosen and applied. Philosophical systems like those which Father McCool discusses tend most often to be interpretations of this sort and do not necessarily conflict. But they need careful analysis.

There is, though, a final possibility. St. Thomas distinguished between two infinities, one of which is the nature of God and the other the powers of God. The powers of God are both defined and confined by the logic of their own natures. Omnipotence is only the power to do what is logically possible. Such powers can figure neatly in theological doctrine and human life. The infinity which is the nature of God is beyond all fathoming.

In this sense all philosophical systems are approximations, and one can never express all there is to express. It is certain to take more than one philosophical reading to get anything like a bearing, especially I suppose the analogical one to which St. Thomas subscribed.

It is still not true that anything goes, even though no theory is final and even though our very separation from the ultimate infinite reminds us that each of us is distinct and can never be fully swallowed by any larger whole. The creation is a unified perspective is something to which we must inch our way, being careful not to throw our hard-won insights along the way.

What is needed if we are to revive Maritain's intellectual project is a cluster of philosophical developments which will make clear how this is so and what it means.