

Maritain's Account of the Social Sciences

From *The Degrees of Knowledge* to *The Peasant of the Garonne*, Jacques Maritain made frequent references to the social sciences, their definition, their subdivisions, and their relations to philosophy. However, he never treated the social sciences as a whole in a treatise; and, consequently, they are often mentioned in circumstances where they are not the principal interest. In investigating Maritain's reflections on the social sciences, particularly in his moral treatises, I was at first convinced that he had developed a single, consistent account of them. Later I became convinced that, in fact, there were two different accounts not easily reconcilable. Thus, rather than a fairly coherent survey, we are faced with a dilemma. My aim is to identify that dilemma and to attempt to see whether there is an escape from it.

An initial difficulty is encountered in *The Degrees of Knowledge*. There are several passages in which Maritain refers to the "moral sciences" (*les sciences morales*). In the first instance, he says:

Moreover, we shall consider only theoretical sciences and leave aside the moral sciences which, concerned as they are with the practical side, and proceeding by way of synthesis to the very concrete determinations of action, belong to quite a different chapter of epistemology.¹

¹Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite: Or, the Degrees of Knowledge* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 1959, 34-35. I have replaced "speculative" with "theoretical" for the sake of uniformity.

Maritain does, indeed, consider moral sciences in the seventh appendix to the book, about "The Proper Mode of Moral Philosophy,"² and he does this precisely by looking at the way of synthesis. He canvasses the question of the status of moral knowledge relying, in part at least, on the writings of the great Thomistic commentators, Cajetan and John of Saint Thomas. The first use of the term "moral science," then, refers to the Thomistic tradition in moral philosophy. In a subsequent passage there is a statement which seems to distinguish *between* philosophy and the moral sciences,³ but somewhat further on, in a clearer way, he asserts that "a striking renewal of themes proper to the moral philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is evidenced in the moral and legal sciences of which we have not spoken in this essay."⁴

It is my contention that Maritain means "social sciences" when he speaks of moral sciences in this context. André Lalande has noted that the older name for the human or social sciences in France was moral sciences.⁵ Indeed, this was the case in English; for when John Stuart Mill published *A System of Logic* in 1843, and many editions later in 1872, his main concern was with the logic of the moral, that is social, sciences. An additional piece of evidence to support this interpretation of Maritain is to be found in the vocabulary of Raymond Aron's *La Sociologie Allemande Contemporaine* (translated simply as *German Sociology*). Writing a few years after the appearance of *The Degrees of Knowledge*, Aron refers to moral sciences in his chapter on Max Weber.⁶

So the term moral science is used by Maritain both to refer to the Thomistic tradition in moral philosophy and to the modern social sciences. We must address the problem of how these two kinds of *science* are related.

From the instances cited, all the indications are that Maritain be-

²*Ibid.*, 456.

³*Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁴*Ibid.*, 66.

⁵André Lalande, *Vocabulaire Technique et Critique de la Philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962, 958).

⁶"L'originalité des sciences morales tient avant tout à la satisfaction particulière qu'y trouve la curiosité de l'esprit grâce à la 'compréhension.'" *La Sociologie Allemande Contemporaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966), 91. The first edition appeared in 1935.

lieved that the character of the social sciences depends on settling the larger issue concerning the character of the study of nature itself. It is imperative, then, first to examine what, if any, connections exist between philosophy and science when the study of nature is at stake.

Let us assume that, once the modern sciences of nature are established, there are generally three ways in which the philosophy of nature will be understood. First, there is the view, now identified with positivism, that the discovery of science, notably physics, has completely eliminated the old philosophy of nature. There are sciences of nature; there is no philosophy of nature. If philosophical concerns are relevant, this is so only in meta-scientific inquiries about the logic and methodology of the sciences. In a once common formulation, philosophy was called the logic of the sciences. In any case, philosophy no longer had any content of its own. Secondly, taking as its starting point scientifically established data, a philosophy of nature is developed, not as a parallel kind of inquiry, but as an extension of the sciences of nature. This seems to be the significance of Bergson's approach in *Creative Evolution*. The work is essentially a philosophy of nature.⁷ Thirdly, there is the view that the discovery of the sciences of nature has not eliminated the validity of the philosophy of nature, as understood in the Aristotelian tradition, even though Aristotelian "science" has definitely been replaced.⁸ Thus there is a dual knowledge of nature asserted, but it remains to examine how that duality is to be understood. Maritain offers a conception of the two kinds of knowledge as distinct, though complementary. Suffice it to say that his conception did not necessarily meet with acceptance in Thomistic circles.⁹

⁷See Henri Gouhier, "Le Bergsonisme dans l'Histoire de la Philosophie Française," *Revue des Travaux de L'Academie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, Fourth Series, 1959, First Semester, 189-191. Maritain says: "With regard to Bergson it should be added that his direct objective was perhaps more in the order of the philosophy of nature than of metaphysics." *Science and Wisdom* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1954), 48, n. 1. The book was based on three lectures given in 1934.

⁸See Yves R. Simon, "Maritain's Philosophy of the Sciences," in Jacques Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951).

⁹F.G. Connolly, *Science versus Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957).

Though the study is out of date, it does give some valuable information of nature in the 1950s. Stated in the simplest terms, Maritain maintains that there are two kinds of analysis of nature which together constitute the generic study of nature. They are empiriological analysis and ontological analysis. The two differ in their basic focus. While empiriological analysis is a focus on what Maritain calls "the observable and measurable as such,"¹⁰ and, accordingly, is subdivided into empirio-schematic and empirio-metric inquiry, the ontological analysis of nature is focused upon intelligible being. Furthermore, there is a sharp difference between the two as to the resolution of their concepts: empiriological analysis depends upon the "permanent possibility of sensible verification and measurement," while ontological analysis resolves its concepts in intelligible being, essences.¹¹ Perhaps the contrast between the two can best be summed up as follows: the empiriological analysis of nature is a theoretical discipline bearing on phenomena and their laws, utilizing mental constructs (*entia rationis*), employing causal explanation in terms of proximate or apparent causes--though clearly excluding teleology--and resolving its concepts in the sensible through verification, or, if we accept Karl Popper's rectification, through falsification. On the other hand, the ontological analysis of nature is a theoretical discipline, bearing on corporeal substances, ordinarily not having recourse to mental constructs, employing causal explanation in the broad Aristotelian sense, and resolving its concepts in intelligible being--that is, the intelligible essence. Empiriological analysis cannot completely sever all connection with being, but its "'ontological index'...is indeed very weak."¹²

Having distinguished the two kinds of analysis, and noting that even when they use the same language, it is often with a different meaning, Maritain then argues that they are complementary studies. Modern physics is not only an empiriometric kind of inquiry, but in Maritain's judgment corresponds to the old idea of *scientia media*, being physical as to its content, but mathematical in form, or, in other words, a mathematical reading of physical reality. Biology is primarily an empirioschematic inquiry since the degree to which its findings are subjected to quantification is relatively limited.

¹⁰Jacques Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature*, 75.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 75-6.

¹²Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 194.

Now that Maritain's view on the two kinds of analysis has been sketched, we move on to his views on the relationship between the study of nature and the social sciences. Here there are really two sets of disciplines to be considered. As to the first set--the triad of psychology, sociology, and anthropology--Maritain has maintained that they should be seen as components of the empiriological analysis of nature, that is, they are fundamentally theoretical disciplines. At least that is one account of them. In contrast to this triad, which is Maritain's, there is another triad--composed of history, economics, and politics--supposedly social disciplines as well. Now although the study of history is extremely important in Maritain's educational philosophy, he has consistently argued that history is not a science. The definitive statement of his views on this subject is to be found in *On the Philosophy of History*.¹³ So we shall concentrate on economics and politics for either they are considered to be social sciences or aspire to that status. Nowhere does Maritain appear to consider them as theoretical disciplines, nor indeed does he recognize them as autonomous disciplines--that is, standing on their own apart from moral philosophy.

The main problem in this paper concerns the assertion, at least in some of Maritain's writings, that the first triad is linked to the empiriological sciences of nature or, more simply, that they are sciences in the empiriological sense, and the assertion, in other writings, that two of them--sociology and anthropology--are subordinated to moral philosophy.

The first of the social sciences treated after the exposition of the duality of the study of nature is experimental psychology. It is first because the ontological analysis of psychology was approached after the philosophy of nature and life had been developed by Aristotle. I mean that there is a parallel relationship, between experimental and philosophical psychology. For Aristotle, of course, the study of the human psyche (*Peri psyche* or *De Anima*) was a theoretical discipline. So much is this so that the important analysis of voluntariness, after the confusing treatment of the topic in Plato's *Laws*, is to be found in the *Rhetoric* because it pertains to moral, legal, or political psychology--that is, to practical

¹³Jacques Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), 2-3.

philosophy. In my opinion Maritain's main contribution to philosophical psychology is to be found in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*.¹⁴

Maritain, strongly critical of Bergson's philosophy, did not always do justice to the latter's contribution to this kind of inquiry. As to the corresponding empiriological kind of analysis, experimental psychology, Maritain's argues against behaviorism that introspection has a part to play. Characteristically he stakes out a middle position between those who make introspection the sole avenue of knowledge, and those, including phenomenologists, who flatly reject it.¹⁵ There is no doubt that he was particularly attentive to Freud's contribution to that new discipline once known as physiological-psychology. His essay on Freud is a careful attempt to sort out Freud's positive findings from his errors. Maritain was sensitive to the danger of the philosophical contamination of the social sciences, and he pointed out that Freud had succumbed to the influence of philosophical materialism in his psychology.¹⁶

Maritain also acknowledged Jean Piaget's work in child psychology, but did not thoroughly examine his contribution to the field as he has done with Freud. Had he done so, while accentuating the positive aspects, he might have noted the objectionable features of a theory which rejects philosophical psychology and shows the traces of French idealist philosophy in its epistemology. A thorough examination could hardly ignore Piaget's constant denigration of Aristotelian modes of thought. While recognizing the contributions of such major figures as Freud and Piaget, Maritain did not comment at length on the theoretical

¹⁴Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), Chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁵Placing Thomas Hobbes at the one extreme because of his reliance on introspection in the *Leviathan*, I would take Maurice Merleau-Ponty as a representative of the other position in his *Phenomenology of Perception*.

¹⁶Maritain warns generally about this kind of contamination when he speaks of "the most deplorable metaphysical shackles" in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 46. In Freud's case the "valuable ideas of a psychologist ... are obscured by a radical empiricism and an aberrant metaphysics." "Freudianism and Psychoanalysis," *Scholasticism and Politics* (Garden City: NY, Doubleday and Company, 1960), 140. Maritain also believed that Freud had confused empiriological and philosophical psychology.

disarray in empiriological psychology.¹⁷ In fact, the essay on Freud was the only extensive scrutiny of the subject.

Just as psychology the second of the social sciences in this first set, sociology, is a theoretical, empiriological kind of analysis. There is no doubt that Maritain was quite well acquainted with the French school of sociology (for example, Comte, Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl) and less so with German sociology, particularly Max Weber, whose ideas have greatly influenced epistemological discussions of social knowledge in the United States. Of course, Maritain has examined in great detail the thought of August Comte. Although Maritain obviously rejects Comte's famous law of the three stages and his positivistic conception of knowledge, he does accept the validity of the division of sociology into social statics and social dynamics. Comte had first called the new study social physics. He recognized the profundity of Comte's view that positive sociology could not ignore the ethical and religious dimensions of human life, as Emile Littré attempted to do when he broke with Comte over the subjective synthesis. It is remarkable as well that Maritain supports the idea that sociological inquiry should seek to formulate laws, an idea not endorsed by some sociologists. The works of Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl are mentioned primarily for their views on the relationship between sociology and morality.¹⁸ Whatever data sociology might offer to an adequately considered moral philosophy, it could not replace it. He is particularly critical of Lévy-Bruhl's thesis in this regard.¹⁹

Closely allied to sociology is the third theoretical, empiriological discipline—anthropology. More often than not there are references in Maritain to two branches of that study: ethnography and ethnology, the study of culture and the comparative study of cultures, rather than to the whole of anthropology.

Maritain offers both a critical comment and a constructive proposal when he looks at some aspects of French research in anthropology. He is

¹⁷For an examination of this disarray, see Yves R. Simon, "*Connaissance de l'Âme*," *Gants du Ciel*, (Montreal: Fides, 1944). For a translation of this essay see "Knowledge of the Soul," *The Thomist*, LIV, 2 (1990): 269-91.

¹⁸See Maritain's preface to the third edition of Simon Deploige's *Le conflit de la morale et de la sociologie* (1923) in *Oeuvres Complètes*, II, 1282-4.

¹⁹Jacques Maritain, *Moral Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 265 and 345.

critical of Lévy-Bruhl's famous distinction between the primitive mentality and the civilized mentality, and the evolutionary explanation of the progression from one to the other. Maritain rejects the notion that there are two mentalities, or souls, as Lévy-Bruhl sometimes said, rather than two different states; but he came up with a constructive proposal, for if the two mentalities theory is discarded, along with the questionable use made of it, he proposed his own law concerning the passage from the *magical* state to the *rational* state of the human being in the history of culture.²⁰ The use of the term law has been elaborated in Maritain's philosophy of history.

To sum up the first stage of the argument, we find that Maritain treats the three disciplines of experimental psychology, sociology, and anthropology as instances of theoretical, empiriological analysis; or, to be more exact, there are a number of places where he does so. For there is an antithesis to the theoretical thesis which might be called a practical antithesis. This means that there are other instances where Maritain appears to deny these disciplines theoretical status—hence autonomy—insisting that if they are practical disciplines, they are subordinate to moral philosophy. Take the first instance where his antithesis has been expressed. In *Science and Wisdom*, sociology and anthropology are described as sciences of experimental information connected to moral philosophy. They are "not autonomous sciences" since they fall under "the domain of practical knowledge"; in fact, they are not in actuality sciences at all.²¹

When Maritain examines the various disciplines from the viewpoint of their appropriate place in an educational curriculum based on philosophical principles, especially in *Education at the Crossroads*, there is, once again, the clear statement that sociology and anthropology are "intrinsically subordinated to ethics and natural law."²² What is noteworthy in this context is that Maritain refers approvingly to a book by John U. Nef

²⁰Jacques Maritain, "Sign and Symbol," *Ransoming the Time* (New York: Gordian Press, 1972), 227-39. He refers to the law again in *On the Philosophy of History* and says that Lévy-Bruhl indicated his agreement with the "states" thesis (97).

²¹Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, 171.

²²Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), 80.

in which that author speaks of "analytical and theoretical fields" including psychology, sociology, and anthropology.²³ The reader is puzzled to say the least. On the one hand, these are theoretical, empiriological sciences which would seem to be autonomous, yet, on the other hand, the same disciplines, no longer considered to be either theoretical or autonomous, are subordinated to moral philosophy. If this contradiction is only apparent, it is not easy to see in what manner the two aspects can be reconciled.

Let us now turn to the second set of social studies which are examined by Maritain—economics and politics (Nothing has been said of geography. Whether it is to be classed as a natural science or a field straddling the natural and social sciences is not, to my knowledge, discussed by Maritain). Allusions to economics as a field of research are rare in Maritain's writings. He alludes to economics in the plural according to French usage; there are economic sciences or different subfields of economics in our usage. Little if anything is said about the nature of the discipline or its scope. Nor does Maritain deal with its development from the earlier emphasis on value, at one level of analysis, to the present emphasis—Marxists aside—on utility. Nor does he have anything to say about Keynesian ideas. The only thing we do know is that economics is subordinated to moral philosophy.

The issue of the status of political science has been principally examined in the essay on Machiavellianism. For Maritain, Machiavelli represents the attempt to render political knowledge autonomous, that is, to cut its connection with moral knowledge. Machiavellianism, then, represents "a profound split, an incurable division between politics and morality."²⁴ Furthermore, it is a kind of technical knowledge, not pure theory, that the Florentine promotes or, as Maritain prefers to say, a technical, as opposed to a moral, rationalization of political life. Whenever the question of the autonomy of political knowledge arises, Maritain tends to view in it the perspective of the option between a politics without ethics and a politics subordinated to moral philosophy. Political knowledge is never regarded as a form of theoretical knowledge. The current state of political studies is not surveyed. For instance, if we were to listen

²³*Ibid.*, 81.

²⁴Jacques Maritain, "The End of Machiavellianism," *The Range of Reason* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 137.

to its claims to be a theoretical, empiriological science, in Maritain's sense, we would observe an empirioschematic treatment of political phenomena in comparative politics and developmental politics, where historical understanding and causal analysis are significant. We would observe an empiriometric treatment in which quantitative analysis is employed in regard to opinions, voting, and content analysis. We would note that the latter approach gives rise to a certain self-assurance in its practitioners, that may come with the possession of precise information. If we were to listen to the claims, Maritain thinks we would still have to reject them for if political science produces information, it is not science in the proper sense,²⁵ and it is certainly not autonomous. To deny theoretical status, then, is, *a fortiori*, to deny autonomy. There is no political science which is separate from moral philosophy. Very simply, Maritain has made the Thomistic division of moral or practical philosophy into *monastica*, *oconomica*, and *politica* his own. Economics, obviously, includes the new political economy as well as the old household management.

There is no philosophical position without its difficulties. Surely much more needs to be said about the kind of knowledge and information attained through modern economic analysis and empirical political science, or studies if one prefers. That Maritain's treatment of these two fields is inadequate must be granted; but at least his remarks about economics and politics are consistent.

At this stage a comparison between Maritain and Leo Strauss is useful. Strauss made a very systematic study of a supposedly autonomous theoretical political science and was well known for his critical and, some would say, devastating attack on empirical political science.²⁶

Strauss argued that both the divorce between facts and values on one hand, and that between means and ends on the other, are untenable and, if so, only a kind of political knowledge (and he means political philosophy) which combines consideration of facts and values as well as relates means to ends--let us say efficiency and purpose--is defensible. Up to this point, Maritain would seem to be in agreement with Strauss; but Strauss not only rejects the claims of empirical political science, but the claims of

²⁵Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, 180, n. 1.

²⁶Leo Strauss's strongest attack is found in "An Epilogue" in *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics*, ed. Herbert J. Storing (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1962), 305-27.

sociology as well; and here some elaboration is necessary.

To the extent that Maritain characterizes sociology as a theoretical discipline within the science of nature, its autonomy is not placed in doubt. Nor does he perceive any adverse consequences in attributing autonomy to sociology. Autonomy is denied to a Machiavellian political technology since political knowledge is practical, not technical, knowledge, and thus must be subsumed under practical philosophy--moral philosophy in a broad sense. To the extent that Maritain considers sociology, as well as political knowledge, to be a practical discipline, it, too, is subordinated to moral philosophy. If this were his final position, there would be no significant difference between Strauss and Maritain in regard to the social sciences. The principal difference is that Strauss always denies that sociology is theoretical knowledge, and Maritain only does this on occasion.

Finally, to return to the main issue of this paper. Does Maritain offer us one account of the social sciences or two? I have argued that there are two accounts when it concerns sociology and anthropology. If these two, and psychology as well, fall under the sciences of nature, they are theoretical modes of knowledge and autonomous. If, on the other hand, they are practical modes of knowledge, then they are subordinated to moral philosophy and are not autonomous disciplines. I contend that they are alleged to be theoretical in *Quatre Essais*, *Neuf Leçons*, *Moral Philosophy*, and *The Peasant of the Garonne*. On the other hand, the antithetical view, that they are practical not theoretical, is articulated in *Science and Wisdom* and *Education at the Crossroads*. I contend, then, that not only are there two different accounts of the status of these disciplines, but that the accounts are inconsistent and incompatible. If, inevitably, a choice is required between the two accounts, I would argue for the position, stated in *Nine Lectures on the Primary Notions of Moral Philosophy*, that sociology and anthropology are autonomous, theoretical, empiriological sciences which furnish valuable data to the moral philosopher. They are not, as a result of this, parts of, or subordinated to, moral philosophy. The choice is defended not on the basis of a weight of evidence argument. After all, we are not in a court of law. No, the argument for the choice rests on the fact that Maritain seems to have given more reflection to the bonds between the social sciences and moral philosophy in this treatise than he had ever done before. Regardless of the reasoned choice one makes, I conclude that Maritain leaves us in this situation because the dilemma discerned in his treatment of the social sciences cannot be escaped.