

INTRODUCTION:  
THE TASK OF THINKING REALITY

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I. THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY

Metaphysics is the science of reality, the study of what things are and how they operate. It is a longstanding view among philosophers that metaphysics is an innate tendency of the human spirit, that people instinctively want to know what reality is. Aristotle famously remarked at the beginning of his *Metaphysics* that “all men by nature desire to know” and about two millennia later Immanuel Kant echoed these same ideas by stating in his *Critique of Pure Reason* that metaphysics is rooted in the teleological movement of reason itself. At first glance the term “metaphysics” can appear a bit daunting and intimidating, conveying the connotation of abstract systematizing, but at its heart the philosophical tradition has always endeavored to tap into and articulate the deepest aspiration of all human beings, which is to live in the truth, the very basis of reality.

With such a formidable tradition standing behind such views one could be forgiven for believing that this desire for truth is a permanent and indelible fixture of the human soul. Yet, when one looks around the world today in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is much evidence that living in the truth is not the top priority of most human beings. The rapid advances in technology, especially on the communication front (e.g. the Internet), and the increased politicization of society, which more often than not breeds a certain obfuscating and self-serving rhetoric, have created the ideal conditions for the flight from truth and the establishment of a pseudo-reality, often termed a “virtual reality.” This is nothing more than a cursory, general observation of the state of humanity in our contemporary age, but the dictum that “truth falters in the public square” (59:14), as promulgated by the prophet Isaiah, is as old as civilization itself and has been witnessed countless times in history, most famously in the case of Socrates, but also throughout the philosophical tradition. Although

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human beings desire the truth, we also tend to shun and reject it. Although human beings want to embrace and live in reality, we also have an inclination to immerse ourselves in falsehoods and even lies. Although human beings are made for happiness, we are prone to sin and to spending our days in sadness. It would not be too outrageous to suggest that human beings are, rightly put, paradoxical creatures.

Despite this contradictory human nature, there is still hope that truth will set us free. As the Irish poet Seamus Heaney remarked, “The mind still longs to repose in what Samuel Johnson once called with superb confidence ‘the stability of truth,’ even as it recognizes the destabilizing nature of its own operations and enquiries.”<sup>1</sup> This confidence in the power of truth to orient the human mind towards its final goal in life and to anchor the soul in the nurturing waters of reality is the backdrop of this present collection of essays, which are devoted to metaphysical themes that take their cue from the original searchings of the ancient Greeks, continued through the Middle Ages, and advanced in contemporary times by figures such as Jacques Maritain. What is at play here is the perceived need to resurrect metaphysical thought and to demonstrate that the unquenchable desire for truth is indeed an aspect of the human condition that cannot be suffocated out of existence.

*Distinctions of Being: Philosophical Approaches to Reality*, as the title itself suggests, bears upon the time-honored insight that philosophical thinking depends upon the making of distinctions. Robert Sokolowski has gone one step further to describe the act of distinguishing as a quintessential philosophical act.<sup>2</sup> Such distinctions include what is essential versus what is accidental, form as opposed to matter, act and potency, the divine and the human, the temporal and the eternal, and so on. No doubt such thinking requires a modicum of talent and skill, for often the realities being distinguished are subtle, abstract, and utterly simple. Nonetheless, it remains a mainstay of philosophical thought itself that the subtleties of sameness and difference be properly recognized and understood. After all, as the cover photo of

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1 Seamus Heaney, “Crediting Poetry,” in *Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966-1996* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 418.

2 Robert Sokolowski, “The Method of Philosophy: Making Distinctions,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 51 (1998): 515-32.

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this volume perfectly illustrates, in the interplay of the colors of blue and white it is incumbent upon one to be able to pick out the sky from the water and the clouds in the air from their reflection in the sea. In fact, the horizon serves as the limit and boundary for both sky and earth, providing the necessary rupture between two domains of being and offering at the same time the necessary condition for the vision and comprehension itself. To be sure, without a horizon there is no distinction between heaven and earth, and without a perceptive observer there is no recognition of the distinctions of being, the many and various ways in which things exist.

### II. THE THING AS THE BASIS OF METAPHYSICS

The chief inspiration for metaphysical thought is nothing other than the attention paid to the things of the world. We live in a world of things, things that stand apart from us and englobe us in their positioning nature. We orient ourselves by virtue of the reality of objects that act as markers and measures, enabling us to find our bearings. Metaphysics was born from a profound reflection on things. The Ionian and Milesian monists wanted to understand the fundamental essence of the things in the world. St. Thomas Aquinas focused his mind on the being of things, understood in terms of the act of existing. In a more recent development, Martin Heidegger raised the question of being by analyzing the way in which things relate themselves to us, ontological states that he described with the terms *Vorhandenheit* (“present-at-hand”) and *Zuhandenheit* (“ready-to-hand”). So intimately connected are things to the act of thinking that one could emphatically announce, along with G. K. Chesterton, that “you cannot think if there are no things to think about.”<sup>3</sup>

The importance of things for metaphysics as such has been illuminated in a thought-provoking work by the Canadian philosopher Kenneth L. Schmitz entitled *The Recovery of Wonder*.<sup>4</sup> One of the central theses advanced by Schmitz is that the concept of the thing—*res* in Latin, *ontos* in Greek—was a hard won achievement. The early, pre-Socratic Greeks did not have a word for a thing as such. What they did

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3 G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Image Books, 2001), 31.

4 Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Recovery of Wonder: The New Freedom and the Asceticism of Power* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005).

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have were the words *ta pragmata* meaning “doable things” or “things that can be done” and *ta chremata* which were “useable or useful things.” *Pragma* is related to *praxis*, which has the connotation of an action or deed, whereas *chrema* refers to a useful or needed object, such as money or property, something that one can use in a utilitarian manner. It was not until the advent of Plato and Aristotle, arguably the first significant metaphysicians, that the concept of a thing simply “being”—rather than being done or used—emerged into human consciousness. Thus was the notion of a thing born and the science of reality, known to later ages as metaphysics, given a sustained expression.

It bears noting that the English word “reality” is derived from the Latin *realitas* which is itself linked etymologically to *res*, thing. The thing stands out as a pivotal feature of reality. A thing is an entity residing in the world and capable of being cognized as a unified whole, as a complete some-thing. Trees, houses, tables, dogs, and streams all denote things. But we can also talk about intellectual entities as things, such as thoughts, emotions, and fantasies. Although fraught with problems, we can even speak of God as a thing, as Martin Buber suggests in his concept of the I-It relation. A thing can be either, animate or inanimate, natural or artificial, material or immaterial. The Oxford English Dictionary informs us that the word “thing” has the meaning of “that which exists individually; that which is or may be an object of perception, knowledge or thought; a being, an entity.”<sup>5</sup> On one level, the word “thing” is so vague and general as to appear meaningless. We ordinarily use this word to denote just about everything we refer to in our speech: “Give me that thing over there!” or “What was that thing-a-ma-jig you were holding?” or “I did not mean a thing by what I said.” Indeed, “thing” has a universal denotation. But, at the same time, a thing marks out what is truly fundamental in our perceptions. Without things which we encounter and use and ponder, there would be no reality to engage with and to reflect on.

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<sup>5</sup> Its first and original meaning is “a meeting, assembly, esp. a deliberative or judicial assembly, a court, a council.” The word “thing” originally was related to the proceedings of a court of law, i.e., a suit or cause pleaded before a court.

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The careful and even reverential attentiveness to things gives rise to contemplation and thought itself. Schmitz elucidates the origins of the contemplative insight into things that lies at the heart of metaphysics. The Greeks called this approach to things *theoria*, which comes from the word *theoros*, a word which means “one who sees.” The “one who sees” is the *theoros*, the individual who has an insight into the things of the world, who can actually “see” what things are. Such a vision, it needs to be stressed, must focus on the nature of the thing as it reveals itself, rather than the perceiver imposing some arbitrary characterization on the thing. This realism, which is nothing other than a deliberate attentiveness to things, is the basis of all metaphysical thinking.

Over time, however, the priority given to things was altered and eventually discarded entirely. Historically speaking, the school known as nominalism—also known as terminism—made its mark in the late Middle Ages. Nominalism was the first major instance in the philosophical tradition of the West in which the thing was separated from the concept. This distance placed between things and ideas proved in the long run to be a ruinous enterprise. The chief problem with nominalism, at least from our perspective here, is that it loses the sense of the inner depth and meaning of things. Jacques Maritain expresses his lament in the following way:

[The nominalists] have a basic misunderstanding of the value of the abstract, that immateriality which is more enduring than things for all that it is untouchable and unimaginable, that immateriality which mind seeks out in the very heart of things. But why this incurable nominalism? The reason is that while having a taste for the real indeed, they nevertheless have no sense of being. Being as such, loosed from the matter in which it is incorporated, being, with its pure objective necessities and its laws that prove no burden, its restraints which do not bind, its invisible evidence, is for them only a word.<sup>6</sup>

This intellectual and spiritual neglect of the being of the things was furthered in the rationalism of René Descartes. By separating the mind from sensible things in his pursuit of intellectual certainty, Descartes

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Distinguish to Unite or The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 1.

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transformed the philosophical understanding of the manner by which knowledge is obtained. In the older metaphysics of the ancients and medievals, knowledge always originates in the apprehension of sensible things. But for Descartes it is possible to arrive at a purely intellectual grasp of truth independently of sensation. Because the Cartesian epistemology reflects the Thomistic conception of how angels, which are pure intellectual substances, come to know essences without needing to perceive material things through the senses, Maritain labels Descartes' philosophy an *angelism*. This Cartesian angelism effects a violent separation between mind and reality, between the intellect and experience, and, in so doing, introduces into modernity the principle of idealism.

The modern idealists lose completely the appreciation of things as existing independently of mind. Whereas in the past, in the older metaphysics, the human intellect was attentive to the ontological constitution of things, which it patiently penetrated in its theoretical inquiries, gradually uncovering the rich being of things, idealism stands in stark contrast by abolishing all intrinsic otherness to things. At bottom, for an idealistic standpoint, things are determinations and constructions of the mind. Immanuel Kant represents this idealistic attitude in his attempt to seek the grounds for the validation of scientific knowledge, so that knowledge can meet the demands of scientific rigor, precision, and certitude. What is at stake is not the origination of beings but the justification of knowledge-claims; what is at stake is not the reality of things but the authority of the knower. This issue for idealism is not ontological constitution but epistemic validation. This justification is achieved by Kant on the basis of a priori categories. Things are translated from objects in the early modern sense into phenomena in the sense of Kant's critical idealism. If the material of knowledge could appear only under the actively determining conditions of the knowing subject, objects had in idealism received their definitive emptying: they were no longer that which stands over against the mind as objects (with a diminished, residual independence), but that which appears to the mind as phenomena, under the mind's conditions; that is, they were in effect appearances, not things. Therefore, idealism has the effect of completely desensitizing human intelligence to the presence and meaning of things. It diminishes the human appreciation of reality and radically transforms accordingly the nature of human subjectivity. With such a

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profound effect on the human spirit, it is not surprising, then, to learn that Maritain regards philosophical idealism as an error of monumental proportions. Idealism, in short, violated the integrity of metaphysics, that is, the human person's capacity to know reality as such.

### III. THE CLAIMS OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is a curious possession, for it is essential to everyday, ordinary living, a veritable commonplace, but its proper nature is usually very little understood. To know something is a reality that speaks to the objective and subjective poles of existence. First, knowledge is of *something* that is grasped by the mind in its truth, and, second, it is the intellect that is modified in some way by the presence of knowledge in it.<sup>7</sup> As regards the subject, knowledge is the ennoblement and elevation of intelligence. What is underlined here is a particular way of being, not a process of producing or making. The knower's very being is ontologically enriched in the act of knowing. However, knowledge is not of oneself, but of an object, a determinate something that can be apprehended by the intellect. It is this object that is taken up into the human mind with respect to its intelligible nature. For Maritain, following Aristotle and Thomas, the knower becomes the object in the act of knowing, which explains how precisely the knower's being benefits from knowledge. Certainly, the person does not actually become a table or chair when he or she knows it, but rather the intellect accepts the object's immaterial form into itself through a process of abstraction and in this way becomes the thing in an immaterial way. This act of the intellect becoming the object is so puzzling, yet awe-inspiring that Maritain rightly describes it as a mystery.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Maritain reserves the term *superexistence* to denote the existence of the knower who has become the thing known.<sup>9</sup> It is

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7 See Jacques Maritain, *Réflexions sur l'intelligence et sur sa vie propre* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, 1926), 50-53.

8 Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 118. See also Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being* (New York: Mentor Omega Book, 1962), 12-15.

9 *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 123. See also Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent* trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Image Books, 1956), 21: "True knowledge consists in a spiritual super-existence by which, in a supreme vital act, I become the other as such, and which

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clear, therefore, that knowing is not an inconsequential or sterile activity, but is responsible for the enlivening and transformation of the human person as such. On this score, Maritain communicates his thoughts with the utmost clarity: "This entirely immaterial informing, wherein the soul receives or submits only in order to exercise its own vital activity—only in order to bring itself in act to an existence that is not limited to itself alone—is that which constitutes knowing."<sup>10</sup> The human person undergoes a deepening of his being in and through the act of knowledge.

In the foregoing discussion, the term "object" was used rather loosely, but it is necessary to distinguish it carefully from the notion of a "thing."<sup>11</sup> The thing is the physical or material object as it exists independently of the mind, whereas the object is the abstracted, formal object in the intellect. To be sure, the object is derived from the thing as the intellect receives the intelligible species of the thing through sensation. From the initial species received into the mind to the formation of a concept there is a constant reference to the thing which was sensibly perceived. The concept of the object has an intentional function in which it acts as a formal sign of the thing.<sup>12</sup> A formal sign, as Maritain explains, is a sign whose intrinsic nature is to signify, whereas an instrumental sign signifies only accidentally.<sup>13</sup> For instance, smoke signifies the presence of fire, but it does so in a non-essential manner, since it can also exist for its own sake without any reference to a cause. Species and concepts, by contrast, are formal signs in the respect that their very nature points to the thing, the material object, which is housed immaterially in the intellect. Thomas Aquinas emphasizes this

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corresponds to the existence exercised or possessed by that other itself in the particular field of intelligibility which is its peculiar possession." The notion of super-existence is one that Maritain typically uses to describe the mode of existence of human personality, the being who communicates acts of knowledge and love, as found in *The Person and the Common Good*, trans. John J. Fitzgerald (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 40.

<sup>10</sup> *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 125.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 26, 96-107.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

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same function of the intellect to refer back constantly to phantasms in order for the universality of the concept to be adequate to the particularity of the thing.<sup>14</sup> Without this intentional function, concepts of objects would have no intrinsic connection with the things from which they are derived. Put in even stronger terms, it is precisely this intentionality of concepts that enables our knowledge of things to be assuredly of real things.

The categorical mistake, or, as Maritain expresses it, “the original sin” of modern idealism, is that it separated the object from the thing.<sup>15</sup> Descartes and Kant, to single out the two mightiest representatives of the idealistic tradition, misunderstood fundamentally the nature of human knowledge, which is that when the human intellect comes to know an object it always refers to an underlying or original thing, this being the bedrock of all philosophical realism. As Maritain makes unambiguously clear in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, realism and idealism in philosophy represent two wholly incommensurable and diametrically opposed attitudes towards reality. There is no third alternative, no higher perspective than these two which could overcome the divide and put to rest the quarrel between them. In the final analysis, the philosopher must make a decision as to which of these two standpoints he or she wishes to adopt. There is no doubt which position Maritain chooses. In his denunciation of idealism, he writes:

One cannot think about a ‘thought thing’ until after one has thought about a “thinkable thing”—a thing “good for existing”, i.e., at least a possible real. The first thing thought about is being independent of the mind. The *cogitatum* of the first *cogito* is not

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14 Thomas Aquinas, *The Treatise on Human Nature: Summa Theologiae 1a75-89*, trans. Robert Pasnau (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 84.7, 154: “The nature of a stone, for example, is by definition in this stone; and the nature of a horse is by definition in this horse, and so forth. Accordingly, the nature of a stone, or of any material thing, cannot be completely and truly cognized except by being cognized as existing in a particular. But we apprehend the particular through sense and imagination. And so it is necessary, in order for intellect actually to understand its proper object, that it turn toward phantasms so as to examine the universal nature existing in the particular.”

15 *The Degrees of Knowledge*, 115.

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*cogitatum*, but *ens*. We do not eat what has been eaten; we eat bread. To separate object from thing, the objective *logos* from metalogical being, is to violate the nature of intellect, to flee from the first evidence of direct intuition, and at the same time, to mutilate reflexive intuition (the very reflexive intuition on which we would make everything depend) in the very first of its immediate data. Idealism sets an original sin against the light at the beginning of the whole philosophical edifice.<sup>16</sup>

Philosophical realism, the critical realism of Maritain's metaphysics, can only be supported if the thing is permitted to play a role in philosophy. Without the thing we cannot have the option of realism, which positions itself against idealism. "As long as the value of the thing or of the subject is not fully restored, it is useless to try to be a realist."<sup>17</sup> It is for this reason that Maritain assiduously defends the notion of the thing and gives it pride of place in his metaphysics. For he is painfully aware that without the thing, idealism is victorious!

### IV. THE INNER MEANING OF REALITY

In a striking passage in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, Maritain writes: "The mystery of creation alone can allay the scruples of idealism."<sup>18</sup> By this statement, Maritain wishes to express his firm conviction that the main error of idealism is that it accords to human intelligence a power over things that it really does not possess. The fact of creation, the reality that the universe and the things in it derive their being from a divine act, reminds us all that the human intellect is finite and created, and, furthermore, that it does not bring things into being. To be sure, creation reveals to us that things have an existence independently of us.

Kenneth Schmitz picks up on this idea of creation as crucial for a proper understanding of the being of things. Creation informs us that things are not only *given*, but that they are a *gift*.<sup>19</sup> Things are the

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16 *Ibid.*, 115.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, 116.

19 See Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Gift: Creation* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982).

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products of an infinite, divine generosity and possess this fecundity of spirit in their very ontological constitution. Recognizing things as created, as gifts, opens our minds to the interiority, integrity, and depth of things. Schmitz speaks of the intrinsic immateriality of things that is situated in form. This immaterial, formal aspect of things, as mentioned earlier in this introduction, reveals a profound depth of meaning in things, as witnessed in their relations with other things that constitutes a community of things, what we can call a holistic network of meaning. The openness towards the things that we have not made is the core of the attitude of *theoria*, the contemplative insight into the heart of things. This theoretical disposition towards things, penetrating their interior essence, instills in the observer the feeling of wonder, which, as Plato and Aristotle both asserted, is the principle of all philosophizing. On this score Schmitz writes:

Through the interior depth in things, then, there is a shared bond for mutual relations between us and things: an openness for meditation, for *theôria*, and for a wonder that grows upon us as a kind of realization of the *significance* of each thing (*res*). From that should follow a new behaviour towards things.<sup>20</sup>

This theoretical attentiveness to things should lead to a transformation of the human subject and ennoble human intelligence. Instead of seeking to control and manipulate things, which is the general tendency of the modern, technological, and scientific disposition towards the world, the generosity of the gift of things calls us to be loving stewards of creation, faithful to our solidarity with things. And, with this reverential disposition towards the world, the hope is born of a renewed acknowledgement in the human heart of the ultimate origin of things in God's creative act.

### V. OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT VOLUME

The essays collected in this volume all deal with metaphysical themes. They all share a common engagement with the traditional metaphysics of the ancient Greek philosophers and medieval Schoolmen. To be sure, the thought of Jacques Maritain looms large in these pages. The basic thrust of this book is to bring into sharp relief

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20 Kenneth L. Schmitz, *The Recovery of Wonder*, 123.

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the questions and topics that philosophy has dealt with from time immemorial: being, form, matter, truth, knowledge, and God. Such ways of considering things may be on the wane in our contemporary age, but this volume serves to reignite the spark of this mindfulness for the inner nature of things.

The book is divided into four thematic sections. The first part, “Foundations of Aristotelian-Thomistic Metaphysics,” contains papers which examine the basic concepts of Aristotle’s and Aquinas’ understanding of metaphysics. In the first paper, “Why the Senses Cannot Have Truth: The Need for Abstraction,” Steven J. Jensen develops the Thomistic notion that truth resides in the intellect, despite the senses’ ability to perceive empirical objects as they really exist. His discussion revolves around the intellect’s ability to make judgments of reality, expressed in propositions, which reveal the truth of things. In this treatment of truth, the proper focus is the intellect’s relationship with reality, traditionally subsumed under the correspondence theory of truth.

This systematic approach is continued in Joshua P. Hochschild’s paper, “Form, Essence, Soul: Distinguishing Key Principles of Thomistic Metaphysics.” The point of departure for Hochschild’s essay is the many confusions that permeate the different terms used to describe living things, such as human persons. What is a person’s substantial form? And does this differ from the person’s essence? Above all, what exactly is the soul? By elucidating the different uses and understandings of the terms form, essence, and soul—ultimately gauged with respect to grades of actuality—Hochschild has provided a valuable service in setting the record straight.

The concept of being—the very heart of metaphysics—is the subject matter of Lawrence Dewan, O.P.’s, stimulating paper, “First Known Being and the Birth of Metaphysics.” This is a rigorous and sustained reflection on the nature of metaphysics itself in dialogue with Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. How does metaphysics begin? Some philosophers and theologians, notably Ralph McInerny and Benedict Ashley, have argued that metaphysics only comes into existence with the demonstration of separate, immaterial being. Dewan respectfully disagrees. His paper aims to contradict these views by showing that metaphysics is already present in the apprehension of sensible substances. As Dewan affirms, “we have a notion from the start that is

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maximally universal.” Metaphysics is born the moment we start to question the being of things as such, not just immaterial being.

Giuseppe Butera’s paper, “Incomplete Persons: Thomas Aquinas on Separated Souls and the Identity of the Human Person,” is devoted to a critical assessment of Elenore Stump’s views on the distinguishing mark of human nature. Stump challenges the constitution view of human nature, which holds that the identity of the human person is a composite of matter and form, body and soul. Instead, she argues that that constitution is not synonymous with identity, a proposition that opens the door to the thesis that the separated soul after death could be construed as being the person him- or herself. Butera argues that this anti-constitution view is an error and a misreading of Aquinas. He takes Stump’s ideas to task by arguing that she has confused what is accidental in human nature with its substantial being. Moreover, by downplaying the notion of personhood, which has received greater emphasis in the modern age than it ever had in Aquinas’s day, some of the puzzles surrounding the characteristics of the separated soul can be solved.

The next major thematic section of the book is entitled “Analogies of the Divine.” The papers here deal principally with the topic of God, exhibiting both theological and philosophical perspectives. In his splendid essay, “‘The Great Visible God’: Socrates, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas on the Way from Nature to Nature’s God,” Christopher S. Morrissey presents a reflection on natural theology. Morrissey argues that Aquinas’ Five Ways, which are arguments demonstrating God’s existence, ones borrowed directly from Aristotle, owe much to Socrates’ own argumentative method. Socrates inquired into the origin of creatures and the world by positing a fourfold pattern of investigation that examined the existence, essence, properties, and causes of things. According to Morrissey, this Socratic Method influenced Aristotle and later Aquinas in their arguments for God’s existence. From observations of physical nature we can, through reason alone, deduce the existence of an immaterial first cause, this being God. Considerations about the interplay of the physical and the metaphysical domains run throughout Morrissey’s careful analyses.

“From the Relative to the Absolute: Louis de Raeymaker’s ‘Metaphysical Proof’ for the Existence of God” is William P. Haggerty’s contribution to this volume. Haggerty’s paper is an incisive study of Louis

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De Raeymaker's proof for God's existence, as conveyed in his book *The Philosophy of Being*. We are certainly in Haggerty's debt for this presentation of this largely overlooked "retrieval of Thomistic metaphysics" from a former professor of philosophy at the Higher Institute of Philosophy at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium. De Raeymaker develops a unique standpoint by emphasizing the absolute status of being in the context of the relativity of particular or finite beings. The overall order of being is due not to particular beings themselves, which present relations or relativities, but to an external cause of this order of being, which is identified as God. The doctrine of participation is a key element in this ontology. Although Aquinas may have confused logical and real participation in his Fourth Way, Haggerty is convinced that de Raeymaker's treatment of God's existence is quite compelling—more compelling even than many traditional cosmological and teleological arguments.

The Christian philosophical and theological traditions have taught that human beings have a natural appetite or desire for God. In his essay, "Maritain on the Natural Desire to See God: Reflections Appreciative and Critical," Michael D. Torre engages with the thought of Jacques Maritain on precisely this subject. At issue is the relationship between nature and grace. The human person can know that God exists through philosophical reasoning and this cognition spurs one on to know God fully. But can this natural desire to know or see God be fully realized and perfected? Or is it forever unfulfilled until the moment when grace is bestowed? By scrupulously poring over Maritain's texts, Torre argues that in the early part of his career Maritain maintained that the beatific vision was incomprehensible to reason, whereas he gradually changed his mind in the later stages of his life. By suggesting that the possibility of the beatific vision was a truth within reach of reason and philosophy, Maritain came to adopt a position that fell in line with the views of Aquinas himself on this point.

John Marson Dunaway examines the deficiencies of the modern theory of the subject in his paper, "The Majesty of Intersubjectivity: Maritain and Marcel *Contra* Cartesian Subjectivity." Through his self-reflective posturing, Descartes bequeathed a narrow image of the self to his disciples in the West, an image appropriated wholeheartedly by Jean-Paul Sartre. The problem with Sartre's doctrine of subjectivity, according to Dunaway, is that it isolates the person in a solipsistic

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universe. To counter this view, Dunaway presents Maritain's idea of subjectivity as an unfathomable mystery and complements it with Maritain's doctrine of connatural knowledge—knowledge by inclination—which opens persons up to otherness and allows for an intimate relation with God. Dunaway perceives a harmony between Maritain's views and Gabriel Marcel's championing of the reality of intersubjectivity. For Marcel, intersubjectivity is grounded in participation, the human person's embodied existence, in which the bonds with others are recognized and affirmed. Indeed, the notion of intersubjectivity straddles the boundary of metaphysics; Dunaway in fact believes that it has more to do with poetry and mysticism, that is, the participatory mode of existence.

Jacques Maritain was a magnificent metaphysician and his *magnum opus*, *Distinguish to Unite or The Degrees of Knowledge*, attests to this claim. The third major section of the book deals directly with Maritain's metaphysical thought that falls under the rubric of "Maritain's Philosophy of Being." John G. Trapani, Jr., opens this section with his paper, "Difficult Acrobatics: 'Gravitating Head First to the Midst of the Stars,'" a title whose inspiration is taken from the introductory essay of *The Degrees of Knowledge*. Maritain was keenly aware of the poverty of metaphysics, which was exhibited in its inability to deliver the human person unto a union with God. Yet metaphysics does possess a majesty, which allows human reason to rise up to the highest heights of being itself in its pursuit of utter fulfillment. Ultimately, metaphysics is in need of grace; the metaphysician must work together with the poet. In and through the intuition of being, human nature can achieve its greatest accomplishment: the love of God.

As a fitting segue, James G. Hanink discusses some key concepts in Maritain's metaphysics in his paper, "In Defense of the Intuition of Being." Maritain is well known for having advanced the doctrine of the intuition of being—the view that the intellect can have an immediate grasp of or insight into being itself prior to any conceptualization of being. Some philosophers, such as Étienne Gilson and John F. X. Knasas, have denied that such an intuition could ever take place. Their objections are summarized by Hanink under the term *the sensory limit objection*, which stipulates that the intuition of being is impossible because our cognitive categories are restricted to the sensible and not the metaphysical domain. Hanink attempts to argue against this

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objection by citing three sources of the intuition of being: the experience of irreducible singularities, the phenomenon of free and intelligent acts of persons, and the reality of having being (*habens esse*). Whether Hanink succeeds in debunking the sensory limit objection is something that the reader must decide for him- or herself.

Raymond Dennehy's paper, "How Maritain May Have Bridged the Gap Between Metaphysics and Activism," takes these reflections in a new direction by attempting to link Maritain's metaphysics with his social activism. A perennial conflict in Western philosophy is that between the life of intellectual contemplation and the life of practical action. Maritain sought to integrate both orientations into this own life. Dennehy shows how in his youth Maritain achieved a superficial union of thought and action by using Spinoza (the contemplative) and Nietzsche (the anti-rationalist agitator) as models, which proved to be a short-lived experiment. Eventually, Thomism was the prime recipe for this holism Maritain was looking for. Dennehy wishes to emphasize the continuity that existed between Maritain's metaphysics and his activism, a continuity that was made possible by the intuition of being, which allowed Maritain to be liberated from mere concepts and to come into contact with reality both in thought and in action. To be sure, Maritain stressed in his maturity that being is not a concept, but rather an act exercised by a subject. This is precisely the intuition that permitted him to be both a metaphysician and an activist.

In "Maritain, Ratzinger, and the New Era of Intellectual Culture," John Deely, a philosopher who has written much in the area of semiotics, argues that scholars of Maritain's work have typically neglected the importance of signs for his metaphysical thought. The question that opens his essay is Maritain's musings on the point of unity between epistemology and metaphysics, or, in other words, what could bridge the divide between the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of being. Deely claims by echoing the words of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger—Pope Benedict XVI—that the age when the notion of substance was considered the fundamental category of reality has expired. What is as fundamental as substance is the sign. John Poinsett—otherwise known as John of St. Thomas—was an early modern thinker who developed a theory of signs that exercised an enormous influence on Maritain. According to Deely, epistemology and ontology come together under the dominion of the sign. In this sense, semiotics offers

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a more encompassing vision of reality than a traditional metaphysics, which is anchored in the doctrine of substance. As Deely himself expresses it: “the *whole* of our awareness depends upon signs.”

The fourth and final section of this present volume is entitled “The Scope of Science.” It deals with topics that lie at the intersection of philosophy and theology with science. Jean de Groot’s paper, “Distinguishing Between Natural Philosophy and Science: The Case of Ancient Mechanics,” evaluates Maritain’s claim that an unbridgeable divide exists between modern experimental science and the philosophy of nature, particularly as developed and practiced by Aristotle. De Groot wishes to argue that Maritain’s judgment is too harsh in this regard. In fact, in her essay, de Groot attempts to show the lines of continuity between the ancient philosophy of nature and modern science. She does this by discussing how Aristotle developed his notion of *dunamis* (power, potentiality) from his observations of the mechanism involved in a lever. *Dunamis*, according to de Groot’s account, incorporates both a receptivity (passive power) and an activity (active power). The concept of *rhopê* (force, impetus) is presented as a contrast to *dunamis*. By latching onto the concept of *rhopê* at the expense of *dunamis*, practitioners of science paved the way for the gradual disappearance of the ontological understandings enshrined in the latter term, which were replaced by a more entitative interpretation of nature as represented by the former term. In this way, de Groot convincingly illustrates the transition that happened in the West from the philosophy of nature to modern experimental science, a movement which Maritain discusses at some length in *The Degrees of Knowledge*.

The final essay in the collection is by Peter A. Pagan and bears the title “Faith, Physical Determinism and Scientific Method.” This paper deals principally with the limits of science and the value that philosophy offers for scientific research. Pagan sets up the paper by introducing some of the views of the American physicist Stephen M. Barr, who asserts that science is not restricted only to the sensible world, but can go beyond it. An aspect of Barr’s position that Pagan contests is the rejection of a physically deterministic understanding of the universe and the embrace of the Heisenberg indeterminacy principle at the centre of the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics. In short, according to Pagan, Barr maintains that only the

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Copenhagen interpretation and the concomitant rejection of physical determinism is compatible with Biblical faith. At issue in this discussion is the view that classical determinism rides roughshod over free will and that the denial of free will is simply at variance with the Christian understanding of reality. Pagan believes that Barr's scientific pretensions go too far. For Pagan, a proper understanding of physical determinism, grounded in an Aristotelian-Thomistic theory of causality, rather than a mechanistic or Humean one, is more than compatible with Christianity. Miracles are a good illustration of this: miracles are premised on the idea that violations of physical laws happen, and, even when they occur, that physical laws remain in place. The main problem here, according to Pagan, is that science, although well intentioned, often neglects to be properly informed and guided by philosophical principles. And that is a lesson that all scientists should heed!

This present volume brings together a wide variety of topics and perspectives, from the nature of intellect and knowledge to philosophy's ability to prove God's existence to the relationship of social justice and science to the metaphysical domain. Despite this plurality of voices, there is a unified and concerted attempt throughout to grasp the nature of reality in its unadulterated being. Some thinkers have suggested that metaphysics and belief in a supersensible reality have disappeared with Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God. Others, such as Bertrand Russell, A. J. Ayer, and W. V. O. Quine, have advocated the view that science has replaced philosophy in the modern age because of its ability to provide reliable, empirical knowledge, whereas philosophy endlessly dawdles in inconclusive theorizing. It is unmistakable that philosophy and metaphysics have received a "bum rap" over the last century and that many philosophers and non-philosophers alike have lost their confidence in the power of thought to penetrate to the truth of things. What the essays in this collection have hopefully demonstrated is that, contrary to all this misleading and confused rhetoric, metaphysical thinking is alive and well in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century and continues to generate insights into the very nature, structure, and purpose of reality. But what is more, the *perennial philosophy*, the thoughts of the ancient Greeks and the medieval Schoolmen, still has the power to awaken a dormant mind to lofty reflections on being itself. The skeptics have neglected the indomitable restlessness of the human spirit that is the root and animus of the search for truth. And the modern mind, which has conformed to the

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deleterious principles of epistemological idealism, has lost the sense of the mystery and grandeur of the things of the world that nurture and sustains metaphysical thinking. Truly, if reality is based upon God's creative act, then metaphysics is born of a certain disposition of gratitude towards the world, receiving all things as gifts, a reverential attitude evoked splendidly by the modern poet W. B. Yeats in these uplifting words:

When such as I cast out remorse  
So great a sweetness flows into the breast  
We must laugh and we must sing,  
We are blest by everything,  
Everything we look upon is blest.<sup>21</sup>

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21 W. B. Yeats, "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," in *Selected Poetry*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Pan Books, 1962), 145.