

HUMANISM AND BIOETHICS:
THE PROPHETIC VOICE OF JACQUES MARITAIN (1882-1973)

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1. Introduction

Jacques Maritain was, among 20th Century philosophers, the most prescient about how the changing relationships between science and philosophy would affect our presuppositions about what it means to be human, and therefore what the good for humans might be. He was fully cognizant and respectful of the knowledge empirical science was gaining about man's physical and psychological constitution. But he was also fearful that the truths of man's nature which came from religion and philosophy beyond the experimental method would be lost. The resulting damage to the ontological unity of our idea of man would, he predicted, have irreparable consequences on our moral and social lives.

This dissonance in our idea of man was, he felt, the central cultural crisis of modernity. Maritain knew this crisis would reach into our 21st Century and beyond. He posed his prophecy succinctly in these words: "*The peculiar problem of the age lying before us is to reconcile science and wisdom in a vital and spiritual unity.*"¹ He spelled out the nature of this "peculiar problem" in a substantial portion of his own thinking and writing. First and foremost, he distinguished the congruence and the conflicts between the ways of knowing and thinking of science,

¹ Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 32.

philosophy and theology.² He also foresaw the profound influence of these changing relationships on man's social and political life.³

Maritain hoped for an "integral humanism"—one that could provide a unified idea of human beings and in their physical, psychological, rational and spiritual dimensions. Maritain sought this ontological unity in a Christian humanism, one fully in communion with the Christian tradition yet responsive to the positive elements in modern culture.

Maritain could not foresee how prophetic his notion of an integral humanism would be for today's bioethics. But nothing could be more relevant for the growing debates in bioethics between those who hold to an anthropocentric and those who hold to a theocentric humanism. Both groups draw of the presuppositions underlying their version of humanism to respond to the questions of how to use the powers of biotechnology over human life both wisely and well. The differences in the way our presupposition of man and his destiny shape our bioethical reasoning are creating serious rifts within the bioethics community as well as the general public.

I will summarize the ways in which Maritain's humanism provides a prophetic voice that bears attention in our present debates about the ends to which our new-found powers can be used to enrich or endanger our humanity. I will do this under four headings: (1) Maritain's relationship with biological science; (2) The importance of our idea of man, i.e., the "anthropological question" in today's bioethics; (3) The outlines of Maritain's Christian Humanism; and (4) The potential place of Maritain's hope for a retrieval of the philosophy of nature in today's bioethical discourse.

² See Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, translated from the French edition under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959); *Science and Wisdom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954); *True Humanism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950); and *The Philosophy of Nature* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951).

³ See Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1951); *Scholasticism and Politics*, trans. Mortimer Adler (New York: Image Books, 1960); *Christianity and Democracy* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946); and *Reflections on America* (Garden City, New York: Image, 1964).

2. Maritain and Biology

Maritain devoted his scholarly life to philosophy in almost all its branches. He produced works of originality in epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, social and political philosophy as well as moral philosophy. He saw each of these topics as differing ways of knowing reality, each in its way distinct, but also related to the others. He carefully, and *in extenso*, made these connections in his seminal work *Degrees of Knowledge*. In his *Moral Philosophy* he recognized the importance of taking all perspectives and ways of knowing into account since all contributed in its own way to our knowledge of man.⁴

Maritain's philosophical perspective in all these works was the moderate realism of his intellectual guides, Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. By this method he brought these thinkers into congruence with modern sciences—physical, biological and social—as well as with modern social and political thinking. In all his work, Maritain's Catholic and Christian faith infused his thought and gave it the spiritual unity his "true humanism" demanded. His true humanism was unapologetically a Christian Humanism.

Maritain, however, never forgot his early experiences as a student of biology. In fact he began his studies at Heidelberg as a student of Hans Driesch. Driesch was a pioneer experimental embryologist. Maritain was formally a student of biology for only a short time (1907-1908). His diary records that he eventually pawned his microscope in the summer of 1908, in order to help Léon Bloy in his penury.⁵ Maritain, however, continued as a friend of Driesch after he left Heidelberg. In his own philosophy of biology, he strongly supported Driesch's embryogenetic neo-vitalism.

In 1921 Maritain wrote the preface to Driesch's *La Philosophie de l'organisme*.⁶ Later he cited Driesch's experiments to support his own strong contention that the ontologic status of animals could never be

⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Moral Philosophy: An Historical and Critical Survey of the Great Systems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964).

⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Notebooks*, trans. J. J. Ryans (New York: Magi, 1984), 48.

⁶ Hans Driesch, *Le Philosophie de l'organisme* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1921).

explained by physico-chemical mechanisms alone.⁷ He argued that a methodological separation should be made between the empirical study of living organisms and the ontological investigations proper to philosophy. This paralleled his conviction that he should never use a revealed premise in a philosophical proposition.⁸

Although his life's work was in philosophy, Maritain never lost his original interest in the relations between philosophy, science, and biology. He recognized full well how significant they were for any comprehensive view of what it means to be human. He retained that interest to the closing years of his life, when he wrote a strongly worded criticism of Teilhard de Chardin's attempt to fuse the biological sciences with theology. Maritain, perhaps too harshly, thought Teilhard's synthesis of evolution, cosmology, and theology was a kind of Christian Gnosticism. For Maritain, Teilhard's work was more mystical and poetic than philosophically or theologically sound.⁹ It veered from Maritain's own integral humanism by a wide margin.

3. Maritain's Humanism and Modern Bioethics

In the brief 35 years or so of its existence, bioethics has expanded from its earlier focus on medical ethics to the larger issues of how to use the capabilities of modern biotechnology wisely and well. Humans can now alter their ways of reproduction, re-engineer their present and future genetic endowment, modify the germ plasm, create and abort life at will, clone animals and perhaps themselves, etc. It is now obvious that the most profound and relevant question is deciding what is good for man. To answer that question, we need to know who man is and the meaning of his existence. Without some answer to these questions, we cannot judge how to use the expanding power of modern biomedicine without being overwhelmed by it.

⁷ Jacques Maritain, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison in collaboration with J. Gordon Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), 244.

⁸ See Yves R. Simon, "Jacques Maritain, The Growth of a Christian Philosopher," in *Jacques Maritain, The Man and His Achievement*, ed. Joseph M. Evans (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 23.

⁹ Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne: An Old Layman Questions Himself about the Present Time* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 119-20.

We need a moral template against which to measure our answer to the question John Paul II asked all mankind in his first Encyclical: "Does the progress which has man as its author and promoter make human life on earth more human in every aspect of that life?"¹⁰ That question occupied him as a young Bishop at the Vatican Council. It was the focus for the philosophical anthropology of his colleagues at Lublin.¹¹ That question is the reason his biographer called him "...the Pope of a New Humanism..."¹² The same question now engages both anthropocentric and theocentric philosophers and theologians today.¹³ It is also the question at which bioethical discourse must begin and end.

"Humanism" is, however, at one and the same time, an attractive and a troublesome term in bioethics as elsewhere in modern culture. On the one hand, it suggests a sensitivity to the more spiritual dimensions of the personal, the existential, and the humane dimensions of our existence. On the other, it is symbolic of a man-centered universe in which God plays a minor or absent role. For Christians, humanism is God-centered and other-world oriented. Its telos is the beatific vision and not a biotechnological utopia here on earth.

The idea we hold of man is the foundation stone for our normative guidelines in bioethics, as in any system of ethics. It is the unavoidable starting point, explicit or implicit, for any moral line of reasoning. Without a stable foundation point, our arguments about right and wrong, good and bad, will end in endless regress or endless circularity. Whether we are speaking of the common good in social medicine or the individual good of the patient in clinical medicine, our deepest convictions about what is a good or authentic human life ground our moral choices.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Encyclical Redemptor Hominis* #15 (March 4, 1979).

¹¹ Mieczyslaw A. Krapiec, *I-Man, An Outline of the Philosophical Anthropology*, trans. Andrew Woznicki and Theresa Sandok et al. (New Britain, Connecticut: Mariel Publications, 1983).

¹² George Weigel, *Witness to Hope, A Biography of John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Street, 1999).

¹³ Edmund D. Pellegrino, "Toward a Richer Bioethics," in *Health and Human Flourishing*, eds. Carol Taylor and Roberto Dell'Oro (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 2006).

Maritain understood this fact clearly. He said:

The fact is I believe that in the background of all of our moral difficulties there is a fundamental problem which is ineluctably posed for each of us... the problem of the relation of man to the human condition or of his attitude in the face of the human condition.¹⁴

This is the ineluctable problem which is today the force behind the growing and widening rift in bioethical discourse. As Maritain said:

It is clear that whoever uses the word humanism brings into play at once an entire metaphysic and that the idea we form of humanism will have wholly different implications according to whether we hold or do not hold there is in the nature of man something which breathes an air outside time and a personality whose profoundest needs surpass the order of the universe.¹⁵

The metaphysics we bring into play will determine the way we ground the justifications we use for our moral choices.

There are many "humanisms" today, e.g., the classical-renaissance version of the humanist as a scholar learned in the ancient languages and cultures, the atheist humanism of many moderns who see man as the center of the universe, the Hegelian-Marxist humanism of dialectical materialism, the humanisms of the major religions, and the humanism of scientific modernists. For the purposes of moral philosophy, they are reducible to two, based on whether or not they accept a source of moral authority beyond man in a personal God, or whether they see man only as the sole determinant of right and wrong, good and bad. The disparity in the bioethics resulting from each presupposition becomes more evident daily.

Anthropocentric humanism explains man in terms of his chemical and physical constitution, or his psycho-social formation or his subjective values and preferences. On this view, his ethics is his to fashion, by law, public policy, and social construction. It exalts the

¹⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Moral Philosophy: An Historical and Critical Survey of the Great Systems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), 452.

¹⁵ Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism*, xii.

pragmatic, relativistic, and autonomous choice, without need of metaphysics. Its roots were well laid in the ancient world by Democritus and Lucretius. It enjoys a revival among many influential writers of the day, who hold both religion and metaphysics discredited by modern science.¹⁶ They are the modern children of Descartes' most ardent mechanist disciple, de La Mettrie.¹⁷

On this view, human dignity, mind and soul are mere epiphenomena: i.e., a manifestation of the complexity of our physical structure. The normal or the demented patient or the embryo and infant, therefore, have no greater moral claim on us than any other living being in the biosphere. The implications of such presuppositions for human life-questions—embryonic stem cell research, abortion, euthanasia, human enhancement, genetic engineering, neuroethics, etc.—are profound. There is no moral distinction in belonging to the natural kind to which human nature belongs.

Anthropomorphic humanism is not, as its adherents attest, the only scientifically valid conclusion about who and what we are. Many credible scientists do hold both to a divine source of morality, as well as to the legitimacy of science—each in its own sphere.¹⁸ Elsewhere, I have contrasted the way anthropocentric philosophies of man result in divergent and conflicting systems of bioethics.¹⁹

It is necessary to point out, as Maritain did, that to speak of humanism is to introduce metaphysics into the discussion. The anthropocentric perspective cannot claim to be free of metaphysics.

¹⁶ See James D. Watson and Andrew Berry, *The Secret of Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2003); Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience, The University of Knowledge* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998), 235; and Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell, Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2006).

¹⁷ Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *L'Homme Machine, A Study of the Origins of an Idea* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University, 1960).

¹⁸ Francis Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006).

¹⁹ See Edmund D. Pellegrino, "Toward A Richer Bioethics"; see also Arthur Peacocke, *Paths from Science Towards God: The End of all Exploring* (Oxford: One World, 2001), Chap. 1-2, and John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1998), 92.

Instead, it is grounded in a covert metaphysics, one open only to the insights of positive and empirical science. This covert metaphysics is inescapably itself a metaphysics, because it claims an exclusive grasp of reality, a grasp of the ultimate truth of things, but one open only to the methodology of empirical and experimental science.

4. Maritain's True Humanism

Maritain's thinking about the crisis of humanism was triggered initially by his concern for the fundamental atheism inherent in Marx and Lenin's materialist foundations for Soviet Communism. Maritain, however, recognized a certain truth in the Marxist idea of man as a being in a collectivity. He wanted to preserve some of this truth, but cleanse it of its materialist bias. He saw man's fulfillment as a human being not in contradiction of God but in one with God:

...The creature should be respected in his connection with God because he is totally dependent upon Him; a humanism indeed but a theocentric humanism rooted in what is radical in man; integral humanism, the humanism of the Incarnation.²⁰

In *Science and Wisdom*, Maritain summarized his humanism and the dignity of man in the law of Incarnation.²¹ For Maritain, it follows that:

...to love a being in and for God is not to treat him as a mere means of a mere occasion for loving God, but to love and cherish their being as an end, because it merits love, in the degree to which that merit and their dignity spring from the sovereign love and the sovereign loving-kindness of God.²²

Maritain's humanism grounds man's dignity not only in Genesis but in the Incarnation. What better evidence can there be for man's inherent dignity among created things than God's choice of man as the being in whom, and among whom, He sent His only Son? This is radically different from the neutral or non-existent dignity that accords the same worth to every creature in the biosphere, man included! Here, Maritain's humanism moves in the direction of Wojtyła's Christian

²⁰ Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism*, 65.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

personalist humanism.²³ Speciesism is for Maritain not the mortal sin against Darwinian evolution condemned by the materialist, but a recognition of man's transfiguration by grace—man so changed by grace that he strives to become the new man.²⁴

These differences between opposing ideas of man become apparent whenever we must as professionals, individuals, or societies decide whether or not to adopt a new or particular biotechnological "advance." The idea of man we espouse defines the good man as man and of *this* patient in the clinical encounter. The idea of man is therefore far more than a theoretical preoccupation for the physician and other health workers. The same is true of policy makers who cannot avoid having a vision, implicit or explicit, of what it means to be truly human when they fashion a policy or regulation. These differences in perceptions of what is authentic human existence have, in recent years, come to divide the bioethics community itself. Scholars and practitioners are being classified, or classify themselves, as "progressive" or "conservative" on the basis of their preferences for one or the other version of humanism.

As bioethics moves into the public sphere, increasingly the differences I have been describing are dividing public opinion and complicating efforts to legislate, regulate or promote a particular version of humanity's future. Witness the contrast between the Christian humanism of the *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, on the one hand, and that of the *Humanist Manifesto*, on the other.²⁵ Both, with sincerity, seek a world that is more "humane," but their logical presuppositions of how to judge that world are often far apart. Consider only the humanism of John Paul II's existential personalism with the "humanism" of those legislators in California,

²³ Andrew N. Woznicki, *Karol Wojtyła's Existential Personalism* (New Britain, Connecticut: Mariel, 1980).

²⁴ Jacques Maritain, *True Humanism*, 86.

²⁵ See *Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, 1965, and Paul Kutz, *Humanist Manifesto* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2002).

New Jersey, and elsewhere who are willing to sacrifice human embryos for their vision of a new utopia built on stem cell research.²⁶

The debate grows more contentious every day. Bioethics does, of course, have profound political implications, but partisan bioethicists do discredit their claims to expertise in ethics. At this moment, the gap is growing and the chances for some sort of political reconciliation are becoming more remote. Honest and civil dialogue has deteriorated into vicious polemics, often personal in their attack.²⁷

This brings me to the last of the three issues in Maritain's prophecy pertinent to bioethics—the need for a conceptual bridge between metaphysics and experimental science, a bridge of language and dialectical methodology that he subsumed under the rubric of the philosophy of nature. Retrieval of a vital philosophy of nature is potentially an instrument of mediation through which theocentric and anthropocentric humanism might find some common ground. If the dichotomy of anthropological perspectives is not to divide bioethics further, some medium is needed through which they can communicate without immediate mutual rejection. Could this be a retrieval of the idea of a philosophy of nature as Maritain proposed? Could it be the ultimate higher truth to which empirical science aspires? Is there a philosophical realm between science and metaphysics?²⁸

5. Ought there to be a distinct philosophy of Nature?

Maritain asked this question out of his concern, even in his early studies of biology with Driesch, for a bridge between the knowledge claims of experimental science and those of philosophy, especially metaphysics. Maritain strongly supported Driesch's neo-vitalism: the doctrine that life is not totally explicable in terms of physics and

²⁶ See Andrew N. Woznicki, *Karol Wojtyła's Existential Personalism* and Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, translated from the Polish by Andrzej Potocki in collaboration with Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1969).

²⁷ See Edmund D. Pellegrino, "Bioethics and Politics: "Doing Ethics" in the Public Square," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 31, no. 6 (2006): 569-84.

²⁸ Matthew S. Pugh, "Maritain and Post Modern Science," in *Post Modernism and Christian Philosophy*, ed. Roman T. Ciapolo with an introduction by Jude P. Dougherty (Washington, D.C.: American Maritain Association, 1997), 181.

chemistry. He did so against the insistent claim of many empirical scientists then, as now, that they possessed the only valid source of knowledge of nature. On their view, the answer to the question "What is man?" could only be answered by an ever more detailed study of man's physical being. On their view, an ontological grasp was not possible.

The impact of modern science on philosophy was a recurrent theme in Maritain's work, particularly in *Science and Wisdom*, *True Humanism* and the *Philosophy of Nature*. And in these works he argued that there must be harmony between wisdom (infused wisdom, theology and metaphysics) and knowledge of what he called the "special sciences." He developed these epistemic relations with great care in *The Degrees of Knowledge*. Maritain held that there was a hierarchy of distinct degrees of knowledge each with its definitive style of explanation and none of which can be substituted for the other.²⁹ Both science and philosophy have their own methodology. Each has a just place of each in the order of wisdom. Defining these places and their hierarchical relationships was a challenge for modern epistemology.

In such a hierarchy, experimental and empirical science was suited to explain nature in terms of its sensible, observable and measurable characteristics. Metaphysics, on the other hand, while not constituting the whole of philosophy, does deal with the being of things in a higher order of abstraction. Yet, between empirical science and metaphysics, there also exists a realm of reflection which constitutes the philosophy of nature, which knows the same world as the physical sciences, but knows it philosophically: that is, conceptually and as intelligible being.³⁰

A philosophy of nature differs from empirical science. It starts with the same sensible world but, unlike empirical science, it abstracts from that world to a conceptual level, to probe the more general meaning of change, motion, causality, time, soul, and life as they underlie the measurable phenomena of human life. On this view, it would be an error to expect philosophical criteria to emerge directly from scientific

²⁹ Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom* op cit., 33.

³⁰ Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics* (New York: Image, 1960), 58.

observation and equally erroneous to expect to construct a philosophy of nature without scientific fact.

Metaphysics is necessary for a philosophy, for without it there is no philosophy, no contact with being as such. But philosophy of nature is also necessary for metaphysics, for without it there is no connection with the real world of observable and measurable phenomena. Philosophy of nature fulfills the "ontological aspiration" of the sciences. Maritain summarizes his view of the role of mediation a philosophy of science might play:

It [a philosophy of nature] is an indispensable mediator which reconciles the world of the particular sciences (which is inferior to it) with the world of metaphysical wisdom, which it obeys. It is here at the basis and beginning of our human knowledge, in the heart of the sensible and the changeable manifold that the great law or hierarchical and dynamic organization of knowledge comes into play. And on it depends for us the appetite and the good of intellectual unity.³¹

Perhaps the most incisive and informed evaluation of Maritain's notion of philosophy of nature in reference to modern philosophy of science is that of William Wallace.³² Wallace connects Maritain's thought to the Jesuits Peter Hoenen and Filippo Selvaggi. He includes the revisions Yves R. Simon made in Maritain's thought. He also points to a renewed interest in a philosophy of nature among philosophers of science today. For the present author, philosophy of science is a reflection on the philosophical problems arising in the doing of science, and in defining its status as an area of knowledge. Philosophy of nature has as its object not science nor the philosophical problems involved in experimental science as a way of knowing the world per se, but the meanings of the phenomena of nature itself.

In any case, it remains to be seen if serious attention to a philosophy of nature as defined by Maritain and Simon can serve as the much needed bridge between the Scientific perspectives of today's

³¹ Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom*, 69.

³² William Wallace, *The Modeling of Nature* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1990), 197ff.

materialists, and those who hold to the importance of scientific method, but see it as insufficient for a full understanding of man and the natural world.

Could a strengthened and clarified philosophy of nature save the contending factions from the descent from dialectics to polemics in bioethics? Could it serve as the intellectual bridge for a productive dialectic between a more traditional realistic metaphysics and the enormous powers of experimental science? Can the balance between science and wisdom be restored in the arena of bioethics? Could the prophetic voice of Maritain serve as the springboard for a more civil and productive dialectic?

William Wallace has suggested that a retrieval of philosophy of nature might also bring it into closer convergence with contemporary philosophy of science. To this end he suggests that:

...a realist and up to date view of the philosophy of science, as opposed to a Humean or Kantian view brings it very close to a philosophy of nature so much so that philosophy of science can be seen with proper qualifications as itself a part of the philosophy of nature.³³

This is a great deal to hope for. But if this can come about, it would go a long way towards healing the divide between contemporary and traditional epistemology.

6. Humanism, Medicine and Bioethics

The anthropological question and Maritain's cogitations come to a very sharp and practical point in modern medicine. Medicine has always centered on an idea of man and what is good for mankind.³⁴ The first truly moral principle of the Hippocratic ethos is the moral obligation of the physician to act for the well being, i.e., the good, of his patient. But the "good" of the patient is not subsumed entirely by his medical good—that which is attainable by the art and science of medicine. The good of the patient also includes his perceptions of his

³³ Ibid., 227.

³⁴ Edmund D. Pellegrino, "Medicine, History and the Idea of Man," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 346 (March 1963): 9-20.

own good, his good as a human being and his spiritual good, whatever he might conceive that to be.³⁵

Comprehensive medicine requires attention to each of the levels of the patient's good. What physicians think it means to be human is pertinent to the decisions at each level of human good. Since medicine in one way or another will be the conduit for decisions about the application of the latest in biotechnologic advance, what we think humans are *for* will condition our assessment of whether, as Maritain and John Paul II surmised, it is "good" for man as man, whether it sustains and deepens his flourishing as man, or whether it makes him ultimately a victim of his own inventiveness.

The only measure by which to calibrate how much of genetic, regenerative and enhancement medicine or nanotechnology and re-engineering of the human species are morally permissible is our idea of man. We must not forget, believer and non-believer alike, the warning of Henri de Lubac: "It is not true, as is sometimes said, that man cannot organize the world without God. What is true is that, without God, he can ultimately organize it only against man. Exclusive humanism is inhuman humanism."³⁶

The difficulties of the reconciliation of science and wisdom for which Maritain wished is today complicated by the need for philosophy itself first to be reconciled with its own intellectual tradition. Post modern and post metaphysical philosophy has, as Theodor Adorno pointed out, abandoned having answers to "questions regarding the personal or even the collective conduct of life."³⁷ It has become a melancholy science as a result.³⁸

³⁵ Edmund D. Pellegrino and David Thomasma, *For the Patient's Good* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1987).

³⁶ Henri de Lubac, *The Drama of Atheistic Humanism* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995).

³⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

³⁸ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia, Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), 15; cited in Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, 1.

This defection on the part of philosophy, i.e., from what Maritain would have classified as “wisdom,” is something he did not envision. Its implications for bioethics are not apt to be remedied by a philosophy of nature. Only a partial resolution of the “peculiar problem” at the heart of Maritain’s concerns seems possible. That resolution would make a renewal of the philosophy of nature a bridge which might allow a passage of ideas over the rifts between anthropocentric and theocentric ideas of man now roiling the bioethical waters.

A philosophy of nature might also be influential in ameliorating the malaise of modern philosophy as Habermas has diagnosed it:

The new technologies make a public discourse on the right understanding of cultural forms of life in general an urgent matter. And philosophers no longer have any good reasons for leaving such a dispute to biologists, and engineers intoxicated by science fiction.³⁹

Although he does not use the word, Habermas seems to be restating Maritain’s “peculiar problem” in postmodern terms. Without the reconciliation Maritain sought between science and wisdom, de Lubac’s “inhuman humanism” will continue to plague any attempt to discern what it means to be human.

Thirty years after his death, Maritain’s prophetic voice remains ever more clear and relevant. His plea for an integral humanism resonates closely with what has become the central conundrum of bioethics. Though Maritain had no direct contact with bioethics even in its nascent years, it has become a beneficiary of his wisdom.

³⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *Human Nature*, 15