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MARITAIN, JACQUES

(1882–1973)

The French philosopher Jacques Maritain was a powerful force in twentieth-century philosophy and cultural life. The author of more than fifty philosophical works and of countless articles that appeared in the leading philosophical journals of the world, he was widely regarded as a preeminent interpreter of the thought of Thomas Aquinas and as a highly creative thinker in his own right.

Maritain, born in Paris, was reared in an atmosphere of liberal Protestantism. He attended the Sorbonne, where he fell briefly under the spell of teachers passionately convinced that science alone could provide all the answers to the questions that torment the human mind. It was at the Sorbonne that he met his wife-to-be, Raïssa Oumansoff, a young Russian-Jewish student who was to share his quest for truth and to become an intellectual and poet of real stature in her own right. She was also to collaborate with Maritain on a number of books. Soon disillusioned with the scientism of their Sorbonne masters, the two attended the lectures of Henri Bergson at the Collège de France. Bergson liberated in them "the sense of the absolute," and, following their marriage in 1904, they were converted (1906) to the Roman Catholic faith through the influence of Léon Bloy.

The years 1907 and 1908 were spent in Heidelberg, where Maritain studied biology under Hans Driesch. He was particularly interested at the time in Driesch's embryogenetic theory of neovitalism, a theory then little known in France. Upon returning to Paris, Maritain undertook the task of directing the compilation of a *Dictionary of Practical Life*. During the three years that he worked on this project, he also undertook a serious study of the writings of Thomas Aquinas. In 1914, he was appointed to the chair of modern philosophy at the Institut catholique de Paris.

From 1945 to 1948 Maritain was French ambassador to the Vatican. Afterward he taught at Princeton University until his retirement in 1956. He has also taught at the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, Columbia University, the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and the University of Notre Dame. The Jacques Maritain Center was established at Notre Dame in 1958 for the purpose of encouraging research along the lines of his philosophy.

Maritain's thought is based on the principles of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas but incorporates many insights found in other philosophers, both classical and modern, and also profits greatly from data supplied by such sciences of man as anthropology, sociology, and psychology.

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

The cardinal point in Maritain's theory of knowledge is his defense and critical elucidation of different ways of knowing reality. On the one hand, Maritain sees the richness and inexhaustibility of material reality as requiring that the mind let fall on it different noetic glances, each of which reveals to the mind a different universe of intelligi-

bility to be explored. There is, first of all, the universe of *mobile being*—being imbued with mutability—which constitutes the sphere of the knowledge of nature and which itself calls for both an empiriological analysis, that is, a spatiotemporal analysis oriented toward the observable and measurable as such (science of nature), and an ontological analysis, that is, an analysis oriented toward intelligible being, toward the very being and intelligible structure of things (philosophy of nature). There is, second, the universe of *quantity* as such, which constitutes much of the sphere of mathematics. And there is, finally, the universe of *being as being,* which constitutes the sphere of metaphysics.

Much of Maritain's energy was devoted to giving the philosophy of nature its epistemological charter, in contrast with many Thomists in a hurry who would have it almost totally eclipsed by metaphysics, and in contrast with the many scientists who think that the only object capable of giving rise to an exact and demonstrable science is that which is sense-perceivable and can be subjected to methods of experimental and mathematical analysis. Maritain's serious study of the work of modern physicists and biologists revealed to him that scientists are led by their science itself to discover within the mysterious universe of nature problems that go beyond the experimental and mathematical analysis of sensory phenomena. It also revealed to him that the conceptual lexicon of the scientist is radically different from the conceptual lexicon of the philosopher. For these reasons, Maritain emphasized the need for, and prerogatives of, both an ontological analysis and an empiriological analysis of the sensible real. He also worked out a theory of physicomathematical knowledge that relates this knowledge to what the Scholastics called intermediary sciences (*scientiae mediae*), sciences which straddle the physical order and the mathematical order and which have more affinity with mathematics than with physics as to their rule of explanation and yet at the same time are more physical than mathematical as to the terminus in which their judgments are verified.

On the other hand, Maritain saw the human mind as having another life than that of its conscious logical tools and manifestations: "there is not only logical reason but also, and prior to it, intuitive reason." There is indeed not only the Freudian unconscious of instincts, tendencies, complexes, repressed images and desires, and traumatic memories; there is also a spiritual unconscious or preconscious, the preconscious of the spirit in its living springs. The acts and fruits of human consciousness and the clear perceptions of the mind—in other words, the universe of concepts, logical connections, rational discursus, and rational deliberation—emerge in the last analysis from the hidden workings of this preconscious life of the spirit; but there also emerge from them many genuine knowings, and many affective movements, which remain more or less *sur le rebord de l'inconscient,* as Bergson would have said—on the edge of the unconscious. Among such knowings we have the various kinds of knowledge by inclination (knowledge through connaturality)—notably, poetic knowledge, the "natural" or prephilosophical knowledge of moral values, and mystical experience. Maritain felt it to be most incumbent upon us to recognize not only the different kinds or degrees of conceptual and discursive knowledge but also these different nonconceptual and "immediate" forms of knowledge.

METAPHYSICS

Maritain held the classical view that the object of metaphysics is *being as being,* and he stressed that it is in things themselves that metaphysics finds this object. It is the being of sensible and material things, the being of the world of experience, which is the immediately accessible field of investigation for metaphysics; it is this which, before seeking its cause, metaphysics discerns and scrutinizes—not as sensible and material but as being. Before rising to what may be a realm of spiritual existents, metaphysics must grasp empirical existence, the existence of material things—not as empirical and material but as existence.

For Maritain, at the starting point of metaphysics there lies an intuition, the "metaphysical intuition of being," which may be said to consist in the intellect's seeing—through an abstractive or eidetic (idea-producing) visualization—the intelligible value *being,* being in itself and in its essential properties. The word *intuition* here has caused much difficulty for some philosophers, but it seems to be demanded by the thought that Maritain was trying to express. What must somehow be preserved is, on the one hand, that it is as true to say that this "seeing" produces itself through the medium of the vital action of our intellect—of our intellect as vitally receptive and contemplative—as to say that we produce it; and, on the other hand, that it is being more than anything else that produces this "seeing."

In his scrutiny of the being of sensible and material things, Maritain presented a highly original treatment of what Thomists and others have long considered to be the first principles of speculative reason—the principles of identity, sufficient reason, finality, and causality. He

explained that the reality that is the object of the idea of being is richer than this idea, and it presses for multiplication in a manifold of notions, among them the notions of unity, of goodness, of truth: being is one, is good, is true. Each of these notions expresses to the mind nothing but being itself, to which it adds nothing but a conceptual difference. But precisely in virtue of this ideal element that differs from one to the other, these notions as such are different among themselves and are different from the notion of being; they are convertible notions but they are not identical with one another. There is thus a superabundance of being with regard to the notions in which it is objectified, and it is in terms of this superabundance that Maritain elucidated the intuitivity of the first principles.

When he turned his philosophical gaze to the problem of the "cause of being," Maritain was attentive both to specifically philosophical ways of establishing the existence of God and to nonphilosophical or prephilosophical ways of approaching God. Under the first heading he restates the five classical ways of Thomas Aquinas, divesting them of the examples borrowed from ancient physics and formulating them in a language more appropriate to modern times; then he proposes a "sixth way." In this "sixth way" we have first the complex primordial intuition, and later the rational and philosophical reflection, that the *I* who thinks, the *I* who is caught up in pure acts of intellect, cannot ever not have been, for both the intellect and the intelligible as such are above time: this *I* must always have existed, and in some personal existence, too, although not within the limits of its own personal being but rather in some transcendent and suprapersonal Being. Philosophical reflection can go on to establish how the *I* always existed in God, can establish that "the creature which is now I and which thinks, existed before itself eternally in God—not as exercising in Him the act of thinking, but as thought by Him."

But Maritain was quick to recognize prephilosophical approaches to God—the "natural," or instinctive and intuitive, approach proper to the first apperceptions of the human intellect, the approach through art and poetry, and the approach through moral experience. The inner dynamism of a man's first awakening to the intelligible value of existence causes him to see that the Being-with-nothingness that is both his own being and the being of the universal whole must be preceded by transcendent Being-without-nothingness. As concerns art and poetry, the poet or artist, in following the very line of his art, tends without knowing it to pass beyond his art; just as a plant, although lacking knowledge, directs its stem toward the sun, the artist, however sordid his life, is oriented toward the primary source of beauty. And finally, as concerns moral experience, when a man experiences, in a primary act of freedom, the impact of the moral good, and is thus awakened to moral existence and directs his life toward the good for the sake of the good, then he directs his life, without knowing it, toward the absolute Good. In this way he knows God vitally, by virtue of the inner dynamism of his choice of the good, even if he does not know God in any conscious fashion or through any conceptual knowledge.

MORAL PHILOSOPHY

One of the most provocative sides to Maritain's thought was his theory of "moral philosophy adequately taken." His contention was that moral philosophy—however vast, necessary, and fundamental be the part that natural ethics plays in it—must, if it is to be adequate to its object (the direction or regulation of human acts), take into account the data of revelation and theology concerning the existential state of man. Human conduct is the conduct of an existent, not simply the conduct of a nature. Consequently, the moral philosopher must take into account all data that contribute to make the existential condition of man genuinely known to us. He must take into account the data of ethnology, sociology, and psychology. And he must also take into account theological data. For, in fact, as a result of the present state of human nature, man has more propensity to evil than the man of pure nature by reason of the original sin and of the concupiscence that remains even in the just; and, on the other hand, he has incomparably stronger weapons for good, by reason of divine grace. Maritain recognized that the moral philosopher who does take this situation into account will not be a *pure* philosopher but maintained that he will still be able to use the method proper to philosophy and advance with steps, so to speak, of philosophy, not of theology.

Maritain's theory of natural law was elaborated against the background of anthropological data. He held that two basic elements must be recognized in natural law: the *ontological* and the *gnoseological*; and it is perhaps in considering the second of these two that Maritain made his most fecund insights. The chief point he wished to emphasize is that the genuine concept of natural law is the concept of a law that is natural not only in the sense that it is the normality of functioning of human nature or essence but also in the sense that it is naturally known, that is, known through inclination or through connaturality, not through conceptual knowledge and by way of

reasoning. The inclinations in question, even if they deal with animal instincts, are essentially human and, therefore, reason-permeated inclinations; they are inclinations refracted through the crystal of reason in its unconscious or preconscious life. And since man is a historical animal, these essential inclinations of human nature either developed or were released in the course of time; as a result, man's knowledge of natural law developed progressively and continues to develop. Thus, the fact that there is considerable relativity and variability in the particular rules, customs, and standards of different peoples is in no way an argument against natural law.

It belongs, of course, to moral philosophy to provide a scientific justification of moral values by a demonstrative determination of what is consonant with reason and of the proper finalities of the human essence and of human society.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Much of Maritain's effort was directed to working out the character of authentically Christian politics. He lays primary emphasis on man as being both an *individual* and a *person*—an individual by reason of that in him which derives from matter, and a person by reason of that in him which derives from his subsisting spirit. Man must live in society both because of his indigence as an individual and because of his abundance or root generosity as a person. As an individual, man is only a part, and as such he bears the same relation to society as the part bears to the whole. His private good as an individual is in everything inferior to the common good of the whole, so that an individual may even be required to risk his life for the sake of the good of the community. But as a person, man is a whole; and the whole that the person is surpasses the whole that society is, because the person, by reason of the subsistence of his spiritual soul, is destined for eternal union with the transcendent Whole, whereas the particular society in which the person lives, by reason of its not having a spiritual soul, is not destined for union with the transcendent Whole, but will die in time. Man is above and superior to political society, and the political community must recognize the person's orientation to an end above time and facilitate his attainment of it.

Maritain's social and political philosophy also manifested a keen sense of history. For Maritain as for Pindar, man must become what he is—man must "win his being"; man must become, in the psychological and moral order, in the social and political order, the person he is in the ontological order. Among the many truths related to this fundamental exigency of man's being is one that Maritain sees as of absolutely essential importance—the fact that human history is made up of periods, each of which is possessed of a particular intelligible structure, and therefore of particular basic requirements.

It is Maritain's contention that the historical climate of the modern world is quite different from that of the medieval world. For him, medieval civilization was a sacral civilization, by which he means that the historical ideal of the Middle Ages was principally controlled by two dominants: On the one hand, the idea or myth of fortitude in the service of God—the lofty aim was to build up a fortress for God on earth—and on the other hand, the concrete fact that temporal civilization had a largely ministerial role as regards the spiritual—the body politic was to a large extent a function of the sacred and imperiously demanded unity of religion. In contrast, modern civilization was for Maritain a secular civilization, by which he meant that the historical ideal of modern times is largely controlled by two other dominants: On the one hand, the idea or myth of the body politic as being by nature something of the natural order and something directly concerned, therefore, only with the temporal life of men and their temporal common good; and on the other hand, the concrete fact that in pursuing this temporal common good, modern man is most intent on the attainment of freedom and the realization of human dignity in social and political life itself.

Against the background of this view of medieval and modern civilizations, Maritain reflected at length on the nature of the democratic ideal. He saw democracy as the only way of bringing about a moral rationalization of politics, and he insisted that in order to accomplish this task democracy needs the quickening ferment of Gospel inspiration. But he also insisted, no less forcefully, that the "creed of freedom" that lies at the very basis of democracy is not a religious, but rather a civic or secular, one. Furthermore, this secular creed deals with practical tenets that depend basically on simple, "natural" apperceptions of which the human heart becomes capable with the progress of moral conscience and which can be similarly adhered to by minds that may differ greatly as to the speculative and theoretical justifications. In keeping with such a conception, Maritain repeatedly asserted that men belonging to very different philosophical or religious lineages can and should cooperate in the pursuit of the common good of political life. He also maintained that the supreme principles governing the relationship between church and state should be applied less in terms of the social power than in terms of the vivifying inspiration of the church: "the superior dignity of the Church is to find

its ways of realization in the full exercise of her *superior strength of all pervading inspiration.*" This reflects a most basic premise in all of Maritain's thought: that immutable principles admit of, and even call for, analogical applications in different existential situations.

PHILOSOPHY OF ART

From his earliest years Maritain was the friend and confidant of numerous artists, writers, poets, and musicians, and he was considered by many as having the finest aesthetic sensibility among the major figures of modern philosophy. His long reflection on almost every facet of the artistic process culminated in his monumental *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry,* which grew out of six lectures given in 1952 at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, where he had been invited to deliver the initial series of the A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts.

Maritain held, like Dante Alighieri, that human art continues in its own way the labor of divine creation. But he kept reminding the modern artist that human art cannot create out of nothing; it must first nourish itself on things, which it transforms in order to make a form divined in them shine on a bit of matter. Maritain would admit that the widespread effort toward "pure art" in the latter part of the nineteenth century may have been a beneficent phase after the exasperation of sensibility provoked by impressionism, but he affirmed that in the last analysis human art is doomed to sterility and failure if it cuts itself off from the existential world of nature and the universe of man.

The deepest concern of Maritain was with the nature of poetic knowledge and poetic intuition, that is, with the nature of the knowledge immanent in and consubstantial with poetry, poetry as distinct from art and quickening all the arts. He held that poetic knowledge is a typical instance of knowledge through connaturality. Poetic knowledge, as he saw it, is nonconceptual and nonrational knowledge; it is born in the preconscious life of the intellect, and it is essentially "an obscure revelation both of the subjectivity of the poet and of some flash of reality coming together out of sleep in one single awakening." This unconceptualizable knowledge comes about, Maritain maintained, through the instrumentality of emotion, which, received in the preconscious life of the intellect, becomes intentional and intuitive, and causes the intellect obscurely to grasp some existential reality as *one* with the self (of the knower) reality has moved; and at the same time the knower grasps all that which this reality calls forth in the manner of a sign. In this way the self is known in the experience of the world and the world is known in the experience of the self, through an intuition that essentially tends toward utterance and creation. Thus, in such a knowledge it is the object created—the poem, the painting, the symphony—in its own existence as a world of its own that plays the part played in ordinary knowledge by the concepts and judgments produced within the mind.

Poetic knowledge, then, is not directed toward essences, for essences are disengaged from concrete reality in a concept, a universal idea, and are an object for speculative knowledge. Poetic intuition is directed toward concrete existence as connatural to the soul pierced by a given emotion. In a passage of great beauty Maritain wrote:

> This transient motion of a beloved hand—it exists an instant, and will disappear forever, and only in the memory of angels will it be preserved, above time. Poetic intuition catches it in passing, in a faint attempt to immortalize it in time. But poetic intuition does not stop at this given existent; it goes beyond, and infinitely beyond. Precisely because it has no conceptualized object, it tends and extends to the infinite, it tends toward all the reality, the infinite reality which is engaged in any singular existing thing. (*Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry,* p. 126)

Maritain was admired even by those who may be of very different philosophical convictions. He was admired not only for his lifelong zeal for truth and impassioned commitment to freedom but also for his exceptional qualities as a person—his humility, his charity, his fraternal attitude toward all that is. He came to be recognized as one of the great *spirituels* of his time.

See also Aesthetic Judgment; Aristotle; Being; Bergson, Henri; Dante Alighieri; Driesch, Hans Adolf Eduard; Epistemology; Epistemology, History of; Ethics, History of; Metaphysics; Poetizing and Thinking; Social and Political Philosophy; Thomas Aquinas, St.

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MARITAIN, JACQUES [ADDENDUM]

Jacques Maritain died in Toulouse on April 28, 1973, as a professed religious of the Petits Frères de Jesus. His wife Raissa had died in 1959 when the couple was visiting France and from that point on Maritain's center of gravity was once again Europe. In Toulouse, he taught the brothers of his community and the published works that resulted are almost exclusively theological. Thus, Maritain continued to surprise: the quintessential layman became a professed religious, the philosopher became a theologian.

His reputation with many suffered when he published *The Peasant of the Garonne* in 1966. In the immediate wake of the ecumenical council dubbed Vatican II, Maritain was severely critical of developing trends in the Catholic Church. Teilhard de Chardin and phenomenology were major targets of his criticism. Some saw in this a retrogression, remembering *Antimoderne*. It helps to distinguish Maritain's political views from his Catholic faith. He held the latter with unswerving orthodoxy from the time of his conversion. It was otherwise with his political views. His long association with *Action Francaise*, so difficult to reconcile with his earlier socialism, was followed by a resurgence of his natural liberalism in