

# *The Quest for Truth and Human Fellowship in a Pluralist Society*

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Democratic societies are characterized by a complex plurality. In this essay I will show that Jacques Maritain accounts for this complexity by distinguishing five types of plurality: a) the plurality of worldviews (religions and philosophical theories), b) the plurality of associations, c) the plurality of human beings, d) the plurality of cultural contexts, and e) the plurality of creative minorities. Moreover, these types of plurality are interconnected. The significance of each plurality falls into two categories. First, the label of plurality can be used in a descriptive sense, i.e. simply as a way of acknowledging its existence as a fact. Second, this label can be used in a normative sense or as a means of advocating for diversity in itself as a desirable state of affairs. This essay will explore Maritain's description of the characteristics of the five types of plurality by contrasting his ideas with those of other thinkers. The conclusion will answer three questions: first, how does Maritain describe and consider these five types of plurality, both in themselves and in their interrelations? Secondly, does the advocacy of one type of plurality as a desirable state of affairs imply moral relativism, i.e. does it imply that moral values are relative and a claim of truth is impossible? Thirdly, would it be possible to achieve human fellowship in a society that is characterized by such complex plurality?

## Plurality of Worldviews

Wilhelm Dilthey, one of the first philosophers who systematically investigates the phenomenon of a worldview, argues that there is a relationship between a worldview and metaphysics. He is critical of metaphysics because of its claim to universal validity without, in his view, employing a scientific method capable of establishing such validity. On the other hand, however, he argues that metaphysics is not without value because it embodies a worldview, a basic response to the totality of life and the world. A close study of metaphysics reveals its worldview. However, Dilthey argues that each worldview grasps a single aspect of reality and, as such, it is not able to form a complete concept of reality in an objective way.

Dilthey does not have an attitude of indifference towards worldviews but he relativizes their exclusive claims of truth. He proposes a "philosophy of philosophies" that will clarify the meaning of worldview perspectives as reflected in a diversity of philosophical theories which compete with one another. He attempts to overcome the exclusive claims of truth of worldviews by his comprehensive "philosophy of philosophies" which does not have the character of a worldview since he does not want to relativize his own philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

Dilthey's criticism of the exclusivity claims of worldviews is certainly correct if it results in arrogance, ethnocentricity, or the creation of a spiritual ghetto. A worldview is not a goal in itself. It means literally a "viewed world," which itself means that different worldviews have one thing in common: human beings live in the same public world, they are part of humankind, they deal with the same riddle of life and the same world. This world includes a challenge for human beings to think about human origin and meaning, to develop their potential and possibilities, and to act responsibly. Although people make practical choices regarding their worldviews, moral values, and thought, they do this not only in confrontation but also in communication with others. Since all people live in the same world, they possess the possibility of dialogue and cooperation.

Unlike Dilthey, Max Weber argues that worldviews that contain different systems of moral values do not complement each other; instead, they struggle with each other and that, essentially, they do not have anything in common.

1. See Wilhelm Dilthey, *Weltanschauungslehre: Abhandlungen zur Philosophie der Philosophie, Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. VIII (Leipzig/Berlin: Treubner, 1931), in particular the chapter "Die Typen der Weltanschauung," (pp. 75-118) that has been translated by William Kluback and Martin Weinbaum as *Philosophy of Essence* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957).

The confrontation of moral values, in the end, never has anything to do with mere alternatives, but it deals with an irreconcilable life-and-death struggle, like between "God" and "the devil." There is no place for relativizing or compromises, at least, not about what concerns their ultimate meaning. However, as everyone experiences the factuality and, consequently, the outward appearances of life, the relativizing and compromising of moral values are common; in almost every important situation in which a real human being determines his point of view, the various spheres of moral values intersect. This is precisely the numbing aspect of the daily grind in its most essential form: the person who is trapped in a daily routine is not aware of this mixture of fatal hostile moral values that are partially determined by psychological, and partly by pragmatic, factors. Moreover, he does not want, strictly speaking, to become aware of it.<sup>2</sup>

Weber argues that at the level of worldviews and systems of moral values there is a continuous struggle with no compromises and relativity. He acknowledges that in everyday life, systems of moral values partially overlap. However, if a human being takes this situation for granted, and if he chooses to ignore this struggle, then it will have a numbing effect. Although Weber discusses an irreconcilable struggle between worldviews, he argues that if human beings chase after the ultimate good of their worldviews following the maxim of an ethic of absolute ends without accounting for the possible destructive consequences of their actions, then these ends may be damaged and discredited for generations. He disqualifies them as politically irresponsible human beings. They endanger social peace and security. Although one should be aware of the struggle of worldviews, Weber also argues that "what is decisive is the trained relentlessness in viewing the realities of life, and the ability to face such realities and to measure up to them inwardly."<sup>3</sup> Human beings should not take a partial overlap of moral values in practical life for granted, but by virtue of their worldviews and moral values they "would have done better in simply cultivating plain brotherliness in personal relations. And for the rest—they should have gone soberly about their daily work."<sup>4</sup>

2. Max Weber, "Der Sinn der 'Wertfreiheit' der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften" (1917) ["The Meaning of 'Value-Neutrality' of Sociological and Economic Disciplines"], in *Methodologische Schriften* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1968), pp. 246-47. (my translation).

3. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation" (1919), in H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), pp. 126-27.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

By contrast with both of these thinkers, Maritain argues that in a pluralist democratic society, citizens belong to very different philosophical and religious creeds (worldview plurality), and that, at the same time, they should cooperate for the common good. He argues that a plurality of worldviews does not mean that different worldviews complement each other. In the public debate, representatives of different worldviews advocate different social and political ideals, and they employ different arguments. Notwithstanding these different ideals and arguments, Maritain claims that various worldviews have moral values and central tenets in common when he writes that

men possessing quite different, even opposite metaphysical or religious outlooks, can converge, not by virtue of any identity of doctrine, but by virtue of an analogical similitude in practical principles, toward the same practical conclusions, ... provided that they similarly revere, perhaps for quite diverse reasons, truth and intelligence, human dignity, freedom, brotherly love, and the absolute value of moral good.<sup>5</sup>

Maritain argues that there are deep divisions between opposing worldviews, and that there is no doctrine or a "philosophy of philosophies" to reconcile or to overcome these divisions. Yet, he argues that very different worldviews can converge because of similar moral values that work toward the same practical outcomes: "There are a certain number of moral tenets—about the dignity of the human person, human rights, human equality, freedom, law, mutual respect and tolerance, the unity of mankind and the ideal of peace among men—on which democracy presupposes common consent."<sup>6</sup>

Representatives of various worldviews should revere those moral tenets, because "without a general, firm, and reasoned-out conviction concerning such tenets, democracy cannot survive."<sup>7</sup> They have to give account of their worldviews and of the similarity of moral values which underlie practical conclusions and which make these conclusions possible. For this reason he argues that we need "theoretical justifications, the conceptions of the world and of life, the philosophical or religious creeds which found, or claim to found, these practical conclusions in reason."<sup>8</sup> Theoretical justifications from diverse worldviews cannot be reduced to private life

5. Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 111.

6. Jacques Maritain, *On the Use of Philosophy: Three Essays* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), p. 12.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Maritain, *Man and the State*, p. 111.

since they have a legitimizing function for democracy and, therefore, a legitimate place in public life.

Since Maritain argues that a democratic society is characterized by a plurality of worldviews, and since he wants to consider all citizens as responsible moral human beings whatever worldview they hold, he not only highlights the fact of this plurality but also defends this plurality as a desirable state of affairs. This position does not lead him to a position of relativism as some authors suggest.<sup>9</sup> Within this worldview plurality, Maritain maintains his commitment to the Gospel and the truth of its message. At the same time he acknowledges the right of those who deny this truth, because he “respects in them human nature and human dignity and those very resources and living springs of the intellect and of conscience.”<sup>10</sup> Maritain wants to do justice to other religious or philosophical worldviews, not by borrowing from them or exchanging certain ideas with them, but by getting a clearer view of his own worldview thanks to them, and by enriching it from within and extending its principles to new fields of inquiry.<sup>11</sup> Human beings who adhere to different worldviews can cooperate because of “intellectual rigor and justice.”<sup>12</sup> Maritain does not discuss cooperation between worldviews, because they are abstract sets of ideas. He advocates cooperation and brotherhood between human beings founded on an intellectual duty to understand and respect each other’s point of view in a genuine and fair manner. This intellectual duty is strengthened by intellectual charity: the love for each other’s ideas in order to take great efforts to discover what truths they convey.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike Dilthey, Maritain neither relativizes differences of worldviews, nor considers them complementary to one another. Like Weber, he considers worldviews in essence as very diverse and even as opposite to each other. However, like Dilthey, he acknowledges that representatives of various worldviews have to cooperate in the same public world, and that different worldviews have moral values in common. Like Weber, Maritain argues that human beings should be aware of the struggle between worldviews. Moreover, they should justify their practical conclusions and their underlying moral values by pointing out similarities in diverse worldviews.

9. Richard J. Mouw and Sander Griffioen, *Pluralisms and Horizons: An Essay in Christian Public Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 18.

10. Maritain, *On the Use of Philosophy*, p. 24.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

### Plurality of Associations

Two founding fathers of the social theories that concern the plurality of associations are Johannes Althusius (1557-1638) and Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859). The German philosopher, Althusius, discusses the nature of the relationship between the state on the one hand, and other associations of public law (cities, provinces) and private citizens (families, guilds), on the other. He defines the state as "an imperium, realm, commonwealth, and people united in one body by the agreement of many symbiotic associations and particular bodies, and brought together under one right. For families, cities, and provinces existed by nature prior to realms, and gave birth to them."<sup>14</sup> Next, his central claim is that every association makes its own laws by which it ought to be ruled: "Proper laws (*leges propriae*) are those enactments by which particular associations are ruled. They differ in each specie of association according as the nature of each requires."<sup>15</sup>

According to the universal principles of natural law, which are clarified by the Ten Commandments, the government ought to restrict the activities of citizens and associations by law, in order to defend the fundamental rights of every human being. These rights include: a) the right of natural life, including the liberty and safety of one's own body, b) the right of a good reputation, honour and dignity, and c) the right of property.<sup>16</sup> When discussing social and economic policy, Althusius argues that the government should have the right and responsibility to regulate public commerce, contracts, and business on land and water. It should also have the right to maintain a monetary system, a common language, and the public duties and privileges.<sup>17</sup> By employing these rights the government should not pursue a policy of social welfare, but it should create conditions in its laws and policies so that associations can exercise their rights and responsibilities.

Althusius opposes the idea of the absolute state in which private associations are considered as parts of the state as the supreme and all-embracing community. He advocates a horizontal social order in which both the state and private associations have their own rights and responsibilities. However, there is a hierarchic social order between the state and the variety of associations insofar as they lie within a system of law created by the government.

14. Johannes Althusius, *Politica* (1604, 1610, 1614), an abridged edition by Frederick S. Carney (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), p. 66.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

In sum, Althusius defends four important characteristics of the plurality of associations: 1) every association makes its own laws by which it ought to be ruled; 2) the legal power of the state is restricted regarding non-state associations on the basis of their own authority; 3) the government should defend the fundamental rights of every human being, and 4) it should create conditions for socio-economic welfare.

The French philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville, also discusses extensively the plurality of associations. He observes that many people see the state as a danger to their freedom, but acknowledges at the same time that individuals can counterbalance state-power. They can form private associations in which they can unite their strengths and realize moral values like human dignity, freedom and responsibility. These associations can be founded in every sector of society: industry, education, healthcare, and amusement.<sup>18</sup>

In Tocqueville's view, exercising democratic freedom would be threatened not so much by governmental centralization, but rather by administrative centralization. He acknowledges that governmental centralization is necessary for the existence and survival of each state: the central government, maintenance of the public legal system, enactment of laws, and foreign policy. However, there are private interests as well. These should be promoted by private associations like industries, commercial enterprises, schools and churches. If the government desires to centralize and control these interests then Tocqueville speaks of administrative centralization. In that case the government would take away many responsibilities of citizens. It would teach citizens and administrators of private associations that they have no authority and, consequently, it would undermine the vitality of society.<sup>19</sup>

Administrative centralization should be feared for the sake of protecting private associations, which, according to Tocqueville, have proper rights and duties that are not reducible to those of the state. Like Althusius, he advocates a horizontal social order. However, if industries and other free associations strive only for their own interests and do not take into account the interests of the whole society then they endanger public safety. The government has the task of limiting the freedom of free associations for maintaining a stable state and the public order, for respecting laws, and for promoting welfare.<sup>20</sup> Thus, there is a hierarchic order of associations within the state only insofar as it is within a system of law where the government

18. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. (1835/1840), edited by J.-P. Mayer (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), vol. II, pp. 513-17.

19. *Ibid.*, vol I, p. 88.

20. *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 520-24.

creates conditions so that these associations can exercise their own rights and responsibilities.

In sum, both Althusius and Tocqueville argue that on state territory there can be various types of associations who have their own rights and responsibilities that are different from the institutions of the state. The idea of the plurality of associations serves as a model of the social and moral design of society: it is related to social design in the sense of creating spheres of life in which people can exercise their responsibility for their private associations; it is related to moral design in the sense of actualizing moral values which enable citizens to live with dignity, freedom and responsibility.

Maritain also describes the plurality of associations by identifying this plurality as characteristic of the idea of civil society itself: citizens who belong to a variety of autonomous associations and institutions participate in this type of society. In this context "autonomy" means that every social association governs itself, and carries out duties according to its own rights and responsibilities. He does not describe associational plurality as a fact only, but, like Althusius and Tocqueville, he advocates this plurality as a good that contributes to the vitality of civil society.<sup>21</sup>

Maritain argues that the state comprises the associations on its territory, that it is superior to them, and that it is an agency with the power to use coercion in the service of its citizens. There is a hierarchic ordering of the state and these associations.<sup>22</sup> The state has, in particular, the task of maintaining laws, promoting public order and public interest. However, the state should acknowledge the autonomy of associations but can, if it is in the public interest, provide assistance subsidiarily if these "lower" associations cannot fulfill their tasks. The presupposition of the idea of subsidiarity is that associations should be able to accomplish their rights and responsibilities. Maritain advocates, like Althusius and Tocqueville, for a horizontal ordering of the mutual relationships between those associations. However, if those associations cannot adequately fulfill their tasks the state should, ultimately, take over their tasks for the sake of the common good.

Maritain characterizes his theory of the state as an "instrumentalistic" one, in order to make clear that the state is not a goal in itself but a means to promote the common good, and a means to protect itself against totalitarian threats. He characterizes the modern state also as a "juridical machine," with its laws, its power, and its organization of the social and economic life

21. Maritain, *Man and the State*, pp. 12-13.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.



as "part of normal progress." However, a degeneration of this progress may occur if the state becomes identified with the totality of associations. In that case, one could speak of an "absorbing," and sometimes of a totalitarian state. This is a state that regulates the common good not only through political means but also by controlling and organizing science, the economy, and other social sectors.<sup>23</sup>

Maritain argues that not only the state can degenerate by transcending its bounds, but associations themselves can degenerate as well.<sup>24</sup> The reason for the degeneration of associations is that they can be oppressive for their participants and for other associations.

Concerning the former, Maritain argues that an important reason for the failure of modern democracies to realize democracy is "the fact that this realization inevitably demanded accomplishment in the social as well as in the political order, and that this demand was not complied with."<sup>25</sup> A constitutional democracy should be complemented by a democratization of associations. This social democracy is not only a manner of organizing associations, but it serves first and foremost as a moral design to enable citizens to live with dignity, freedom, and responsibility.

On the other hand, if associations transcend their rights and freedoms by oppressing other social associations, Maritain contends that they will threaten the vitality of society. Industries can impose requirements that threaten the interests of families, groups of employees and consumers. They could misuse their autonomy and become more or less oppressive. The rules of the market and commercialization that determine the economic sector of society should not play a decisive role (perhaps an accidental role) in families, schools, universities, churches or hospitals. On the other hand, love, education, faith and care are not determinative ideas in economic affairs (although they too may have an accidental role).<sup>26</sup>

The important idea about associational plurality is not simply that societies are socially differentiated; rather, it is the meaning of this differentiation that matters: associational plurality decentralizes power, and promotes citizens' freedoms and a way of life in accordance with their human dignity. The decentralization of power means that differentiated associations rule their own affairs without being controlled by other communities.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 20-23.

25. Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy & The Rights of Man and Natural Law* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 19.

26. See Maritain, *Man and the State*, pp. 19-25.

Moreover, associational pluralities also have a valuable contribution to make to their individual members since they are the sources of their social identities, moral values, and virtues. Furthermore, they promote the commitment of their members to participate in the society at large.<sup>27</sup>

Since Maritain's view of an associational plurality is not only descriptive but in essence normative (he advocates for this plurality), he criticizes the state and those associations which transcend their rights and responsibilities, thus endangering the associational plurality itself and, consequently, the health and vitality of a good society.

### Plurality of Human Beings

Hannah Arendt distinguishes three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action. In particular, action is the activity that occurs directly between human beings. It corresponds to the human condition of plurality: we all are human beings but no two persons are ever alike.<sup>28</sup> To act, in its most general sense, means: to begin, to take an initiative, or to set something into motion. Moreover, action is closely related to speech which is the effect of the human condition of plurality: one can communicate and disclose oneself as a unique human being among equals. Without speech, human beings could not understand each other. The meaning of action becomes relevant only through the spoken word announcing what one does, has done, or intends to do.<sup>29</sup>

Those distinguishing characteristics of action and speech imply that human beings depend on the continuous presence of others in their plurality.<sup>30</sup> Arendt argues that the capacity to begin something new implies freedom in its authentic meaning, i.e. to show one's unique personal identity, and to excel. However, she does not interpret freedom of action in an individualist manner but always closely connects it with plurality and solidarity, and, consequently, with collective action to form social relationships and associations.<sup>31</sup>

Although Maritain does not discuss Arendt's theory, there is no reason in principle why he would not agree with it. He discusses the plurality of

27. Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, pp. 103-05; Maritain, *On the Use of Philosophy*, p. 32.

28. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 176-77.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 178-79.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 22, 179-80.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-88.

human beings in a way that complements Arendt's theory. He recognizes Arendt's idea of human freedom which is to show one's unique personal identity, and to excel. He calls this plurality the "freedom of autonomy" of human beings. This means that one's free will must develop a psychological and moral attitude that makes a person someone "having dominion over [his] own acts and being to [himself] a rounded and a whole existence."<sup>32</sup> A person should rule his acts and should have the power to overcome and to hold in control those impulses and passions that otherwise could easily enslave him.

Acquiring a psychological and moral attitude does not occur naturally. It is an achievement indeed to bring a person to maturity as a morally responsible agent. Fr. James Schall describes freedom of autonomy as the "freedom that comes when, through discipline, asceticism, habit and purpose, a person can rule his acts to choose what in fact is true."<sup>33</sup> Since discipline, asceticism and habits differ from one person to the other, freedom of autonomy may be achieved in different degrees in different human beings.<sup>34</sup>

Through the analysis of freedom of autonomy Maritain gives an account of his view of the plurality of human beings. He highlights this plurality as a fact but also defends it as a desirable state of affairs. He often discusses the need for education for the development of various human possibilities and potentials, but he acknowledges that human beings in this respect are not equal. There are human beings who have the capacity to excel, but he wishes to do justice to others with different qualities.

Moreover, persons achieve their freedom of autonomy in concrete social, economic, juridical and moral actions. These actions are conditioned by the variety of associations in which they occur. A person's freedom of autonomy in various fields of action can be achieved only within differentiated associations. These associations are permanent frameworks of human actions that transmit moral values, norms, discipline, asceticism, habit and purposes of action. In short, within associations human beings learn their freedom of autonomy and how to become morally responsible persons.

32. Jacques Maritain, *Freedom in the Modern World* (1936; reprint, New York: Gordian Press, 1971), p. 30.

33. James V. Schall, *Jacques Maritain: The Philosopher in Society* (Landham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), p. 130.

34. Jacques Maritain, "The Conquest of Freedom," in *The Education of Man: The Educational Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, ed. by Donald and Idella Gallagher (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1962), pp. 165-68.

### Plurality of Cultural Contexts

Contextual plurality refers to a variety of cultural patterns of beliefs and practices or ways of life that people share. Practices and beliefs are part of the overt cultural framework or context and, as such, they are more or less fully known to the participants in society. The social scientist uncovers a covert cultural pattern by analyzing social, juridical and moral imperatives. This empirical analysis of the social scientist may indicate more or less universal normative rules. However, these rules have an abstract character and they do not eliminate concrete cultural differences. On the contrary, each cultural and subcultural context has something particular that should be taken seriously in its own right.

Richard Rorty, a postmodern philosopher, acknowledges this contextual plurality. He argues that this plurality is characterized by contingency; it is caused by accident in the course of history. It does not make sense to ask philosophical questions on what and how it happened in the course of history. It happened as it happened. Human beings who participate in a cultural context watch reality from this contextual framework and they make statements about it. Whether others may judge their statements as true or objective does not matter. Their statements are true or objective if they are in correspondence with reality as human beings see and experience it from their contextual framework. This plurality of opinions and statements is also contingent. Rorty argues that no philosophy can clarify this contingency, and no philosophy could judge those statements as right or wrong. However, according to him, this reflection does not lead to a moral relativism, because contextual plurality does not exclude the "conversation of mankind." Rorty interprets truth and objectivity as intersubjectivity, or as solidarity: agreement with others. This means that human beings should be in search of solidarity, not as an abstract idea but as a concrete experience of listening to outsiders who are suffering and to others who have new ideas. In his view, solidarity is not a given phenomenon to acknowledge, but something to create. However, solidarity is also characterized by contingency.<sup>35</sup>

Maritain does not acknowledge contextual plurality as a fact only; he also advocates it as a good state of affairs. However, he does not advocate this plurality uncritically, and he rejects the idea of its contingency. He holds that culture is:

35. Richard Rorty, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. I: *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 13, 21-34.

[T]he expansion of the peculiarly human life, including not only whatever material development may be necessary and sufficient to enable us to lead an upright life on this earth, but also and above all moral development of the speculative and practical activities (artistic and ethical) peculiarly worthy of being called a human development.<sup>36</sup>

Next, he argues that to speak of culture is to speak of the common good of human beings. "In the sense of our definition there is no culture that is not humanist."<sup>37</sup> To denounce a spiritual deviation of culture does not mean to condemn this culture, it means that Maritain employs certain criteria to evaluate it. These criteria are the ideas of progress and regress. In relation to these ideas, Maritain discusses the "consciousness of self," that is "the growth in awareness of an offended and humiliated human dignity."<sup>38</sup> This growth in awareness appears as a historical gain; it means the rise toward liberty and a morally responsible personality. He argues that all forms of progress of the modern age, of art, science, philosophy, or politics, exhibit this growth of awareness.

There is a progressive movement of societies as they evolve in history. Maritain argues that this movement depends on "the double law of the degradation and revitalization of the energy of history, or of the mass of human activity upon which the movement of history depends."<sup>39</sup> This means that while the wear and tear of time and mental passivity degrade the moral energy of human beings, the creative forces, which are characteristic of the spirit of human dignity and liberty and which normally find their application in the efforts of the few, constantly revitalize the quality of this energy. Society advances thanks to the vitalization of moral energy springing from this spirit and liberty. This means that progress will not take place by itself but by the ascent of consciousness that is linked to a superior level of organization: a civilized community. This community cannot be achieved through compulsion but only by the progress of moral consciousness and relationships of justice and brotherhood—the "essential foundations" of this community.<sup>40</sup>

Although this progress may be achieved in different cultural contexts in different ways, it will never be achieved easily nor without conflicts. It can be achieved only by great political vigilance stimulated by a process of

36. Maritain, *Freedom in the Modern World*, p. 82.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

38. Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism: Temporal and Spiritual Problems of a New Christendom* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), p. 231. See also Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, pp. 36-37.

39. Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, p. 113.

40. *Ibid.*, pp. 114-15, 118, 121.

education.<sup>41</sup> This political vigilance and educational process should be initiated by the rightful authority of the rulers.<sup>42</sup> However, sometimes the political leaders have become morally bankrupt. Then the time has come “to call upon the moral and spiritual reserves of the people, of common humanity—the last reserves of civilization. These moral and spiritual reserves are not a tool in the hands of those with authority, however; they are the very power, and the source of initiative, of men cognizant of their personal dignity and their responsibility.”<sup>43</sup>

### Plurality of Creative Minorities

For better or worse, Maritain held that the great historical changes in society have been brought about by the “efforts of the few,” those who incorporate and revitalize forces of society and who are themselves characterized by a spirit of human dignity and liberty. Moreover, he argues that a democratic society needs “inspired servants or prophets of the people” who form “prophetic pioneering minorities.”<sup>44</sup> These minorities have a mission that contains a promise for society: they are prophets of political and social emancipation and the basic transformation of social structures.<sup>45</sup> In this context, political emancipation means to achieve a personalist democracy. Social emancipation and the basic transformation of social structures refer to a social democracy as discussed above.

Maritain argues that those prophets are not elected representatives of the people. The vocation of prophetic leadership “should normally be exercised by small dynamic groups freely organized and multiple in nature, which would not be concerned with electoral success but with devoting themselves entirely to a great social and political idea, and which would act as a ferment either inside or outside the political parties.”<sup>46</sup> He has in mind Christian minorities in particular, but also other worldview minorities as well—minorities which are characterized by a prophetic or a peculiar style of thought. However, he is aware that there may be false prophets who are not characterized by a spirit of human dignity and liberty, but rather who want to dominate others.

41. Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy*, p. 26.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

44. Maritain, *Man and the State*, pp. 139, 141.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-46.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Maritain highlights the existence of the plurality of those prophetic or creative minorities and he finds them congenial. However, he does not discuss the origin of these minorities. To clarify their origin, a free interpretation of Karl Mannheim's analysis of groups which are characterized by a peculiar style of thought may suffice.<sup>47</sup> First, Mannheim discusses a general worldview of a culture in a given era. For instance, the worldview of the Enlightenment in France in the eighteenth century was characterized by its belief in reason and in scientific, technical, and moral progress. Another example is the general worldview of the Romantic era that may be characterized by some dominant factors: creativity of the individual human being within the context of a historically experienced identity of the nation. The general worldview of contemporary Western culture may be characterized by a thorough individualism of human beings who arbitrarily make their moral choices, who have a materialist-consumerist life-style, and who participate in the process of technological globalization.

Second, there are also particular worldviews: Catholicism, Calvinism, Islam, Socialism, Libertarianism, and Liberalism. Of course, mixtures of these particular worldviews may occur in human life; for instance, there are Catholic socialists, Calvinist libertarians and Islamic liberals. Particular worldviews always endure beyond the influence of the general worldview. It can also happen that a particular worldview opposes a general worldview; groups of Christians, Socialists, and Muslims may criticize the general worldview of contemporary Western culture.

Third, people who adhere to a particular worldview want to achieve something in practice. All those particular worldviews are characterized by certain general intentions which are subdivided into special strivings: these may be economic, political, moral, or philosophical.

Fourth, those strivings attempt to achieve certain goals. If those economic, political, moral or philosophical strivings have an engagement with concrete social goals, Mannheim speaks of certain styles of thought: conservative, revolutionary, emancipatory or pragmatic.

Fifth, and this is the crux of Mannheim's analysis: human beings who adhere to a certain worldview, who share certain general intentions and philosophical strivings, and who are engaged with certain social goals form an intellectual stratum that is characterized by a peculiar style of thought. Moreover, a sociological analysis of this intellectual stratum may clarify that a grouping that is characterized by a peculiar style of thought may be called a social stratum.

47. Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), pp. 184-89.

These groups may exist within and across associations, and they may attempt to achieve social or moral changes within those associations or society at large. Maritain has precisely those groups in mind when he discusses creative or prophetic minorities: action groups of cooperating human beings who share a certain worldview, general intentions, philosophical strivings, who have an engagement with social and political goals, and who have an emancipatory style of thought in common.

### Conclusions

The first question that was posed in the introduction, "how does Maritain describe and consider these five types of plurality, both in themselves and in their interrelations?" can be answered as follows. Maritain does not only accept a plurality of worldviews, associations, human beings, cultural contexts and creative minorities as a fact, he also advocates for this plurality as a desirable state of affairs. However, he does evaluate this plurality critically.

First, a plurality of worldviews means that they may not be complementing each other but rather they may be quite different, competing or even opposed to one another. Yet, he acknowledges that human beings who adhere to different worldviews may have moral values and practical tenets in common.

Secondly, a plurality of associations ought to be autonomous to achieve their own rights and responsibilities, and to actualize moral values like human dignity, freedom and responsibility. Ideally, they should complement and cooperate for the sake of the common good. However, if the state or associations transcend the bounds of their competences, they can cause social oppositions, struggle, and social degeneration.

Thirdly, a plurality of human beings entails the development of the freedom of autonomy and/or the psychological and moral attitude of human beings. Maritain argues that this attitude may be achieved in different degrees in different human beings. Consequently, human beings are competitive in certain fields of action while they may need to cooperate and complement each other in other social areas.

Fourthly, a plurality of cultural contexts means primarily differentiation. Although Maritain does not discuss the nature of this plurality, he is not indifferent to it. He argues that the development of a culture should be evaluated according to the ideas of progress and regress.

And finally, a plurality of creative minorities means that there are various groupings which are characterized by their own style of thought.



Although their styles of thought may be very different, groupings with emancipatory styles of thought may complement each other, and in this case they may cooperate to achieve common goals.

Thus, the mutual relationships between these types of plurality focus on human beings who are adherents of worldviews, and participants of social associations, cultural contexts and creative minorities. By virtue of one's worldview and its moral values, a person develops his or her psychological and moral attitudes, and participates in social associations which belong to a (sub)cultural context. Also creative minorities need autonomous moral human beings who incorporate and revitalize the moral and spiritual forces of the people, and who struggle to achieve certain emancipatory goals.

The second question posed in the introduction: "Does an advocacy of one type of plurality as a desirable state of affairs imply moral relativism, i.e. does it imply that moral values are relative, and a claim of truth is impossible?" would be answered by Maritain in the negative. He maintains the truth of his worldview, moral values, and anthropological and socio-philosophic ideas. From this perspective, he is in search of communication and cooperation with adherents of other worldviews on the basis of common moral values. From the standpoint of these moral values, he criticizes deficiencies of associations, a lack of development of the psychological and moral attitude of human beings, cultural degeneration, and oppressive minorities.

And lastly, the third question posed in the introduction "Would it be possible to achieve human fellowship in a society that is characterized by such complex plurality?" can be answered as follows: Maritain acknowledges that human beings who adhere to different worldviews and who have different social positions may share common moral values that make it possible to achieve human fellowship across religious, social, and cultural bounds. Moreover, he also acknowledges that there is a real and genuine tolerance and human fellowship "only when a man is firmly and absolutely convinced of a truth, or of what he holds to be a truth, and when he at the same time recognizes the right of those who deny this truth to exist, and to contradict him, and to speak their own mind, not because they are free from truth but because they seek truth in their own way, and because he respects in them human nature and human dignity."<sup>48</sup>

48. Maritain, *On the Use of Philosophy*, p. 24.