

Ashley on Maritain's Philosophy of Science

(Page references are to Ashley's article in "the philosophy of physics," ed. by Vincent Smith)

The title of the article is "does natural science attain nature or only the phenomena?" Maritain does not say science attains *only* the phenomena. He emphatically and then repeatedly says that it is a way of attaining nature, essence,.

Page 64: "there are only two basic objections" to his, Ashley's, view. In fact, neither one of them, as he puts it, is the objection. The second objection is the important one. On page 65 he says the reason that the objecter denies knowledge of nature to science is that "the central definitions which are immediately evident in certain are the necessary premises of any philosophical science."

In fact, it is not definitions but propositions that are immediately evident in certain. To show that science attains knowledge of nature in that sense, he must point to scientific propositions that are demonstrable by resolution to the self-evidently contradictory.

On page 68, he describes "philosophical" knowledge as knowledge that passes beyond the phenomena to the "ontological and intelligible reality of nature". In The first place this is not how Maritain uses the word "ontological" with reference to science. He means a way of constructing concepts. Ashley seems to identify "natural units" with substance"; he does not even seem to be aware of the ontological concept of substance, much less of the necessity of connecting that concept to particular facts about the sensible world, if we are to know that certain natural units are distinct as substances.

Further on page 68, he says that science achieves "certain" knowledge. But what kind of

certitude, not certitude by resolution to self-evidently true propositions. And Maritain could agree with all Ashley says here but add that that is precisely what he, Maritain, means by perinoetic knowledge for example, in reference to Ashley's example of horses.

Page 70: "the scientist must ask questions that require an ontological answer." Again, this is not the sense in which Maritain uses the word "ontological," for scientists do not give answers using concepts resolvable into existence and not to into sensibly distinguishable features of the objects of experience.

Same page: "until a scientist has isolated a natural unit he does not know whether he has anything to study. The question "does it exist" is primary, and no scientist would be so foolish as to investigate the merely possible, and essence abstracted from existence." What can this possibly mean? Previously he seems to have spoken of natural units as something the scientist arrives at *as a result* of his investigations. And granted that a scientist must carve out some definite kind of thing, from his experience or from the universe, to ask about, that is hardly a "natural unit" if that term is meant to refer to substances. In the philosophical sense of the latter word.

The middle paragraph on page 74 is important if Wallace wants to be consistent with it in "the modeling of nature" and in "some demonstrations in the science of nature." He gives a radically different idea of "immediately evident" from the "self evident" propositions that are needed for demonstration in the strict sense of the word. They are immediately evident "in the sense that they rest not on deductive reasoning, but on direct contact with facts. They are seen by the scientist to be true not by a reasoning process but by intelligent observation." "They may be the result of years of patient investigation and extremely complicated experimentation."

Page 75: "the crux of the problem: can the scientist pass from a descriptive definition to a genuine insight into the nature or essence of the natural unit?" Maritain affirms that not only the scientist but even the primitive human being has knowledge of "what are" the things of his experience. See Maritain's section on Dianoetic and perinoetic. He says that we know the quiddity but not quidditatively.

As Ashley goes on, he seems to recognize that Maritain admits a knowledge of essence, and Ashley tries to distinguish the way he says science knows essence from the way Maritain says science knows essence. But a look at some of Ashley's formulas, which he claims express a view different from Maritain's, actually express Maritain's position. For example, Maritain was certainly not disagree with the statement on the middle of page 78 that "we certainly had some true idea of human nature" before we studied philosophy and headed clearly pointed out to us that reason is our highest perfection.

The same is true of the three enumerated points in the first paragraph on page 79. Maritain would agree with the whole of that paragraph and with the whole of the second paragraph. So Ashley in these places is not so much incorrect about science as he is incorrect about what Maritain's view of science is. This is not to say that Ashley is not incorrect about science in other respects.