

III

MARITAIN'S METAPHYSICS

A SUMMARY PRESENTATION

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As we all know, The Degrees of Knowledge is primarily directed toward an analysis and critique of our modes of knowing. One cannot expect, therefore, that even in the sections explicitly devoted to a discussion of metaphysics, Maritain would attempt to give even an outline of a complete metaphysics. For this reason, although my paper is based primarily on The Degrees of Knowledge, I have used, by way of interpretation and supplement, several other closely related works. Maritain himself, in the postscript to the third edition (Degrees, xvi), referred to his Quatre essais sur l'esprit dans sa condition charnelle as, "...in certain respects, a supplement to The Degrees of Knowledge." I have made extensive use also of Existence and the Existent and of the Preface to Metaphysics. Both of these works are closely related to the metaphysical expositions given in The Degrees of Knowledge. For the text itself, I have used the fifth French edition and the Phelan English translation.¹

While The Degrees of Knowledge cannot be considered as having an exposition of a total metaphysical doctrine, it is itself, in one sense, totally metaphysical. Maritain divides metaphysics (that is to say, metaphysics fully formed

and presented didactically) into three parts, namely, a critique of knowledge, a basic ontology, and a natural theology.² Epistemology, in Maritain's view, does not exist outside of or separately from metaphysics. Metaphysics is precisely the locus for epistemology and for critique because it is the highest natural wisdom and, therefore, has as its function not only reflection on, and justification by such reflection of, its own principles, but also reflection on the basic forms or modes of knowing which are formal to all other disciplines. It belongs to the wise man to order all knowledge.

In a sense, therefore, this entire conference is dealing with the first part of metaphysics, namely the critique of knowledge. Therefore, in my presentation, I will concentrate on the second and third part of metaphysics.

The analysis of metaphysics into these three phases or parts is not, of course, in the order of origin; they are parts of a constituted and developed metaphysics. We do not begin to develop a metaphysics by starting with a critique of knowledge. We start with some perception of being.

Maritain stands in the line of the great philosophers of being for whom metaphysics is a true science, a true wisdom and a substantive knowledge, which deals with being as being. Of course, no neat and clean explanation is universally accepted as to what this time honored phrase "being as being" means. The first task, therefore, in understanding metaphysics, is to determine the philosopher's conception of being as such.

Maritain's philosophy is a thoroughgoing realism, in which things, as they are, present themselves to us and are the source and measure of all knowledge, and therefore of truth. His metaphysics then, is likewise a realistic metaphysics, and its roots must be in the reality which we all know. Consequently, at the origin of metaphysics, we must reflect upon our direct and ordinary knowledge, which arises from our immediate experience of the real world. Maritain uses the term "common sense" to refer to this kind of pre-philosophical, pre-scientific and pre-reflective knowledge of things. Here, in the first intellectual contact of the human mind with the really existing sensible world, an understanding of being is immediately and spontaneously generated. At the first awakening of the intelligence, the first spontaneous understanding englobes a concept of being.

I find it everywhere, everywhere itself and everywhere varied. I cannot think anything without positing it before in my mind ... it is being which is first known and into which every object of thought is resolved for the intellect.³

This grasp of being in common sense is not simply an acceptance of a given or of a factually present, or simply of a particularized thing. In this initial understanding of being, there is, though implicit and not recognized as such, the very intelligibility of being itself and of its first principles. This first concept implies or necessitates^{es} all the primordial intelligibilities of being, including even its analogical character.

For being is a primordial and common object of concept...which...is itself and right from the start essentially diverse in the diverse objects in which the mind meets it.⁴

This common sense grasp of being includes the intelligible necessities of being to such an extent that even the non-philosopher, operating only within the realm of common sense, is able to reach true pre-philosophical conclusions concerning fundamental problems. These conclusions include a pre-scientific, pre-philosophical knowledge of God, of human personality, of free will and of other most vital practical conclusions.⁵ Though at the common sense level the metaphysical concept of being is not disengaged but "disguised, invisible,"⁶ its intelligible force is fully present.

The spontaneous process, by which the intellect, at this common sense encounter, immediately generates a concept of being, is a natural total abstraction which is opposed, as we shall see to the formal abstraction that is involved in the metaphysical intuition of being itself. Borrowing a term from Yves Simon, Maritain calls this abstraction an "extensive" abstraction.

...we perceive the notion of being to be the most extensive, the widest of all notions. But we have not yet disengaged the properties of beings as the primordial source and focus of intelligible mystery.⁷

The understanding of being as the most extensive of all concepts is not merely implicit, it is explicit in the knowledge of common sense.⁸ Common sense puts all objects into this concept. The common sense grasp of being

is therefore as universal or as extensive as the metaphysical understanding of being itself. Common sense, then, is more general, more extensive than the particularized, individual sciences which are subsequent to it.⁹ Moreover, since the initial grasp of being is spontaneous and immediate, common sense grasps what it does grasp without flaw or error, for being, at this stage, "cannot deceive us, since, being the first, it cannot involve any construction effected by the mind nor, therefore, the possibility of faulty composition."¹⁰

It must be emphasized, as I have already said, that the intelligibilities of being and their intrinsic necessities are discovered spontaneously by the human intellect in the sensible world, even though this world is, indeed, a world of contingency and change. Despite the contingent character of the sensible world, there are stabilities and necessities in that world which are immediately open to intelligence. Maritain well understood that contingency and necessity are not purely and totally opposed in the real world, and, therefore, are not always mutually exclusive. On the contrary, he saw that the real sensible world is a world of contingent necessities, thus eliminating the original sin of Platonism, Kantianism and Transcendental Thomism, namely their assumption that no necessary and universal knowledge could be derived from the sensible world.

The concept of being which I have been describing up to this point is not, of course, the subject or the formal

object of metaphysics as a scientific discipline. This concept which we all possess at the level of common sense is called by Maritain the "vague" concept of common sense. In our ordinary, everyday common sense knowledge, we do not disengage being - "real being, in all the purity and fullness of its distinctive intelligibility - or mystery."¹¹

I have emphasized and re-emphasized the content of the vague concept of being found in common sense, even though this concept is not the subject of metaphysics as such. It is important to understand that at the level of common sense, the intelligence has already implicitly and blindly, as it were, grasped the basic intelligibilities which become explicit in metaphysics as we move from the vague concept to the philosophical concept. Thus is established what Maritain calls the second phase of metaphysics, in which we identify being as the "subject" of metaphysics, that which metaphysics studies and for which it seeks explanation and causes.

As already pointed out, the vague concept arises without any a priori imposition of the mind on reality, without any intellectual restructuring of experience. Rather, there is a grasp of the intelligibility that is found in the diverse entities presented to the mind in ordinary experience. When we pass from this vague knowledge to the explicit knowledge of metaphysics, it is likewise important to note that, for Maritain, what happens in this movement is not the addition of some new intelligibilities of being to existence and the principles of being and existence as they are found in the

vague notion, and, therefore, also in the real world.

Common sense attains the same objects as metaphysics¹², but in a different way¹³, and is, indeed, an "incomplete" knowledge.¹⁴ The act by which we disengage being from its immersion in common sense is called by Maritain "an intuition." His formal definition of this intuition is "the intellectual perception of the inexhaustible and incomprehensible reality thus manifested as the object of this perception."¹⁵ He adds, "It is this intuition that makes the metaphysician." Since this is a disengagement of what exists englobed in common sense, the intellectual perception includes the perception of being and its properties, the perception of its transcendental character and its analogical character.¹⁶ This intuitional disengagement is achieved by formal abstraction which is distinguished, of course, from total abstraction.

Maritain proposes to call abstraction "visualization" rather than "abstraction" because of the misunderstandings and the various connotations attached to the word "abstraction." Therefore, total abstraction is called "extensive visualization."¹⁷ In extensive visualization, the intelligible object is there (and this is the case in the common sense grasp of being), but is "wholly implicit or blind." Formal abstraction, or intensive visualization, places before the mind universal types and essential intelligibilities explicitly abstracted and laid bare.¹⁸ In the case of metaphysics, intensive visualization, or formal abstraction, yields a concept of being in which being is understood

in its purity, not as found in sensible objects alone, but as open simply to the world of intelligibility and of real or possible existence.

Thus, at this level of visualization, it can be seen that being does not imply sensible being, that being as such, in its pure intelligibility, abstracts from all matter. Because of this purification or disengagement of the concept of being from the sensible beings in which we initially find it, the second phase of metaphysics, which now deals with this disengaged concept of being, is called "transensible." It is the realm of the trans-sensible because now being itself, even when found in sensible beings, is seen to transcend the sensibility of the object and to exist in a realm of pure intelligibility.

For the same reason, this intensive visualization is identified with the third degree of abstraction of traditional Thomism, and is at the highest level of conceptual immateriality.

It should be noted that Maritain identifies all three degrees of abstraction as being intensive visualizations and formal abstractions. Thus we read in the Preface:¹⁹

There is thus a series of successive courts of scientific jurisdiction corresponding with successive levels of intelligibility. We must pass from one to another, drop one veil after another, and so ascend to increasingly pure degrees of formal visualization so long as there is still something left to see in the object, something which could not be seen hitherto, because on the level which had been reached it was still hidden, lay beyond the jurisdiction to which appeal was made. We are thus made conscious at once of the indigence and the greatness of the

human mind which can enter the being of objects only by gradual stages, by divesting them first of this, then of that objective determination, of this and that stratum of knowability, sensible first, then intelligible-physical, then intelligible-mathematical, which conceals what still awaits our perceiving. For a pure spirit there could be no question of degrees of abstraction or visualization. It would not abstract. It would see everything in an object from within and as involved in its being itself, down to the final determinants of its singularity. The vision of an Angel represents a knowledge at once and indivisibly metaphysical, mathematical and physical, and which even comprises the intellectual equivalent of sense perception. All these things are distinct for us only because we are intellects that derive from material things themselves by means of the senses, the objects on which they feed. To reject abstraction is to refuse humanity.

It is essential to note that this movement from the vague concept to the intuition of being is achieved not by way of additional content of knowledge, not by way of induction, not by way of demonstration, but simply by a reflective disengagement of being in its trans-sensible intelligibility. It simply drops all that flows from or pertains to the materiality of corporeal sensible being. It is, therefore, ontological knowledge, an understanding of real being, whether existent or possible. This concept of being, which is the result of the metaphysical intuition, provides the subject of the second phase of metaphysics, namely, that which metaphysics studies and for which it seeks explanation and causes. It provides also the formal object of the discipline and gives rise to and specifies the habitus metaphysicus.

At this phase, metaphysics deals with the inferior analogates, in which we apprehend being de facto. Separated from God, as really existing beings, are not yet included in the metaphysical viewpoint. However, since metaphysical knowledge at this level is trans-sensible, it is possible and, according to Maritain, necessary for the metaphysician to consider the structure of purely immaterial beings, even of infinite being, though at this point one does not yet know whether such exist or even whether they are positively possible. Maritain points out that, in the Summa, St. Thomas develops a doctrine concerning the Angels which rests upon revelation. Yet, Maritain also maintains that woven into this presentation is a metaphysical analysis of the structure of a finite pure spirit which can be disengaged from the data of revelation and viewed simply at a metaphysical level. In fact, he says, "He who has not meditated on the angels will never be a perfect metaphysician."²⁰

By the same token, Maritain maintains that although the study of man belongs to the philosophy of nature, the soul, in its spirituality, comes also under the consideration of the metaphysician. The intuition of being which reveals its pure intelligibility likewise reveals its inexhaustible intelligible richness, richness such that we can neither grasp nor express it in a single concept, however analogous it might be. Consequently, in the second phase of metaphysics, we not only elaborate the concept of being itself and work out its internal structure in terms of essence and

and esse and its consequent analogous character, but we explicate that intelligibility in a series of concepts which deal with modes attached to being itself. Thus, we arrive at the transcendental modes, such as the good and the true, or specialized modes, such as substance. Moreover, the existential character of being involves the development of first principles or judgments which themselves reveal an additional richness. In the Preface Maritain himself works through the reflective and analytic explanation of the principles of identity, sufficient reason, finality and causality.²¹ The first judgmental principle is the principle of identity, of which he gives a rather elaborate exposition in the Preface.²²

Thus, at this level, basic intelligibilities of being are endlessly mined and elaborated. Once we have established the contingency based on the distinction between being and its act of existence, as we find it in all the inferior analogues of being which we directly know, and, further, after we have established the principle of causality, a truly philosophical search can be made for the causes of being, thereby transforming metaphysics into a true science. That is to say, metaphysics provides a knowledge of its subject through the principles or causes thereof.

The second phase of metaphysics consists of trans-sensible knowledge and analogous knowledge, but it is dianoetic in the sense that, at this level, and prior to the discovery of the causes of being, we have direct access to all the analogues which we find in experience, and we grasp them in their

very being, at least up to some limit of intelligibility. Therefore, at this stage, we apply analogous concepts to the analogates because we know the analogates.

As we now proceed to the third phase of metaphysics, in which the causes of being are established and, therefore, in which not only the possibility, but the existence of God is established and brought under the formal object of metaphysics, we pass from dianoetic to ananoetic knowledge. Ananoetic knowledge is knowledge in which we have to think objects, which are otherwise unthinkable and unknown, by means of analogies drawn from the inferior analogates of the second phase and which we do know. Thus, our knowledge of God is purely and simply based on applications of analogies to a mode of being of which we have no direct understanding.

We can recall how Maritain maintains that the vague concept of being gives every man an adequate base for a certitudinal knowledge of God. Here, in the third phase of metaphysics, in natural theology, that certitude becomes a scientific one, as the proof is disengaged and laid bare.

In the Degrees Maritain gives a sample of the sort of demonstration we can use to establish the existence of God. It begins with the reflection on "thought," which discovers both its intrinsic value and its essential contingency, and then moves through the principle of causality to a thought "which has itself as its existence and as its object."²³ At this point, therefore, we reverse the order

of the analogates. We had to establish the inferior analogates within the second phase of metaphysics and, through them, move to the first cause of all being, so that now we see that the first cause is itself the primary analogate on which all others in the hierarchy of the analogy depend, and through which they are all ultimately to be explained. Thus, metaphysics is completed as a science. Moreover, while in the second phase we saw being as purified from material conditions and from all matter, and, therefore, had reached a trans-sensible knowledge, here we reach a trans-intelligible knowledge, since we can have no dianoetic knowledge of God.

Here, finally, is fully revealed the majesty and the misery of metaphysics, of which Maritain writes at the very beginning of the Degrees. Metaphysics reaches its culmination in the ananoetic grasp of God, the infinite being, the pure act of existence. Herein lies its majesty. But we reach God in metaphysics only blindly. Despite our ananoetic effort, God remains a hidden God, and we do not reach Him in Himself. Left to itself, metaphysics, in the very hour of its greatest success, seems to be a tragic failure.

At this point, not only does metaphysics become a completed science, that is, an understanding of its subject matter and its causes with scientific certitude, but it has become also a wisdom. Wisdom is "a supreme knowledge having a universal object and judging things by first principles." Above all the human disciplines,

metaphysics is the only one that judges all things; that is, only metaphysics has an object so universal that it is transcendent and exercises this judging in the light of the highest of first principles. Beyond it lie only the two supernatural wisdoms which Maritain recognized, namely theological wisdom and mystical wisdom. These, indeed, surpass metaphysics in the line of wisdom. At last all three wisdoms will give way to the final vision of God.²⁴

Looking back now, we can see why metaphysics, according to Maritain, includes a critique of all knowledge. As the highest knowledge and as a wisdom, it judges not only its own first principles epistemologically, but also the principles and the hierarchy of all other human disciplines. This, then, is an outline of Maritain's metaphysics. Several points, however, require special treatment.

Maritain has spoken constantly about the "concept" of being. He also maintains that there is a "concept" of existence. He has repeated over and over again the fundamental Thomistic doctrine that being is the first apprehension of the mind and is that into which all other apprehensions are ultimately to be resolved. In the Degrees, the emphasis lies on the concept of being or simply on "being." The act of existence is indeed emphasized and discussed, but the importance of the act of existence does not seem to come out as clearly as it does in some of his other works. I think the reason for this is that in the Degrees of Knowledge, where he is doing epistemology, or the first part of metaphysics, he is heavily dependent on John of St.

Thomas, whose epistemology rests likewise heavily upon the nature of the concept. Therefore, to supplement the meager treatment of existence as we find it in the Degrees, we have to turn to some of the other interrelated presentations.

Our question is this. Given Maritain's emphasis on the "concept" of being, and even on a "concept" of existence, does he not risk losing the unique Thomistic understanding of the very act of existence itself, of the esse?

Being is what is first in our knowledge. How is this to be understood? Maritain tells us:

The intellect. . .in the initial upsurge of its activity out of the world of sense, in the first act of self-affirmation accomplished by expressing to itself any datum of experience, it apprehends and judges in the same instant. It forms its first idea (that of being) while uttering the first judgment (of existence), and utters its first judgment while forming its first idea.²⁵

In the first contact with reality, whatever the particular experience may be in which that contact takes place, the intellect is actuated both in simple apprehension and in the judgment, actuated simultaneously by a reciprocally caused and mutually related grasp of the subject of the act of existence and the actual exercise of the act of existence itself. The latter is not grasped through simple apprehension. Yet the intellect does intentionally grasp the very act of existing of the entity discovered outside the mind. It not only grasps this act, but it expresses it by affirmation and projection.²⁶

Grasp of existence as the very act of existence, as existentia exercita, is proper to the judgment and cannot be reduced to a concept or an essence. "But existence is not an essence; it is shut off from the whole order of essence."²⁷ "It is judgment which the act of existing confronts."²⁸

Being is that which exercises the act of existence. It can be grasped in simple apprehension and, therefore, in a concept. But this concept is a privileged concept which transcends the order of essence and overflows simple apprehension because of its relationship to the act of existence;

... a privileged idea which is not the result of the process of simple apprehension alone but a laying hold of that which the intellect affirms from the moment it judges, namely the act of existence The ideas of being ... precede the judgment of existence in order of material or subjective causality; and the judgment of existence precedes the idea of being in the order of formal causality.²⁹

The abstraction proper to metaphysics does not proceed from a "simple apprehension" or an eidetic visualization of a universal more universal than the others. It proceeds from the eidetic visualization of a transcendental which permeates everything and whose intelligibility involves an irreducible proportionality or analogy - A is to its own act of existing (esse) as B is to its own act of existing (esse)....³⁰

Although Maritain does indeed admit a "concept" of being and locates that concept in simple apprehension, it is like no other concept. It is "privileged" and it is "unique." Therefore, he emphatically refuses to reduce being, insofar

as it is visualized in a concept, to the order of essence. It may be apprehended by simple apprehension, but not by simple apprehension alone. Being, as the subject of existence, is intrinsically related to the act of existence, which is simultaneously reached, initially in the first judgment of the mind. This judgment coincides with the first act of simple apprehension. Being is differentiated from all other concepts by this intrinsic relationship.

Moreover, Maritain asserts the reality of essences and their act quality within their own order. The intelligibility of the essence is fundamentally a structured potency for the act of existence. Therefore, while he calls the act of existence a super-intelligible with reference to the intelligibility of essence, he also indicates that the true intelligibility of the order of essence is derived from the super-intelligibility of the act of existence itself. We know potency through act. Essence is not pure potency; it is a structured potency having its own intelligibility. Yet this intelligibility is derived from the act of existence.

Thus, in the very first grasp of being, acquired from the contact of the intellect with sensible reality, being and existence, or the subject of existence and the act of existence, are seen to be really distinct in the inferior analogates of being. They are seen to be in a relationship which differentiates and yet binds them together, a relationship which is unique to each being and yet common to all beings, so that the analogy of being is one of proportionality.

The very notion of essentia signifies a relation to esse, which is why we have grounds for saying that existence is the primary source of intelligibility. But not being as essence, or an intelligible, this primary source of intelligibility has to be a super-intelligible. When we say that being is that which exists or is able to exist, that which exercises or is able to exercise existence, a great mystery is contained in these few words. In the subject, "that which," we possess an essence or an intelligible - insofar as it is this or that, insofar as it possesses a nature. In the very "exists" we have the act of existing or a super-intelligible. To say "that which exists" is to join an intelligible to a super-intelligible; it is to have before our eyes an intelligible engaged in and perfected by a super-intelligibility. Why should it be astonishing that at the summit of all beings, at the point where everything is carried to pure transcendent act, the intelligibility of essence should fuse in an absolute identity with the super-intelligibility of existence, both infinitely overflowing what is designated here below by their concepts, in the incomprehensible unity of Him Who is?³¹

It is the judgment which first grasps, expresses, and intentionally apprehends existence as a true act of an external being, and therefore according to its proper nature. Nevertheless, Maritain maintains that besides this judgmental understanding of existentia ut exercita, there is a concept of existentia ut significata. This, he holds, is truly a concept in which existence is conceived per modum quidditatis, after the fashion of a quiddity,

presented to the mind not insofar as a subject has it, but, rather, insofar as it can be conceived per modum quidditatis as constituting a certain intelligible object ...³²

There is a concept of existence. In this concept, existence is taken ut significata, as signified to the mind after the fashion of essence although it is not an essence.³³

Despite Maritain's insistence on the conceptualization of being, as well as the conceptualization of existence ut significata, there can be no doubt that his metaphysics is existential to the highest degree, but without dissolving essences either into pure limits, or otherness, or an emptiness which is posterior to existence itself.

Finally, there are two appendices that I would like to add to this presentation.

The first of these concerns "subsistence." In his analysis of the structure of beings, Maritain accepts the modus subsistentiae as a distinct part of that structure. The modus subsistentiae terminates the essence in the order of essence and makes it a true *sopposit*. By so terminating it, it also makes it capable of receiving the act of existence. I feel obliged to add this to the general structure of his metaphysics because he insists on it, even to the extent of writing a special appendix for the Degrees, "On the Notion of Subsistence," consisting of pp. 434-4 but I confess that I can neither explain nor defend the modus subsistentiae. I do not understand it, and I think it violates the fundamental Thomistic analysis of the metaphysical structure of being.

A few additional comments on Maritain's intuition of being are in order.³⁶ In the course of this paper I have given what I consider his technical definition, a definition which seems to me to be quite reasonable, namely, a direct and immediate intellectual apprehension of intelligibility, or a super-intelligibility, if you will. Yet Maritain frequently speaks in almost ecstatic terms about this intuition as an

event which sometimes is like a sudden illumination, occurring to different people as a result of different sorts of shocks or experiences. At times, he describes it almost as though it were some sort of natural mystical illumination, or even a sort of grace.

I would handle these descriptions by distinguishing between a strictly philosophical epistemological presentation of this particular intuition and a humanistic approach to it as it occurs actually in people's lives. I, myself, think that his epistemological explication of the intuition itself is sound. I also think that his humanistic and poetic descriptions of the intuition are sound but must not be taken to be philosophical, and must not be subjected to metaphysical or epistemological criticism. I think that the full realization, the express, direct insight into the act of existence, or into being, can be an experience that is emotional, profound and very, very personal. It is in the nature of a realization or of a sudden seeing, like the flashing out of an understanding, of which Plato speaks in his Seventh Letter. It is something like the real assent that Cardinal Newman described. It would be parallel to a situation in which what Newman describes as a notional assent suddenly becomes, for some individual, under some kind of stress or special motivation, a real assent.

I believe that in my own almost lifelong study of metaphysics, I have had several such moments, precisely with reference to the intuition of being, moments of sudden realization accompanied by a deepening insight and by a kind of spir-

itual excitement, that flowed from the insight and, in turn, enhanced it. Consequently, I think that the humanistic and poetic descriptions given by Maritain of the sudden intuition are not at all fanciful. They should, however, be taken as humanistic descriptions and not as philosophical analysis. I think, further, that his use of humanistic methods to bring out the importance and the true meaning of philosophical insights and positions is a measure of the seriousness with which Maritain lived the life of a true philosopher. You will all recall that he had a certain contempt for the professor of philosophy or for the man who dealt with philosophy as a lawyer might deal with statutes or a mathematician with tables. Maritain was dead serious about metaphysics.

NOTES

1. Jacques Maritain, Les degrés du savoir, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1948). trans. Gerald B. Phelan in The Degrees of Knowledge, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959). Hereafter referred to as Degrees.
2. Degrees, p. 80.
3. Degrees, pp. 210-11.
4. Degrees, pp. 211; 214.
5. Jacques Maritain, A Preface to Metaphysics, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1948), p. 29. Hereafter referred to as Preface.
6. Preface, p. 33.
7. Preface, p. 31.
8. Preface, p. 32.
9. Preface, p. 29.
10. Degrees, p. 214.
11. Preface, p. 44.
12. Degrees, pp. 214-15.
13. Preface, p. 229.
14. Preface, p. 31.
15. Preface, p. 44.
16. Degrees, pp. 214-25; Preface, p. 44.
17. Preface, p. 75.
18. Preface, p. 76.
19. Preface, p. 84.
20. Degrees, p. 221.
21. Preface, p. 91.

22. Preface, pp. 91-7.
23. Degrees, p. 224.
24. Degrees, pp. 24-54.
25. Jacques Maritain, Existence and the Existent, (New York Pantheon, 1948), p. 23. Hereafter referred to as Existence.
26. Degrees, p. 98, footnote 3.
27. Existence, p. 22.
28. Existence, p. 23.
29. Existence, p. 26.
30. Existence, p. 30.
31. Existence, pp. 34-5.
32. Degrees, p. 98, footnote 3.
33. Existence, p. 33.
34. Ibid.
35. Existence, pp. 36-7.
36. In the Preface, footnotes on pp. 59-60, Maritain takes notice of some of the criticisms directed against his intuition of being. This text contains some very important clarifications.

SOME REMARKS ON METAPHYSICS

AND KNOWLEDGE BY MEANS OF NOTIONS

COMMENTARY ON "Maritain's Metaphysics" by R. J. Henle, S.J.

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Father Henle has succeeded in one of the most difficult philosophical tasks according to Maritain, namely, the exposition of knowledge by means of notions.

There is no more thankless task than trying rationally to distinguish and to circumscribe - in other words, .. to raise to a scientific or philosophical level - common notions that have arisen ... as ambiguous as they are fertile, and which nevertheless envelop a core of intelligible meaning. Such concepts are nomadic, not fixed; they are shifting and fluid. Now they are used synonymously, now in opposition to one another. Everybody is the more at ease in using them as he does not know exactly what they mean. But as soon as one tries to define them and separate them from one another, hosts of problems and difficulties arise. One runs the risk of being switched onto a wrong track while attempting to bring out the truth.¹

Maritain uses the term "notion" in many places to signify the distinct kinds of concepts which form the intuitively known, originative, analogical beginnings of human inquiry and which permeate all successful subsequent intellectual development. Notions are fluid, trans-experiential, trans-philosophical concepts which enable one to move with ease from one formality to another, from pre-philosophical knowledge to philosophical knowledge and, further, to metaphys-

ical knowledge. Notions (e.g., the notion of being) present us with that which we first seek to comprehend, although comprehension of their rich contents comes as our inquiry reaches various levels of completeness. Notions are the unifying core which subsist throughout our struggle to elaborate what is contained in human experience. No matter to what heights the human intellect may soar, it remains on solid ground if its notional origins are rich and pure.

Notional materials are far from being homogenous. If a cross-section were made, what we would find, even for a single notional function, would be a series of layers of conceptualization exhibiting different indices of refraction. For example, not only is the existence of stable natures or essences in the corporeal world a postulate of the scientist's pre-philosophy, but in the very practice of science the natural notion of this ontological core furnished by common sense continues to play a role on certain planes.²

The human knower employs ananoetically notional knowledge to slide up and down the schema of immaterial intentional existence - the degrees of knowing - corresponding to the schema of extramental esse. We do this by mining and elaborating the intelligibilities contained within our originative notional knowledge. This originative cognitive activity purifies common sense experience in a way that disposes it to philosophical elaboration.

By "a pure notion of common sense," we mean the understanding of truths that are known in themselves, and of the principles of reason (habitus principiorum); we mean a metaphysics still unformed, but yet an understanding rich in some of the certitudes absolutely fundamental to human life....For philosophy is a knowledge in which the basic certainties of common sense are rediscovered...fashioned by critical reason and scientifically enunciated. It is a knowledge which extends those convictions of common

sense without limit by ever-new discoveries and new demonstrations. It is a knowledge based entirely on the inescapable evidence of the principles which the intellect intuits, rather than on the authority of common sense.³

We draw distinctions within being (reality) and not between realities. This enables us to remain in union with being. Distinction in unity, not distinction as separation, enables the notion of being to remain endlessly rich in what it presents to us.

The originative notion of being, as Fr. Henle pointed out, contains implicitly all that will be disengaged by the metaphysician. However, one must carefully distinguish the metaphysician from the dialectician; both proceed from common sense, but in diametrically opposed directions. Both consider all things, for the subject matter of the dialectician is equal in extension to that of the philosopher-metaphysician.

The philosopher-metaphysician must proceed from principles of real being, whereas the dialectician can proceed from principles of being of reason, or that which accrues to a thing in virtue of its being an object of thought.⁴ The dialectician proceeds with ease from principles extrinsic to real being, a procedure which is death to the metaphysician.

The metaphysician disengages the intelligibility of being which is taken for granted by common sense. For example, the order within being, the gradation of the transcendentals of truth, goodness, beauty, etc., are present to us in common sense, but not explicitly known. When, however, what is taken for granted by common sense is explicitly

known, such knowledge becomes the foundation of knowing with certitude the existence of God via the ways of St. Thomas, etc. In this way, we move from objects which are more intelligible to us (finite being) to an object which is more intelligible in itself, God (infinite being).

This disengagement of the intelligibility of being confronts us with the mystery of being, that I am an existing subject in a world of existing subjects. Each of us is at the center of the universe of existing subjects. This is a mystery because of its supra-intelligibility and because we never have a direct vision of ourselves in this life.

This intuition, which affirms my existence and the existence of other subjects, is an affirmation of being, an affirmation of realities, not as possible actualities, but as actually exercising existence.

Once this intuition is attained, the existence of the world and myself can never be viewed as a mere possibility. The world and I are not necessary beings, but neither are the world and I possibilities. Once a being exists, it can never again be viewed as a possibility. This intuition is "a wordless process of reasoning which cannot be expressed in articulate fashion without sacrificing its vital concentration,"⁵ but its certitude surpasses anything significant by words.

Driven to discover the intelligibilities contained within the above, the metaphysician realizes that all epistemological truth presupposes ontological truth. The human knower can discover the intelligibilities of things because

they conform to the divine intellect. Truth is thus grasped in its sacredness because, in disengaging the intelligibility in things, one conforms his mind to God, who is the reason for our existence, the intelligibility of things and the culmination of our happiness.

The dialectician, however, can take common sense in a totally difference direction, where being becomes purely a logical form and the emptiest and most impoverished of all concepts. As Maritain points out in Approches sans entraves, we have many concepts of existence, at least three, and possibly more (my own view is that there are at least five), but only one brings us to true metaphysical knowledge.

Holding an intuition of being enabled Maritain to be an existentialist without being an anti-intellectualist, since he was able to affirm the primacy of esse, without destroying essences. It also enabled Maritain to be a critical philosopher without falling into idealism because he was able to maintain on different levels what must be assigned to percipere and what must be ascribed to judicare. Further, Maritain was able, by means of his notional grasp of being, to be a personalistic philosopher giving full force to the significance of human subjectivity without becoming a subjectivist.

NOTES

1. Jacques Maritain, Man and the State, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951, p. 1.
2. Jacques Maritain, Distinguer pour unir ou les degrés du savoir, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959). Sixth edition, p. 293. Trans. Gerald B. Phelan in The Degrees of Knowledge, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959) p. 150.
3. Ibid., p. 159, English Trans. p. 82.
4. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, opusculum de natura generis.
5. Jacques Maritain, The Range of Reason, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 88.