

# *Transcendental Thomist Methodology and Maritain's "Critical Realism"*

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Among students of Neo-Thomism, it is standard practice to draw an epistemological divide between Maritain and Gilson, on the one hand, and the Transcendental Thomists (e.g., Joseph Maréchal, Karl Rahner, and Bernard Lonergan), on the other. Both parties profess realism. By "realism" I mean the claim that our basic concepts are valid for a non-mind dependent world. But this espousal takes two forms. For Maritain and Gilson, we are confident in the validity of our basic concepts because one appreciates them as abstracted from real things given in sensation.<sup>1</sup> Concepts are not self-vali-

<sup>1</sup> Speaking of classical realism, Gilson asks, "Is it so difficult, then, to understand that the concept of being is presented to knowledge as an intuitive perception since the being conceived is that of a sensible intuitively perceived? The existential acts which affect and impregnate the intellect through the senses are raised to the level of consciousness, and realist knowledge flows forth from this immediate contact between object and knowing subject." Étienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 206. Also, "The apprehension of being by the intellect consists of directly seeing the concept of being in some sensible datum." *Ibid.*, p. 197. Again, "When the concept of being is abstracted from a concrete existence perceived with the senses the judgment which predicates being of this existent attributes being to it . . . as 'seen' in the sensible datum from which [the concept of being] was abstracted." *Ibid.*, p. 205. See also Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), p. 98n50, 108n125 and *The Peasant of the Garrone*, trans. Michael Cuddihy and Elizabeth Hughes (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 100. For Maritain the "intuition of being" was always engendered *a posteriori* from the intellect's contact with real things given in sensation: "I see [the metaphysician's being] as an intelligible reality which issues from the least thing and in diverse respects belongs to all things." *A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958), p. 63; "We must attain a certain level of intellectual spirituality, such that the impact of reality upon the intellect...gives the objects received through our senses..." *Ibid.*, p. 49. For remarks in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, see: p. 226, "...as if in opening a blade of grass one startled a bird greater than the world;" p. 227 on concept of being making "incomplete abstraction from its analogates;" p. 228 on transcendentals as "realized in the sensible in which we first grasp them" and being as "attained in sensible things by dianoetic intellection." Finally, another

dating and the epistemology is worked out from bottom to top. For the Transcendental Thomist our basic concepts are not *abstracta* but *projecta*. They are an *a priori* of the mind. Far from deriving from sense data, they are dynamically injected into that data, they suffuse that data, and allow the data to stand forth in certain determinate ways.<sup>2</sup>

example from *The Peasant of the Garrone*, p. 136: "...the procedure proper to philosophy, which has its starting point in experience and a prolonged intercourse with the world and with sensible reality."

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Maréchal, Karl Rahner, and Bernard Lonergan all regard the dynamism of the intellect towards Being as a constitutive factor for our consciousness of beings. Maréchal remarks: "As soon as the intellect, meeting an external datum, passes to the second act under the formal motion of this datum and the permanent impulsion of the natural appetite, we have a particular, positive determination subsumed under the universal form of being, which previously was only the framework of and the call for all possible determinations. An 'object' profiles itself before consciousness." Joseph Donceel, *A Maréchal Reader* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), p. 170. Also, on judgment: "Considered as a moment in the intellect's ascent towards the final possession of the absolute 'truth,' which is the spirit's 'good,' [affirmation] implicitly (*exerce*) projects the particular data in the perspective of this ultimate End, and by so doing objectivates them before the subject." *Ibid.*, p. 152. "...the 'datum' represented in us was constituted as an 'object' in our mind through the judgment of affirmation." *Ibid.*, p. 161. "For the subject is really knowing as such only to the extent that he formally takes part in the edification of the object." *Ibid.*, p. 118. The same constitutive approach can be noted in Rahner. Speaking of the agent intellect, Rahner says: "Insofar as [the agent intellect] apprehends this material of sensibility within its anticipatory dynamism to *esse*, it 'illumines' this material..." Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dych (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), p. 225, see also, p. 221. Likewise, "Because it is apprehended in this dynamic tendency of the intellect . . . the particular sensible thing is known as finite, i.e., as incapable in its limitation of filling up the space of this dynamism. Because of this comparing of the particular thing to the absolute and ideal term of knowledge, the particular thing appears as existent (concrete being) in relation to being." Karl Rahner, "Aquinas: The Nature of Truth," *Continuum*, 2 (1964), p. 67. Finally, in Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Longmans, 1965), Lonergan appears to share the same constitutive approach found in Maréchal and Rahner. In fact at p. xxii, Lonergan expresses his intention to incorporate what Maréchal calls the finality of the intellect. Noteworthy are points found in Lonergan's discussion of the notion of being. First, abstraction is described as a provisional disregarding of the intellect's unrestricted objective of being (*ibid.*, pp. 355-6). This suggests that being is an expanse against which things are initially profiled and from which we temporarily depart as abstraction focuses upon some feature. Likewise, judgment is understood as "an element in the determination of the universal intention of being" (*ibid.*, p. 358). This seems to mean that each judgment is profiled against the notion of being. Such a move enables us to see the judgment as an "increment in a whole named knowledge." The move also sets the stage for wondering to arise once more and to lead to further judgments. In sum, McCool, in my opinion, correctly describes both Rahner and Lonergan as "Maréchalian epistemologists" and "Maréchalian metaphysicians," Gerald McCool, "Twentieth-Century Scholasticism," *The Journal of Religion*, 58 (1978), pp. 218-19. For further description and discussion of Maréchal, Rahner, and Lonergan, see John F. X. Knasas, "Intellectual Dynamism in Transcendental Thomism: A Metaphysical Assessment," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 69 (1995), pp. 15-28.

Despite being *a priori*, Transcendental Thomists claim that their *projectum* understanding of our basic concepts avoids Kantian skepticism. The *projecta* are self-validating. The self-validation consists in noticing the ineluctability of the *projecta*. Because real doubt presumes the ability to think things otherwise and because the *a priori* are ineluctable, then no real doubt about the *a priori* is possible. Doubt will occur only within a context that affirms the very things doubted. In short, the doubt destroys itself. This procedure they call: retorsion or performative self-contradiction.<sup>3</sup> The veracity of sense is confirmed by its occurrence within the self-validating context of the mind's *a priori*. Realist epistemology is done from the top down. The crucial and defining moment of the methodology is the application of retorsion.

Transcendental Thomists claim that their validating device of performative self-contradiction simply expresses the "indirect proof" utilized by Aristotle and Aquinas to defend the non-contradiction principle at *Metaphysics, IV*. In dealing with deniers of the principle, Aquinas, commenting on Aristotle, says:

but it is necessary to take as a starting point that a term signifies something both to the one who utters it, inasmuch as he himself understands what he is saying, and to someone else who hears him. But if such a person does not admit this, he will not say anything meaningful either for himself or for someone else, and it will then be idle to dispute with him. But when he has admitted this, a demonstration will at once be possible against him; for there is straightway found to be something definite and determinate which is signified by the term distinct from its contradictory.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the absence of the Transcendental Thomist phraseologies of "retorsion," "performative self-contradiction," "implicit to explicit," and "subjective to objective necessity," Aquinas's thinking, at least at first glance, appears similar to these things. The passage seems to say that because thought to be thought must be definite, then reality is definite. Everything is not its contradictory.

But the identity is an illusion. Only by anachronistically construing Aquinas's opponents as the Kantian opponents of the Transcendental Thomists does the identity appear. But Aquinas's opponents are all realists, a label

<sup>3</sup> For Maréchal's key exercise of retorsion, see *A Maréchal Reader*, pp. 215-17, 227-28; for Rahner, "Aquinas: The Notion of Truth," p. 69; for Lonergan, *Insight*, p. 352 on being as unrestricted. In sum, "Yet the absolute validity of [metaphysics'] truths can be established, since it can be shown that the affirmation of these truths is a condition of the possibility of all human knowledge. . . . This explains the great importance of 'retorsion' in Transcendental Thomism. 'Retorsion' is a technical term which refers to the method of demonstrating an assertion by showing that he who denies this assertion affirms it in his very denial." Joseph Donceel, "Transcendental Thomism," *The Monist*, 58 (1974), p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, Indiana: Dumb Ox Books, 1995), p. 227 (IV.7.611).

from which a Kantian-type of thinker would scrupulously divorce himself. Unlike a Kantian, none of Aquinas's opponents entrenches himself in a skepticism that maintains that the First Principle might be only subjectively true. Rather, all make reality claims. They say that the First Principle is not true of reality; contradiction is true of reality. To a Thomist, this position may be monstrous, but it is a realist one. Correctly understood, the opponents are not in thought but out in reality.

Closer scrutiny of Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* validates this realist characterization. Aquinas divides his opponents into two groups. The first is comprised of Heraclitus, Protagoras, Empedocles, Democritus, and Anaxagoras.<sup>5</sup> They were led to affirm that reality is contradictory because of difficulties. These difficulties included the fact that contraries are generated from the same thing and that contrary opinions appear equally true.<sup>6</sup> Note that in both cases a presumed realism is driving the thinkers to deny the First Principle. Unlike the Kantian, whom the Transcendental Thomist is trying to move from thought to reality, Aquinas's opponents are already in reality, for they are using what they think that they know of reality to deny the First Principle.

Aquinas's second group of opponents are those who deny the First Principle because it cannot be demonstrated. A study of Aquinas's treatment of them reveals some pertinent observations. They can save their own thought and not suffer a reduction to the level of plants only by affirming that what exists is what is perceived. But that result is unacceptable "...because many things are and come to be of which there is neither opinion nor knowledge, for example things which exist in the depths of the sea or in the bowels of the earth."<sup>7</sup> These thinkers likewise cannot be Kantian-style thinkers that begin in subjectivity, for subjectivism is used as a threat against them and their position. In other words, subjectivism is not where these thinkers are but where they will end up. Moreover, when it comes time to criticize subjectivism, Aquinas does not initiate retorsion. Rather, Aquinas simply makes the *a posteriori* remark that we know that things exist unobserved.

If the realist nature of Aquinas's opponents is acknowledged, then one understands how Aquinas's above quoted defense of the First Principle differs from the retorsion interpretation of the same. Despite *prima facie* similarities, Aquinas's defense differs by including a suppressed premise: "Thought is about the real." This residual realism enables Aquinas to catch

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 253 (IV.12.683), 235 (IV.8.637), 250 (IV.12.675), 247 (IV.11.670) and 245 (IV.10.666).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 245 (IV.10.665) and 247-48 (IV.11.669-70).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 265 (IV.15.716).

the deniers in self-contradiction. All that is required is that the deniers say something meaningful. In other words, if thinking is determined by the real, then to employ words to say something definite is to admit that something definite exists. Everything is not its opposite, and so the principle is affirmed. On the other hand, if the real is the contradictory, it is not definite and so thinking itself should not be.

The Kantian denies this realism consisting in the conformity of thought to reality. The Kantian admits only that thinking is determined by thought itself. As a result performative self-contradictions in thinking point to what may be exigencies in thought alone. There is no manifest way to go beyond thought to the real. Aquinas's indirect approach would leave a Kantian cold. But it was never meant to deal with a Kantian. The approach is at home in realism. Taken out of that context, it loses all efficacy.

The anachronism point continues to hold of Transcendental Thomists who cite the *Summa Theologiae*.<sup>8</sup> In his reply Aquinas concedes the following portion of the objection:

For whoever denies the existence of truth grants that truth does not exist: and, if truth does not exist, then the proposition *Truth does not exist* is true: and if there is anything true, there must be truth.<sup>9</sup>

In sum, one cannot deny truth under pain of contradiction. So, the argument presumes that the non-contradiction principle is more than a rule of thought. What is the basis for that presumption? It should be Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, (Book IV) in which, as noted, the opponent is not a Kantian but an *a posteriori* realist. For the Kantian, all the above *Summa* text would prove is that if you are to think, you have to think as if there is truth.

The anachronisms are to the good because philosophically the nagging suspicion remains that ineluctability is just what you would expect if the *a priori* are simply ways you have to think rather than ways reality has to be. The screeching of performative self-contradiction could quite well indicate a grinding of merely mental gears and not any manhandling of reality. A familiarity with less encompassing contexts acquaints us with the ideas of something standing outside a context and the context placing the thing in a different light. Contexts can be limited and distortive. One, naturally and correctly in my opinion, wonders if such is the case with the ineluctable *a priori*. Why may they not be actually limited too?<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *A Maréchal Reader*, pp. 89-91 and "Transcendental Thomism," p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 2, a. 1, obj. 3.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this criticism, see Knasas, "Intellectual Dynamism," pp. 23-26. I understand my criticism to echo generally Gilson's criticism of Maréchal, "It would then be

As mentioned, in the popular mind Maritain is considered an *a posteriori* thinker and an opponent of the transcendental turn in Thomism. And it is true that throughout his writings, Maritain maintained an *a posteriori* source in sensation for our concepts and that his intuition of being thesis, so central for his metaphysics, is no exception to this.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Maritain says “in the final reckoning, the primary basis for the veracity of our knowledge” is the “resolving of the sense’s knowledge into the thing itself and actual existence.”<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is this paper’s contention that in his *Degrees of Knowledge* elaboration of “critical realism,” Maritain effects an out-of-character liaison with the archetypal method of Transcendental Thomism—retorsion.

The thesis of Maritain’s critical realism (“*le réalisme critique*”) is that apart from the issue of the source of our concepts, there exists on the intellectual level a philosophically expressible nexus of thought with reality at least as possible. In other words, from our thought alone, we do not know if anything is actual. Our thought does distance itself from reality as actual. Nevertheless, from our thought alone, we do know how reality has to be if it is to be. In short, thought cannot divorce itself from reality as possible.<sup>13</sup> In particular, we do know simply on the level of thought that the principle of identity is more than a rule of thought. It expresses more than what something has to be to be thought of. It expresses what something has to be even when it is not thought of. In sum, for Maritain a point exists at which thought is self-validating. It is not self-validating of reality as actual as the ontological argument for our thought of God. Rather, for Maritain, thought is self-validating of the real at least as possible. This point confounds what Maritain understands to be the modern project of going from thought to real-

easy to show that nonintuitive thought like ours requires and posits, by the finality of its dynamism, ‘the independent reality of the ends its pursues.’ But, as Fr. Maréchal himself immediately adds, ‘from a strictly critical point of view a dynamic necessity, no matter how ineluctable, can of itself only be the basis for a subjective certitude.’ What resources does the Kantian method place at our disposal in order to objectify that certitude? Absolutely none. To get around this difficulty Fr. Maréchal quickly adds that, if one could show that the reality of the ends of thought is not only a dynamic necessity but also a logical necessity, the task would be successfully completed. But this is not so, for, outside of relying unduly upon the data of the metaphysical critique, such a demonstration would lead only to an abstract necessity of thought which, no matter how absolute, does not guarantee the real existence of its object. In short, critical thought has imprisoned itself and can find no way to be reunited with reality.” *Thomist Realism*, pp. 141-42.

<sup>11</sup> *The Degrees of Knowledge*, pp. 226-28; *A Preface to Metaphysics*, pp. 49, 63.

<sup>12</sup> *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 108n125.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98n50.

ity. Thought for the moderns is one step further back than thought for Maritain. For the moderns thought succeeds in divorcing itself even from the real as possible. Certainly from that point any contact with the real seems impossible to achieve.<sup>14</sup>

Here is a listing of passages from *The Degrees of Knowledge* that express Maritain's critical realism position.

In fact, the intellect, *in virtue of its own proper activity*, perceives that *necessary* law of all *possible* being in an *actual* (and contingent) existent grasped by it *through* the sense.... But for critical reflection it is well to give distinct consideration to the primary datum (revealed by psychological and logical analysis) of the intellectual perception as such. And this is why we...say with R. Garrigou-Lagrange that awareness of the irrefutable certitude of the principle of identity as the law of all possible being is part of the first conscious (philosophical) grasp that constitutes the starting point of critique.<sup>15</sup>

Maritain acknowledges the sense origin of the principle of identity. But then notice the shift. It is not by an appeal to the principle's sense origin that critique validates the principle. Rather for purposes of initiating a critique of knowledge, this abstractive origin can be placed aside. Now the "intellectual perception *as such*" of the principle validates it at least of the possible real. Later we will note just what is seen in the intellectual perception. Again,

...our intellect, in simple apprehension, abstracts from existence in act and in its judgments it does not only judge of that which exists but also of a thing that can or cannot exist and of the *de jure* necessities contained in those essences. Thus, it is primarily with reference to the possible real that the value of intellectual knowledge "is justified," or better, confirmed or made explicit reflexively, and it is in reference to this that the critique of knowledge should primarily proceed.<sup>16</sup>

Maritain concedes that thought does succeed in abstracting its object from actual existence. Nevertheless, having gone that far, thought should acknowledge that its object cannot tear itself from possible real existence. Just in the *abstracta* themselves are contained necessities bearing upon the requirements

<sup>14</sup> "And as for the possibility of being in general, it is certified for us—even independently (*de jure*) of any perception of actual existence—by the very first judicative intuition of our intellect, for it affirms precisely that being is not non-being. But in a philosophy which starts only with thought, a philosophy according to which the mind attains at first only itself, how can we be sure that all our objects of thought are not beings of reason? That is where the Evil Genius plants his barb. That problem was crucial for Descartes (and for Leibniz, too). By the force of that violent splitting in two, that lived contradiction which is at the heart of idealism, must we not at last ask ourselves if being itself . . . is not a being of reason?" *Ibid.*, pp. 142-43.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98n50.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

for the possibility or impossibility of actual existence. Critique primarily proceeds from these.

Especially strong expressions of the epistemologically autonomous validity of thought are found in these remarks:

And as for the possibility of being in general, it is certified, for us—even independently (*de jure*) of any perception of actual existence—by the very first judicative intuition of our intellect, for it affirms precisely that being is not non-being.<sup>17</sup>

And at this point citing Garrigou-Lagrange:

We see at once that it is not only inconceivable, but really impossible, for a thing at once to be and not be. And we thus affirm already the objective and ontological value of the principle of contradiction before any judgment of existence, before reflecting that this primary affirmation presupposes ideas, and before verifying the fact that these ideas come to us by abstraction, from sensible things grasped by our senses.<sup>18</sup>

Maritain's choice of this remark makes clear the relation between his "critical realism" project and the validation of ideas through sense. There is no relation. As mentioned, intellectual perception as such suffices to achieve validation.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 142-43.

<sup>18</sup> It appears to be in this light that Maritain explains verification in metaphysics: "Metaphysics, however, does not verify its conclusions in sense data, nor like mathematics, in imagination. Nevertheless it too refers to the corruptible existence which can be attained by sensation. But it does so not to establish scientifically what are the realities it studies—those namely which constitute the subject matter of metaphysics, the being 'common to the ten predicaments,' created and material being taken as being—nor in order to know their essence." *A Preface to Metaphysics*, pp. 22-3. Also, "Unlike the Philosophy of Nature, [metaphysics] has no need to find its terminus in the verifications of the sense in order to establish those truths which are superior to time." *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 232. Garrigou-Lagrange appears to indulge in retorsion in these words, "Moreover, the intellect sees not only that idealism has not in fact found other evident principles which agree among themselves and with experience, but it sees also that idealism is not able to find others. Why? Because the principle of contradiction is immediately founded on our wholly first notion of being or of the real, presupposed by all other notions, . . ." "Le Réalisme Thomiste et le Mystère de la Connaissance," *Revue de Philosophie*, 38 (1931), p. 76 (translation is the author's). He makes the viability of idealism dependent upon getting outside the notion of being. Realism appears to be critically justified by ineluctability. If not the persons of Maritain and Garrigou-Lagrange, then their positions is what Gilson appears to have in mind when Gilson says, "If you feel that abstraction should not presuppose its object, it would be far better to stop treating it as an abstraction, since there is no longer anything from which it could be abstracted. Make it the idea of some Cartesian thought, but do not try to play two tables at one time." *Thomist Realism*, p. 193.

In fact in a manner similar to the top-down epistemology of Transcendental Thomism, Maritain employs intellectual critique to validate sense, not vice versa.

*Starting from that certainty*, [the intellect] reflexively confirms for itself (“justifies” to itself) the veracity of sense and its own certitude of the existence of the sensible world. Thus, it is nonsense [“*non-sens*”] to posit (as is constantly done) the problem of the import of intellectual knowledge by bringing into question, as real being other than the ego, not, first of all, possible extramental being, but only the existence or non-existence (in act) of the sensible world.<sup>19</sup>

Maritain leaves unelaborated the intellect’s reflexive confirmation of the veracity of sense. My best bet as to what he was thinking is this. The objectivity of the data of sense is no difficult matter, because we already know that our idea of being is true of all possible being. But we can grasp something true for all possible being only by taking it from some actual being. Now, being is taken from the object of sensation. Hence, the object of sensation is an actual. Whatever, noteworthy is how Maritain is using the unity of thing and object on the intellectual level to confirm unity of thing and object on the sense level.<sup>20</sup> Again, Maritain’s realism *qua* critical is done top-down.

Obviously, the heart of Maritain’s “critical realism” is the autonomous “intellectual perception as such.” Just what is it about such a perception that provides critique with the validation it seeks? Two texts give the answer. Following a paragraph that cites Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, (Book IV) the first text reads:

Through the performing of this task fundamental truths, especially the general validity of knowledge and first principles, are humbly confirmed—by reason of the impossibility of their contradictories.<sup>21</sup>

And why is it impossible to affirm the contradictories of the first principles? The second text reads:

All anyone has to do is to take counsel with himself and experience within himself the absolute impossibility in which the intellect finds itself: how can it think the principle of identity without positing the extramental being (as at least possible) whose behavior this first-of-all-axioms expresses? A prime object, intelligible extramental being without which nothing is intelligible: that is the irrefutable

<sup>19</sup> *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 109n75.

<sup>20</sup> Maritain’s procedure is top-down but still different from the top-down approach of Transcendental Thomists. In Maritain’s approach being remains related to sense as an *abstractum*; it never assumes the guise of a *projectum*, or constitutive *a priori*.

<sup>21</sup> *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 79.

factual datum that is thrust upon the intellect in the heart of its reflection wherein it becomes aware of its own movement towards its object.<sup>22</sup>

The mentioned “impossibility of the contradictory” is based on the intelligible primacy of being, such that being is implied in all other intellectual apprehensions. In other words, being is validated by its ineluctability. Because I cannot get beyond it in thought, there is nothing beyond it in thought. A being of reason is conceivable only in reference to something else. Because being cannot undergo a similar reference, it is known not to be a being of reason.

I find this foundation for Maritain’s “critical realism” strikingly similar to the retorsion foundation for Transcendental Thomism. Likewise does Gerald McCool, dean of the Neo-Thomist narrative. In his *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism*, McCool summarizes Maritain’s critical realism this way:

By validating the principle of identity through the technique of retortion and by rooting the objective judgment in extra-mental being at the outset of his philosophical reflection, Maritain provided a reflexive vindication of metaphysics as a necessary science of being.<sup>23</sup>

This talk of Maritain reflexively vindicating metaphysics by the technique of retorsion is guaranteed to warm the cockles of a Transcendental Thomist’s heart. Along with McCool’s claim that Gilson’s lifelong labors in medieval philosophy actually undercut the program of *Aeterni patris*,<sup>24</sup> McCool’s locating Maritain within the Transcendental Thomist orbit is one of the outrageous coups of the volume. But sadly I must admit that Maritain has given his kidnapper the rope. For both Maritain and the Transcendental Thomists, being validates itself by its ineluctability. Simply because we cannot think beyond being, i.e., simply in virtue of the intellectual perception as such, we can be fully confident that there is nothing beyond being; we can know that we are not trapped in an inside locked from an outside. Anything we attempt to use to question the validity of being turns out to be something that presupposes being. Hence, idealism is, Maritain says, “an absolute impossibility—impossible *in itself*.”<sup>25</sup>

I can only say that I wish it were so. As I said *contra* the Transcendental Thomists, ineluctability is just what you would expect from a mere thought

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>23</sup> Gerald McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1992), pp. 120-21.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>25</sup> *The Degrees of Knowledge*, p. 77.

context that happens to be fundamental. If that is what you are dealing with, then you will also have the retorsion phenomenon. So the phenomenon by itself is indecisive between realism and idealism. I admit that I sympathize both with Maritain's critical realism and Transcendental Thomism. The *a posteriori*, or abstractive approach to validate our concepts is a messy and laborious affair. The plethora of sense vagaries, e.g., the hallucination and dream possibilities, the relativity in perception, after-images, bright spots during migraines, the distorting effect of social and cultural biases, etc. must be analyzed one after another. The amount of work does leave one pining for a silver bullet, and the ineluctability of intelligible being seems to be that missile. But just as Aquinas for truth's sake forfeited the ease of Anselm's *Proslogion* argument for the tedious affair of Aristotle's proof from motion, I likewise must balk at the retorsion methodology to defend realism and insist on the trek through the jungle of sense perception.

To conclude, I want to note that retorsion methodology is less of a problem for Maritain than for the Transcendental Thomist. For the latter retorsion is the sole way to secure realism, for the *a posteriori* approach from sense is dogmatic and naïve. But Maritain's critical realism included an admission that being was abstracted from sense. I noted Maritain's acknowledgement of the admission along with his insistence that for purposes of critique critical realism can dispense with it. But even in the "Critical Realism" chapter Maritain's insistence is ambiguous. Despite emphasizing the "primacy" of the "intellectual perception as such" for critique and that "intellectual perception" is the "starting point" of critique, Maritain just as explicitly says, "in the final reckoning, the primary basis for the veracity of our knowledge" is the "resolving of the sense's knowledge into the thing itself and actual existence."<sup>26</sup> The epistemological primacy of sensation is another current, though a minor one, in a chapter that appears to say the opposite, viz., in the final analysis the primary basis for the veracity of our knowledge is the unbreakable unity on the intellectual level of thing as at least really possible and object. Hence, in the wake of criticisms of retorsion, Maritain can retreat to this other current and defend the validity of knowledge on an abstractive basis. In fact that is my suggestion. Retorsion is an alien graft that compromises Maritain's otherwise straight forward *a posteriori* epistemology. Cut it off. And an indication exists that Maritain did so. In his *The Peasant of the Garonne*, Maritain avows that sensed actual existence is "the absolutely basic foundation of philosophical knowledge."<sup>27</sup> Nowhere is any

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 125n108.

<sup>27</sup> *The Peasant of the Garonne*, p. 100.

talk *à la* critical realism about the “nonsense” of tying the import of intellectual knowledge with the existence of the sensible world. Rather, this “nonsense” appears to be in what the preceding remark indulges. Moreover, *contra* Husserl, Maritain’s continued expression of the inseparability of thought and thing thesis<sup>28</sup> makes no mention of the “actual or possible” disjunction omnipresent in *The Degrees of Knowledge*. Finally, *The Peasant* characterizes Aquinas’s philosophical realism as an “integral realism” (“*un réalisme intégral*”).<sup>29</sup> Though this language still differs from Gilson’s language of “methodic realism,” it also differs from Maritain’s own “critical realism” terminology that he so labored to defend in Chapter Three of *The Degrees of Knowledge*.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 131.