

MARITAIN, RATZINGER AND THE NEW ERA OF INTELLECTUAL CULTURE¹

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I. THE EPISTEMOLOGY/ONTOLOGY DIVIDE OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

In *The Degrees of Knowledge*, without fully explaining himself, Maritain insists that “if unreasonable prejudices” against the idea that “a philosophy of being could...also be a philosophy of mind” can be turned aside, we “might well...see a new dawn break upon a new and glorious scientific era”, one “putting an end to misunderstandings engendered in the realm of experimental research by the conflict between Aristotle and Descartes”, and inaugurating a new era wherein “the divine good of intellectual unity, shattered for three centuries now, would...be restored to the human soul.”²

How so? Beyond claiming that this “new era” would “quite clearly suppose the supreme regulation of metaphysical wisdom”—among the chief concerns of *The Degrees of Knowledge*, to be sure—Maritain in this work gives us no straightforward indication of *where*, in modern terminology, ontology (or “philosophy of being”) and epistemology (or “philosophy of mind”) come together.

II. A DIGRESSION ON THE PROBLEM OF “CLASSIFYING MARITAIN”

In this regard, permit me to voice my suspicion that *The Degrees of Knowledge*, even though it is the work of Maritain’s many that is most explicitly devoted to the problem of how to get beyond the modern ‘turn to the subject’, actually does not represent Maritain’s best ‘guess at the riddle’ of how to overcome the modern opposition of studying

¹ [Editor’s Note: At the author’s request, the Editor has altered the style otherwise used throughout this book to place punctuation marks (commas, periods, etc.) outside of quotation marks, when these do not appear in the secondary source being quoted.]

² Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 66-67.

the process of knowing (epistemology) to attaining a knowledge of being (ontology).

My companion Brooke (with respect to whom Maritain—actually both of the Maritains, but Jacques in particular—we consider our ‘patron saint’) once wrote a book that asked in its title whether Jacques Maritain was “modern” or “ultramodern”.³ But what she meant by “ultramodern” was actually what came later⁴ to be defined rather as “postmodern”: for the work of Maritain, itself quintessentially involved with modernity and/or rather the *overcoming* of modernity, was not modernity at its extreme (which is what “ultramodern” best indicates) but rather modernity in the depths of its dissatisfaction with the ‘turn to the subject’ and the solipsism to which this ‘turn’—in spite of the best efforts of its protagonists both before and after Kant—inexorably pushed its adherents.

Maritain considered suicide preferable to the ‘final interpretant’, the ‘inescapable consequent’ (in its technical *différance* from ‘consequence’), of modernity, or at least so his early pact with Raïssa strongly suggests. It was never the fullest possible development of modernity that Maritain sought (‘ultramodernity’), but rather the way beyond modernity, yet without losing modernity’s gains. These gains, admittedly, if we contrast philosophy with science, were almost solely on the side of science, although philosophy of old was practical as well as speculative, and it was not only but at least *mainly* as speculative that philosophy in modernity constituted, in Maritain’s view, a debacle.

His early work he labeled *Antimoderne*.⁵ It was a blunder, this choice of titles, from which in certain circles his reputation never recovered. “Antimoderne” hovered as a cloud from under which, at least for some,

³ Cf. Brooke Williams Smith, *Jacques Maritain, Antimodern or Ultramodern? An Historical Analysis of His Critics, His Thought, and His Life* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1976).

⁴ Cf. Brooke Williams Deely, “Jacques Maritain’s Reflections on ‘America’: Sign of a New Christendom,” in *Semiotics 2003*, ed. Rodney Williamson, Leonard G. Sbrocchi, and John Deely (Ottawa, Canada: Legas, 2005), 219–33, 223, and John Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 611.

⁵ Maritain, *Antimoderne* (Paris: Revue des Jeunes, 1922).

Maritain could never emerge. And yet he was the first Catholic thinker to anticipate the emancipation of Vatican II from the pre-Vatican II Vatican view that separation of Church and State and tolerance of non-Catholic versions of Christianity were to be tolerated only where and as long as the Catholics did not form the majority within the given state—not so different from the ‘modern’ (or at least contemporary) Islamic view: “One man, one vote—one time”. Even the declaration of death as the due of one who converts to Islam only afterward to fall away and revert to error has its forerunners in the 17th century France of Pierre Bayle. He had to flee upon deciding that he was wrong to convert from being a Huguenot to being a Catholic, since ‘being a Huguenot’, like being a ‘person of a book’ (Jew or Christian), had protected status in the state only so long as the person in error had not ‘seen the light’ and embraced the ‘one true view’ of Islam (or, in France of Bayle’s day, Catholicism). After that, in “lapsing from the truth”, all bets were off.

Maritain was no modern in speculative philosophy, yet in practical philosophy he was a ‘thoroughly modern Millie’. Not only was he the first individual philosopher cited by name in a papal encyclical, but he was cited precisely as the first Catholic intellectual worthy of the name to embrace Democracy and the separation of Church and State that democracy requires in order to be real. And when it comes to the beginnings of modern science, he stands alone among prominent Catholic intellectuals in his evaluation of the Galileo affair as the disaster that it was (marking the limit, as Maritain said, of divine patience with the “means of inquisition”, themselves a great “stain upon human history” and “grave offense against God”⁶). In matters political, his *Integral Humanism* inspired the Latin American world with

⁶ Maritain, *De l’Église du Christ* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1970), trans. Joseph W. Evans, *On the Church of Christ. The person of the church and her personnel* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 181, 211. In the thirteen years spanning 1983–1995, the Cercle d’Etudes Jacques et Raïssa Maritain (in the persons of Jean-Marie Allion, Maurice Hany, Dominique and René Mougel, Michel Nurdin, and Heinz R. Schmitz) established the definitive text of all the Maritain’s writings and brought them to publication in 15 volumes entitled *Jacques et Raïssa Maritain. Oeuvres Complètes* (Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse et Editions Saint-Paul Paris, 1983–1995). The above work appears in vol. XIII, 9–411. (The *Oeuvres Complètes* is hereafter abbreviated by “OC,” followed by volume and page numbers.)

an influence that continues to the present day. In this area, as John Knasas has pointed out,⁷ Maritain moves far beyond what a literalist reader of Aquinas might be inclined to endorse. But Maritain, for all his devotion to the work of St. Thomas, looks always to the *consequences*—indeed, the far consequences⁸—of the thought of being, not to the imaginary horizon of the 13th as “the greatest of centuries”.

III. BACK TO OUR PROBLEM CONCERNING THE EPISTEMOLOGY/ONTOLOGY OPPOSITION

In the question before us, the question of how to conceive the actual relation between the two terms whose significates the moderns distinguished as “epistemology”, on the one hand (the study of the nature and processes or means of human knowing), and, on the other hand, “ontology” (the study of the being of that which is—provided that we can get beyond the processes of knowing and reach all the way to ‘that which is’, which can by no means be presupposed after the ‘turn to the subject’), we have a question to which Maritain in his work constantly called attention, but never himself, I dare say, quite managed to answer. It tantalized him. He understood its importance. And he did everything he could to make his listeners aware of its import. Yet, if we are to judge by the reactions so far to his work on the role of signs in knowing, although he fell short in his lifetime,⁹ yet, like

⁷ John F. X. Knasas, “Aquinas and the Liberationist Critique of Maritain”, *The Thomist* 52.2 (April, 1988): 247–67.

⁸ E.g., the opening paragraphs of Maritain’s “Letter for the *Basilian Teacher*” (April 7, 1962), in *OC XII*, 1218–25.

⁹ Speaking as one who from his student days knew Maritain personally, Thomas A. Sebeok comments that “I have always been perplexed that Maritain remained, in America and elsewhere, essentially unrecognized outside his parochial tradition, and even within, as a serious contributor to semiotics [e.g., *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, eds. Deal W. Hudson and Matthew Mancini (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987) makes no mention of it]...The rich...vein in semiotics...running from Aquinas...through Maritain...has been insufficiently mined by the general semiotics community here or abroad. That mother lode of pure gold is far from exhausted.” (See Thomas A. Sebeok “Semiotics in the United States”, in *The Semiotic Web 1989*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok, with

every great thinker, he bequeathed to posterity to tease out the further implications of what he was “on to” without being able to finalize the matter.

1. Maritain at Princeton: still in the “age of substance”

I am reminded of the tale of Maritain told to me by my former teacher and close friend, the Dominican Friar Ralph Austin Powell. Returned from Louvain in the World War II era, Ph.D. in hand, Powell assumed a teaching position at St. Michael’s College at the University of Toronto in the early years of Gilson’s establishment of the glorious Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies. Yet, after a year of teaching there, Powell resigned, because he found that, as far as he was concerned, St. Michael’s of the day had no interest in real philosophy, but only in the teaching of history of philosophy, and history with a definite slant. He abandoned his faculty status there and returned to his Washington home, retiring to the attic to read the whole of Plato and Aristotle in their original language. Happily ensconced, he was astonished to be summoned by his father, who admonished him that he, the father, had from the beginning misgivings about his doctoral pursuit of philosophy at Louvain, because a man has an obligation to serve the public—a teacher, a lawyer, a doctor. If you need to go back to university for another degree, the father advised, to make yourself useful to society, by all means I will pay your way once again; but what you cannot do is sit at home and do nothing.

Nothing! For a philosopher to steep himself in the Greek of Plato and Aristotle is to do nothing! Ralph Austin was astonished and chagrined, humiliated. But refuge was at hand. Jacques Maritain that year was teaching at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study, and the son was able to secure the father’s support to go and study with Maritain as an interim solution to the problem of “sitting around the house.”

At Princeton at the time, in addition to his lectures, the Maritains would host occasional Sunday gatherings with the students, and these, too, Powell attended until he was a familiar face, and felt comfortable

assistance from Evan P. Young [Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990], 275–395, 311–12.)

enough to ask for a private meeting with Maritain to present for his assessment his own—Ralph’s own—basic philosophical stance. As Fr. Powell tells the tale, the meeting took place in the Maritain’s living room, with Jacques and Raïssa seated at opposite ends of a long couch across from Powell’s chair.

Powell at the time was a convinced idealist, a student of Jules Lachelier, on whose work Powell’s Louvain doctoral dissertation had been based. As Powell held forth, the Maritains listened, with only an occasional question interjected by Jacques. After nearly two hours Powell reached the end of his exposition, and asked for Maritain’s overall assessment. Jacques replied that it was clear that Ralph Austin was indeed a philosopher of considerable depth, and Jacques encouraged him by all means to continue to develop his philosophical thought. He, Jacques, had only one suggestion regarding Ralph’s philosophical position. “I think,” he said, “that you need to introduce into your system the idea of substance.”

Powell went away elated. He had been listened to, praised, and encouraged by none less than the great Jacques Maritain! His vocation as a philosopher had been confirmed! A full three days passed before Powell realized that if he followed Maritain’s suggestion by introducing into his system the idea of substance, the system, which depended on his own co-creation with God each second of the world, would be utterly ruined! Elation gave way to demoralization, and Powell resolved his problems by deciding to join the Dominican Order, where he was required to undergo doctoral studies all over again, culminating in a second—a Thomistic—doctoral dissertation modestly titled *Truth or Absolute Nothing*, and dedicated “To Rev. Humbert Kane, O.P., who knows more about nothing than anyone I know.”

Certainly the idea of substance is central to Maritain’s work, as it was to the work of Aristotle and Aquinas; and it became central, too, to Powell’s own thinking. “The Problem of Identifying More or Less Absolute Unitary Beings in our World”, Powell’s most mature statement of the problem, is published posthumously in *The American Journal of Semiotics* 25.3-4 (2009), 77-126, and can be regarded as the finest fruit of his long-ago private meeting with Jacques Maritain.

2. The need for a move beyond substance: “back to the future”

But what are we to make of Joseph Ratzinger’s thesis that “the undivided sway of thinking in terms of substance is ended; relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality”?¹⁰ How does this claim square with the centrality of substance in Thomistic thought, as Maritain so deftly and indirectly led Powell to see?

The answer, I think, is to be found in the work of the man that Maritain identified as his principal teacher after St Thomas himself,¹¹ namely, John Poincot, who published his Latin work in philosophy and theology under his name in religion, Joannes a Sancto Thoma.¹² The equiprimordial reality of relation with substance does not appear at all when we approach being principally with an eye to the order of so-called *ens reale*, being as it is independently of whatever human beings think, believe, or feel—hardcore reality. From this standpoint, indeed, relation appears rather as *ens minimum*, with substance comparatively *maximum* in the finite order. But this standpoint, the standpoint of “Thomistic Realism” in the modern context, is inadequate to the problem that Ratzinger envisaged, which is the problem of person and personal identity and which is relatively independent of substance, after all, and certainly irreducible to it. Had your mother surrendered you as a fertilized ovum to be implanted by medical means in a woman

¹⁰ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI as of 19 April, 2005), *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 132; reprinted with a new preface, repaginated and with unexplained minor changes in the English (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 184.

¹¹ See Maritain, *Antimoderne*, 144; *Reflections on America* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 74–75; and *Le Paysan de la Garonne* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966), trans. Michael Cuddihy and Elizabeth Hughes, *The Peasant of the Garonne* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 219. See also Williams Deely, “Jacques Maritain’s Reflections on ‘America’,” 221–22.

¹² The matter of the name of John Poincot (1589–1644) is fully discussed in John Deely, “Editorial AfterWord” and critical apparatus to *Tractatus de Signis: The Semiotic of John Poincot*, disengaged from the *Artis Logicae Prima Pars* (Alcalá, Spain) and published in a bilingual critical edition arranged by John Deely in consultation with Ralph Austin Powell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 391–514, 421–24; electronic version hypertext-linked (Charlottesville, VA: Intalex Corp., 1992).

of a completely different race and culture, your substance today—your genotype, in biological terms—would remain what it first was in your mother's womb; yet your personal identity and name would be completely different from what it is. It is the problem of "the semiotic self", as Sebeok and others¹³ have pointed out.

IV. BEFORE ANY POSSIBLE DISTINCTION OF ONTOLOGY FROM EPISTEMOLOGY

Precisely in the being of relation, ontological relation as indifferent to the difference between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*, do philosophy of being and philosophy of mind find their original unity of subject-matter, prior to any possibility of a distinction (let alone an opposition) between "ontology" and "epistemology" such as the moderns essayed. And the first thinker in the Thomistic tradition, perhaps the first philosopher of any tradition, to point this out was John Poinsoot.¹⁴

Relation, Poinsoot demonstrated, is the crossroad of knowledge and being, not only in the Divine Trinity of Persons, as Thomas had pointed out,¹⁵ but as well throughout the order of finite being in its totality, precisely because all knowledge depends upon signs, and all signs consist in ontological relations triadic in type—a thesis associated in our day with Charles Sanders Peirce, without recognition so far that Peirce got the thesis from his study of later Latin thinkers otherwise

¹³ See Sebeok, "The Notion Semiotic Self Revisited", in *Semiotics 1988*, ed. Terry Prewitt, John Deely, and Karen Haworth, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), 189–95; "The Semiotic Self Revisited", Foreword to *Sign, Self, and Society*, ed. Benjamin Lee and Greg Urban (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1989), v–xiv; and "'Tell me, where is fancy bred?': The Biosemiotic Self", in *On the Borderlines of Semiosis* (Imatra: International Semiotics Institute, 1993), ed. Eero Tarasti, *Acta Semiotica Fennica* 2, 221–28; and Norbert Wiley, *The Semiotic Self* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁴ See, in Poinsoot, *Tractatus de Signis*, his "Remarks Super Libros Perihermenias", 38/11–39/11; the Second Preamble, Article 2, 93/17–96/36, esp. 94/25–95/4; and Book I, Question 1, esp. 117/28–118/18.

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274), *Summa theologiae* (1266–73), in *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia ut sint in indice thomistico*, ed. Roberto Busa (Stuttgart-Bad Connstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980), vol. 2, 1.28.1; commented on in Poinsoot, *Tractatus de Signis*, 93/17–96/36.

universally neglected by the moderns (including the Neothomists),¹⁶ and in particular from his study of Poinot's teachers, the Conimbricenses, on the subject of signs.¹⁷

Of course, being and knowing can go their separate ways, when theories accepted as true are in fact false (such as the theological doctrine of Galileo's day that the sun revolves around the earth, as God himself was supposed to have told us).¹⁸ It is only in truth, a Thomist might, with good reason, want to argue, that being and knowing come together, for "truth for finite minds is the correspondence of thought with thing", and such correspondence has to be critically established and verified.¹⁹

¹⁶ See Mauricio Beuchot and John Deely, "Common Sources for the Semiotic of Charles Peirce and John Poinot", *Review of Metaphysics* XLVIII.3 (March 1995), 539-66. Here again Maritain, particularly in contrast with Gilson—who encouraged neglect of the Latin Thomistic development between the 14th and 17th centuries—stands out as exceptional: see Deely, "Quid Sit Postmodernismus?" in *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy*, ed. Roman T. Ciapolo (American Maritain Association: Washington, D.C., 1997), 68-96 (an essay on the work of Étienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain in relation to Poinot).

¹⁷ This seminal treatise (1607) has only now been edited and translated into English as an independent monograph by John P. Doyle—a fitting work to mark the beginning of the first fully postmodern century of an increasingly global intellectual culture: see his bilingual, critical edition, *The Conimbricenses. Some Questions on Signs* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2001).

¹⁸ Cf. Deely, *Four Ages of Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 493-99, for details of the matter, including the scriptural passages (494 n. 11) in which the proper interpretation of the relative motion between sun and earth is directly revealed.

¹⁹ See the first paper in this volume by Steven Jensen, "Why the Senses Cannot Have Truth: The Need for Abstraction."

Yes, but, as Heidegger well asked,²⁰ what is the ground for the prior possibility of such correspondence? It is in the light of this question that Poincot's *Tractatus de Signis*—which so fascinated Maritain, but otherwise suffered neglect in the 20th century era of Neothomism—provides the decisive analysis. The being of things is what it is regardless of what anyone thinks, feels, or believes, indeed. This is the hardcore meaning of *ens reale*. But things are knowable, and, when actually known, things exist not only in themselves (ultimately as substances), but now also in relation to some finite knower; and the status of things in relation to being known is not the status of substance as such (*esse in se*), but rather the being of terminus of a cognitive relation, the *aliud*, as it were, of *esse ad aliud*.

V. THE DIFFERENCE OF OBJECTS FROM THINGS

This understanding of the difference between objects and things was on the way to being systematized among the Latins, but never reached the status of a notion (a distinction) fully thematized. Moreover, the usage among the Latins on this point was not merely left unthematized but quite reversed in the context of the development of modern philosophy. In the modern context, “object” and “thing” come to be regarded as terms lacking in any significant difference of meaning, because objects are all that we know, and so are regarded as an alternative way of saying “thing” by the ‘realists’, or simply express whatever can be known by the ‘idealists’ who hold that ‘things-in-themselves’ are unknowable anyway—so nothing is to be said about them in any case.

Now the generic term for concept in St Thomas is the Latin expression *species expressa*.²¹ With this in mind, Maritain notes²² that “it

²⁰ See Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1954)...although actually composed in 1930 and earlier published in 1943. (The English translation by R. F. C. Hull and Alan Crick, “On the Essence of Truth”—in *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock [Chicago: Gateway, 1949], 292-324—was particularly consulted in preparing the present work.)

²¹ In *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 115, Maritain asserts that the generic term “species”, from which the expressions *species impressa* and *species expressa* distinctively derive, “has no equivalent in our modern languages” of

seems that St Thomas was much more concerned with the relation between the *extramental thing* and the *species* thanks to which it [the extramental thing] is made object than with the relation between the *species* and the *object* itself taken as such.”

Only when we deal with the relation between the concept and the object itself taken as such (that is to say, as knowable not only when it is a thing but regardless of whether it is also a thing here and now, which sometimes it is and more typically it is not) can we begin to realize the profound implication of the seemingly innocuous statement that the difference between objects and things is that things only contingently, but objects necessarily, involve a relation to some finite knower.

1. Modern confusion in the very posing of the question

So we need to ask precisely *how* is an object as such involved in a relation to a knower? The object is not normally the *relation itself*, nor is it the *foundation* of the relation, for the foundation of the relation where concepts are involved in knowing is precisely the concept itself. And concepts are not, according to St Thomas, involved in all knowing. It is indeed only when concepts are involved that knowing can go astray from the truth, as evidenced in Gilson’s question, the question that has bedeviled the twentieth century twilight of modern philosophy, for Thomist and non-Thomist philosophers alike: “How can we guarantee the fidelity of the concept to its object?”²³!

philosophy; and it is also a term which has been all but universally misunderstood in the Neothomistic development of the last century, mired down in the ubiquitous “quo/quod fallacy” conflating *species expressa* with the preinterpretive function St. Thomas reserves to the *species impressa*. Clarifying these points in particular, among others relevant to our present theme, has been the effort of my book on *Intentionality and Semiotics* (Scranton, Pennsylvania: Scranton University Press, 2007).

²² Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 389, n. 4.

²³ Étienne Gilson (1884-1978), *Thomism. The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Laurence Shook and Armand Maurer (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2002 [= Étienne Gilson Series 24]), 266; this translates the 6th and final edition of this work (Paris: J. Vrin, 1964), the first edition having been published in 1941.

Yet Gilson's very way of putting this question is problematic, and indicative of the modern tendency to equate objects with things, to regard the term "object" and the term "thing" as synonyms first of all. For of the three elements required for a relation, namely, foundation in a subject, the relation itself as provenating from that foundation suprasubjectively, and the 'other' at which the relation terminates, it is clear when we enumerate these elements that the object corresponds always and only to the third element, the terminus.²⁴ And terminus and foundation of a relation are correlates: there is no problem of a "fidelity" of the one to the other; they are correlative.²⁵

So the question Gilson is really asking is one that he himself does not quite realize. The question really is not the *fidelity* of concept to object but the *coincidence* of object with thing. Every object of a concept as terminating the concept pretends to be—that is, presents itself 'as if'—a thing, but only sometimes is it so; and if then the difference between an object and a thing is that an object as such exists as the terminus of a relation, whereas a thing may or may not be terminus respecting a given relation (as when a father is not really the father), we need to ask about the status of a terminus not as thing or as object but *as such*.

2. Objects as terminus of relations

Every object is terminus of a relation, and every relation has a terminus; yet not every terminus is an object, and not every object is a thing. Let us consider relation in its original locus of philosophical discussion as a category of *ens reale*. This is the notion of relation

²⁴ The point is perhaps too technical to develop properly here, but it is fundamental to the whole question of the singularity of relation as making possible in nature an action of signs (prior even to life or cognition) that only in intellectual knowledge does it happen that relations in their difference from related objects and related things can themselves become termini of objective awareness, as also fundamentals of yet further relations: see Poinsoot, *Tractatus de Signis*: Second Preamble, Article 3, esp. the "Prima Difficultas", 102/35–105/14; and Deely, *Purely Objective Reality* (Berlin: Mouton, 2009).

²⁵ See Poinsoot, *Tractatus de Signis*: Appendix C.

common to Aristotle and Aquinas²⁶ that Ockham and all the moderns after him denied,²⁷ the notion that relation in its positive and proper being does not reduce to being in itself (substance) or to being in another (accident), but only depends on *esse in* in order to achieve its status over and above *esse in* as *esse ad*, terminating at some thing “other than itself” in order for the relation to be a “real relation”, i.e., a relation in the order of *ens reale*, thus:

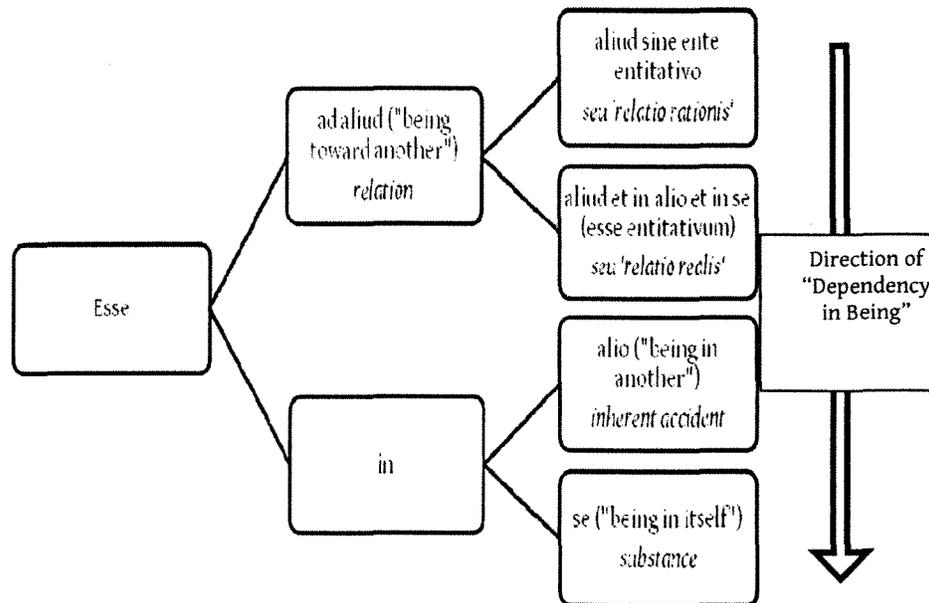


Diagram illustrating the singularity of relation respecting *ens reale*

VI. THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF RELATIONS TO THE ORDER OF *ENS REALE*

But notice that while the existence of the terminus as thing (i.e., the existence of the terminus as terminus in *esse entitativum*) is the essential

²⁶ See “The Fundamental Architecture of the Treatise on Signs” in Deely, “Editorial AfterWord”, 472–79.

²⁷ Julius R. Weinberg, *Abstraction, Relation, and Induction: three essays on the history of thought* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965).

condition making the relation be a *relatio realis*,²⁸ the entitative status of the terminus is not at all what makes the relation be a relation (*adesse* is what makes a relation to be a relation ontologically), nor is its entitative status what makes it as terminus *be* terminus. For one and the same thing, unchanged in its subjective being, under one set of circumstances will *also* be terminus of a given relation, and not terminus under other circumstances. Two triangular things, A and B, will be “similar” on the basis of their shape only as long as both exist. Their shapes, given their simultaneous existence, are at once the rationale of founding and of terminating, respectively, a relation in this case bilateral. But their respective shapes “in themselves” are subjective properties, part and parcel of the being of the triangular things as things in the order of *ens reale*. Their respective shapes *also* found and terminate a relation of similarity only when and as long as the relation over and above subjectivity (“intersubjectivity”, as is commonly said) itself exists. Absent the relation, absent also the being as foundation or fundament as such, and also the being as terminus as such.

These considerations reveal two things crucial for understanding the intersection of being with mind: it is the reality (mind-dependent or mind-independent indifferently) of the relation as relation that lends itself to the being of terminus as such and to the being of fundament as such. So, while a relation in order to belong to the category of *ens reale* (*relatio realis*) must exist intersubjectively, it is the existence of the relation itself that makes a fundament be a fundament as such subjectively and a terminus to be a terminus as such suprasubjectively (“*ut aliud*”).

1. The being distinctive of “passions of the soul”

Now, when Maritain says²⁹ that the Thomistic term *species* “has no equivalent in our modern languages”, he has in mind the point that concepts are unique among the accidental forms of *esse in* (or *in esse*) in that they cannot exist without giving rise to, without provenating, *adesse*, relations to objects other than themselves, precisely because the

²⁸ See Poinset, *Tractatus de Signis*: Second Preamble, Article 2, esp. 91/12–16; and 94/35–95/17, esp. 95/2–4.

²⁹ Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 115.

concepts as qualities of the soul are elements of *subjectivity* as founding relations to objects, while the *objects* terminate those relations *suprasubjectively* regardless of whether the object is or is not also a thing. So while relations are always suprasubjective in their positive being as *esse ad* (or *adesse*), they are only sometimes *intersubjective* as well, namely, when their terminus *happens also to be* something possessing *in esse*, which need not be the case. So relations, all relations, are necessarily suprasubjective, but only sometimes and contingently intersubjective, namely, when they obtain in the order of *ens reale*.³⁰ But when the subjective being of the terminus is destroyed by death or some other mishap, the relation, if it is a cognitive relation based on concepts or a cathectic relation based on feelings, unchanged as relation, ceases to obtain in the order of *ens reale* and intersubjectively, yet without in the least ceasing to be a relation or ceasing suprasubjectively to present an object as its terminus.

2. The equiprimordiality of relation with substance: a first glimpse

So the fundamental character of relation as equiprimordial with substance begins to impose itself, not only because finite substances cannot exist in fact without being involved in relations with their surroundings, but because experience wholly exists as a network of cognitive and cathectic relations which obtain suprasubjectively not only when they obtain intersubjectively but also even when they do not obtain intersubjectively. And in every case of suprasubjectivity—that is to say, in every case of *adesse*, including the more limited case of intersubjectivity—relations lend to things whatever being as terminus (terminus as such) things have (which is always in the case of objects as such, regardless of whether and when those objects are also things).

³⁰ See Deely, “Why Intersubjectivity Is Not Enough”, in *Early Fall School in Semiotics 2004 Tom X* (the *Proceedings* of the International Early Fall School in Semiotics of the Southeast European Center for Semiotic Studies of the New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria, 2004), 34-58 (text: 34-55; questions: 55-58). Now also printed as Ch. 9 of *Purely Objective Reality*, 143-64.

VII. MARITAIN'S CLAIM CONCERNING PHILOSOPHY OF BEING
REQUIRES POINSOT'S DOCTRINE OF SIGNS

Yet Maritain's claim concerns how a philosophy of being can also be a philosophy of mind, and so far we have only shown how and why being and knowing can diverge. To show how these two conceptions—"ontology" and "epistemology" in modern terms—come together in a virtual coincidence presupposed to their separation and guaranteeing that their separation cannot be an opposition (as it became in modernity, especially after Kant), we have to press yet further our discovery that the intentionality of consciousness (as being of or about, directed upon, an object) is derivative from the singularity of relation as the only mode of being indifferent to the distinction between *ens reale* and *ens rationis*.

Poinsot points out that the relation between concept and object is a sign relation, that is to say, a relation whereby one thing (in our present case, a concept) presents something other than itself (the object, or what it is that is known) to or for the one knowing—the one whose awareness the concept specifies as being of this rather than of some other object. Many Thomists have claimed to see in this doctrine of concepts as "formal signs", signs which make objects known without having to be *themselves* first objectified, the key to Thomistic realism. But these Thomists are deluded on the point, for Poinsot expressly points out³¹ that, were knowledge in "formal signs" or concepts the whole of human knowledge, there would be no direct contact with the order of *ens reale* in human experience. Maritain joins Poinsot on this point,³² noting that only because *not all* of our awareness of objects

³¹ Poinsot, *Tractatus de Signis*: Book III, Question 2, 310/37–312/6, esp. 312/2–6.

³² Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 118 n. 1. See also Josephus Gredt (1863–1940) in his *De Cognitione Sensuum Externorum. Inquisitio psychologico-criteriologica circa realismum criticum et objectivitatem qualitatum sensibilibium* (ed. altera aucta et emendata; Rome: Desclée & Socii, Editores Pontificii, 1924), iv: "Scripto nostro tamquam unica via ad idealismum vitandum manifestatur realismus naturalis integralis philosophiae thomisticae, cujus cardo in doctrina consistit de sensuum externorum cognitione intuitiva excludente quamcumque speciem expressam."—"The integral natural realism of Thomistic philosophy, the doctrinal heart of which consists in excluding from the intuitive cognition of external sense any least trace of an expressed specifying form, is shown in our writing to be the one and only way of

depends upon concepts are we assured of a partial coincidence between objects as objects and things as things.

Yet, even though not the whole but only that part of our awareness that has a limited indifference to the reality of its objects depends upon concepts, *the whole* of our awareness depends upon signs. As Maritain puts it,³³ “the sign involves the whole extent of moral and human life; it is in the human world a universal instrument, just as is movement in the world of nature.” Sign relations in their ontological character as relations are more fundamental than even the intentionality of consciousness involving concepts.

In these relations at the very origins of awareness in sensation, prior to any possibility of separating ontology from epistemology, Maritain’s thesis—that philosophy of being can also be philosophy of mind, and conversely—finds its demonstration. Sensation, St. Thomas says, consists in the action of the sensible upon the sense, itself an instance of “brute secondness” causal interaction, but an interaction from which thirdness arises, in that the proper sensibles simultaneously present to the animal the common sensibles of shape, movement, position, etc.; and this web of relations constituting sensation, even though they are cognitive relations—that is to say, relations of awareness—yet are at the same time relations which cannot be *entia rationis* (*relationes rationis*).

In other words, the relations of sensation—in its prescissive distinction from perception and intellection alike (alike in that both the higher levels of awareness and experience beyond bare sensation depend upon concepts, and so are relatively indifferent to the reality of their objects apprehended)—are the sign relations that guarantee the partial coincidence of being with knowing especially insofar as it is a pure question of *ens reale*.

avoiding idealism” (which is exactly the point of Poinset at 312/2–6: “Quodsi existat in aliquo sui ut in imagine vel effectu, non immediate videbitur, sed ut contentum in imagine, ipsa vero imago est, quae videtur.”

³³ Maritain, “Sign and Symbol,” in *Redeeming the Time* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1943), trans. and ed. Harry Lorin Binsse, 191.

VIII. SEMIOTICS AS INESCAPABLE IN MARITAIN'S TRANSCENDING OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

Despite the portentous rhetoric Maritain uses in presenting his essays and retouchings of his essays on sign,³⁴ few among his admirers to this point have taken with full seriousness Maritain's claim that the sign "involves *the whole extent* of human life and knowing". Yet just this neglected aspect of Maritain's thought, in continuity with the thought of John of St. Thomas and St. Thomas before him, marks the clearest trajectory in which Maritain's thought is more postmodern than it is simply "antimodern" or even "ultramodern".

Maritain never used the word "semiotics", just as St. Thomas never used the word "epistemology". Yet just as we have been required to present St. Thomas in modern context in terms of "epistemology" and "ontology", even though the terms *do not well fit* his actual thought, so in postmodern context will we have to consider Maritain and St. Thomas alike in semiotic terms—with the vast difference that this time the terms not only postdate the main work of these two philosophers *but also well fit* their thought in all that concerns human life and experience.

Thomas Sebeok, the *Zeichenmeister* of 20th century developments in semiotics, said, as his own life entered its final years, that "I wish I had grasped Maritain's credo" concerning the doctrine of signs "sooner and better, for I have become convinced that the tradition in which he labored mutually harmonizes with and enriches what I have elsewhere termed the 'major tradition' in semiotic studies."³⁵

Semiotics, the study of the action of signs, is the study more than any other that reveals at once the postmodern thrust of Maritain's alliance with Thomas Aquinas and John Poinsett together with the justice of Ratzinger's thesis³⁶ that "the undivided sway of thinking in terms of substance is ended" by the discovery that relation is "an

³⁴ See Deely, "Semiotic in the Thought of Jacques Maritain", *Recherche Sémiotique/Semiotic Inquiry* 6:2 (1986): 1-30, for a comprehensive overview of Maritain's texts on the doctrine of signs, or "semiotic".

³⁵ Sebeok, "Semiotics in the United States", 311-12; see further Sebeok, *Global Semiotics* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001).

³⁶ See note #10.

equally valid primordial mode of reality” with substance in the world existing as knowable.