

within the terms of the relevant discipline. This reading of faith also suggests that its content will be fixed in part by the affections, which might seem to invite some qualification of Van Nieuwenhove's emphasis on the intellectualist bent of Aquinas's account of theological contemplation. Of course, the author is very much aware of the challenge that such issues pose, potentially, to a core claim of the book. As he says, if 'Aquinas's position [on the nature of faith] is open to the charge of voluntarism ... it would undermine a central argument of this study and move Aquinas's theological outlook in a more affective direction' (p.98) – and the reader should judge for themselves the cogency of his response, only one strand of which I have cited here.

There are many other fascinating discussions in this text: on the relationship of the active and contemplative life, on the sense in which earthly contemplation anticipates the beatific vision, by virtue of involving a non-discursive insight, or *intuitus simplex*, on the influence of Neoplatonic sources in shaping Aquinas's understanding of the distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus*, on the person-relative nature of the distinction between philosophical and theological argument, on the role of God-involving desire in ordering our relations to creatures, on the evolution of Aquinas's conception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, on the idea of contemplation as a possibility not only for the philosophical sage, or intellectual sophisticate, but the *vetula* – and so on. No one who is interested in the question of what Aquinas might have to teach us about human life, and the conditions of our flourishing, could fail to be excited by this wide-ranging, rigorous, and judicious study – one that inspires as well as instructs.

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ASPECTS OF TRUTH: A NEW RELIGIOUS METAPHYSICS by Catherine Pickstock, *Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, pp. xx + 324, £29.99, hbk*

It seems best to begin with the concluding chapter. Three things are required if there is to be truth, Pickstock says there. One is an inherent connection between objects and subjects, between things and spirits, between things known and knowing minds. A second is that this connection cannot be exhausted as contingent but must somehow reflect the eternal, participate in it, because if there is no ultimate stability there is no truth. And the third is that the eternal cannot be a matter of ineffable being but must itself be dynamic or self-expressing: the eternal or the infinite must itself be

an eternal correlation between being and its expression or manifestation. Only if there is eternal truth in this sense can there be truth in any sense.

So Pickstock's 'religious metaphysics' involves a return to Plato and to Aristotle and to what those philosophers had to say about 'form', form in things and form in minds. Students of philosophy are immediately told that Plato and Aristotle thought differently about form but that difference should not blind them to the fundamental agreement between the two great Greeks, namely that, as Plato says in *Parmenides*, and in spite of the difficulties the various theories raise, it is impossible to see how, without forms, there can be not just truth, but thinking or discourse at all.

The previous nine chapters, then, are given to defending the ground necessary to sustain Pickstock's three requisites for truth. So much has happened in philosophy between the ancient Greeks and today, including many thinkers, schools and orientations that would disallow one or more of those requisites. For some people, Descartes is immediately identified as the great 'baddie' with his separation of consciousness and matter, but Pickstock does not take that road, for the *cogito* might be understood creatively, which would open the way to the kind of approach she advocates. The great 'baddie' is rather Kant, not so much for anything he consciously intended as for the consequences of his thought in imprisoning so many later thinkers in epistemology. How can there be truth if things cannot be known for what they are? How can we emerge from that prison if epistemology insists on its own ultimacy and refuses space to ontology and to metaphysics? One of the 'goodies' in the story is Merleau-Ponty, who keeps turning up at crucial moments, and whose defence of a continuity between things and the flesh of the human body secures the first requisite for truth, in something like the way Aquinas also does with his empiricism, his understanding of the essential union of body and soul, and his view that for rational beings 'reason is nature'.

In the opening chapter, entitled 'Receiving', Pickstock shows how the point reached in both analytical and continental philosophy in relation to 'truth' opens the door to 'innovative intellectual assumptions' informed by pre-modern understandings of truth but illuminated by what is to be learned from the modern engagements with the question. The chapter called 'Exchanging' considers contemporary philosophies of the gift and of the given, and presents some difficulties inherent in those philosophies which render them unable to account for truth unless supplemented with a philosophy of participation. Bolzano's scholasticism enters as another 'baddie', in the chapter entitled 'Mattering', a Catholic scholastic approach which, Pickstock says, preferred at serious cost an 'etiolated realism' (p.92) to Kantian subjectivism. It became a form of the rationalism from which it sought to distance itself, losing sight of Aquinas on God and on our knowledge of God, as well as of the unavoidable situatedness of any knowledge. Instead, she considers Rowan Williams's Gifford Lectures, *The Edge of Words*, as a better path to take, testifying to the movement towards realism in 21st century thought.

The chapter on ‘Sensing’ will feel like home ground to students of Aquinas, though Pickstock relies more on Chrétien, Guardini, and Casel to speak of how it is not only spirit that leads body but body that leads spirit, if only because all sensation already has a ‘spiritual resonance’. The Dionysian corpus comes to mind here, with its ‘liturgical consummation of theology’, in the *Hierarchies* that follow on, rather than anticipate, the *Mystical Theology*. The chapter on ‘Minding’ struggles with Descartes and Kant, with the rupture of human nature and ‘raw’ nature, and the possible ways forward from there. One strategy is non-naturalism but better perhaps is a renewal of naturalism? Contemporary debates involving McDowell, Dreyfus, Strawson, and Nagel are summarized. This is one point where Merleau-Ponty saves the day, since for him the mental experience of truth must be rooted in sensory experience of truth.

We are at the centre of the argument with a chapter called ‘Realising’, where she considers various proposals for a post-modern realism. One crucial need is to get beyond epistemology to ontology and to metaphysics. Another is to consider how the body is understood in post-modern thought. Realism presents itself in various forms today, but once again Merleau-Ponty seems like the secure point of reference, with his presentation of the ‘double-facedness’ of the body. There is no need for a ‘third thing’ to make knowledge possible for there is already a continuity, a connection, between things known and knowing minds.

The term ‘infinite’ appears in the chapter called ‘Thinging’ and perhaps this is a concept that needed a bit more attention, at least to explain where it comes from and what it is doing here. She explains well how an immanentist realism will be necessarily dualist – something will inevitably be absolutized. Transcendence on the other hand overcomes dualism, replacing it with ‘hierarchy’, but within an equality of all before the transcendent. Once again Pseudo-Dionysius comes to mind, for he presents just such a vision of the immediate relationship of all things, no matter where they belong on any hierarchy, with the one source of all things. Having considered many contemporary proposals, Pickstock sees the way forward as espousing a mode of real ontological continuity between things as existing and things as known, this to be done either by returning to pre-modern *morphe*, to Merleau-Ponty’s shared surface of ‘flesh’ linking the interiorities of knower and known, or a postmodern synthesis of the two (p.198). There follow critiques of various ‘-isms’ and their proponents – monisms, pluralisms, materialisms, realisms whether plain or fancy – but she keeps her eye on the goal, a realism that will be metaphysically secured. Many of the contemporary philosophers she considers, especially the French ones, testify either positively or negatively, to the need to speak again of formal and final causality, to return with our contemporary preoccupations, to Plato and Aristotle.

The chapter called ‘Emptying’ shows how some postmodern philosophies align with Buddhist philosophies of nothingness which, in turn, can find themselves at home with Plato’s *Parmenides*. But Plato worked on

from there, Pickstock says, in *Sophist* and later dialogues, pursuing the quest to locate truth in being. This is the second requisite for truth, that the connection between things and minds participates somehow in the eternal. There is no truth even in realist philosophies if they lack transcendence. Realism means ontological continuity between material and spiritual things making possible the transmission and abstraction of forms. That sounds like a classical summary of what Greek philosophy teaches us, but it is proposed here as re-conceived – here he is again! – by Merleau-Ponty ‘in terms of the belonging of the knowing soul-inhabited body to a continuous material surface of flesh’ (p.237). The conclusion comes into view: for truth to gain sway one depends on a vertical correlation: upon God, upon spirit, and that there be a continuity between things and spirit in terms of both form and embodiment (p.240).

The penultimate chapter is entitled ‘Spiriting’ and it supports her developing strategy by appealing to the work of French philosophers of ‘spiritual realism’, notably Ravaisson, but now also Bellantone. Human thought is not co-relationally confined, they help us to see, but is rather a kind of initiation and sacrifice that attains to or aligns with truth. This is where Descartes’ *cogito* is understood as creative (like the Aristotelian agent intellect?), like the Socratic subject who in encountering things is awakened to excellence, to goodness, and to beauty. It means reading Descartes in terms of Augustine rather than *vice versa* and so seeing that both the material world and spirit are real, and not just one or other of these as materialism and idealism would propose.

So, we return to the final chapter in which Pickstock turns to some earlier English thinkers (Edward Herbert, Robert Greville, and Anne Conway) whose writings, she believes, could support alternative modern approaches that are similar to what she finds in the French philosophers of spirit. Things seem a bit unsteady, however, as we come towards the end of *Aspects of Truth*, with a move beyond philosophy towards theurgy / liturgy, and truth understood as an event enacted rather than something accessible to ‘pure reason’. Rather than skepticism, she speaks of an apophatic theory of truth, retracing philosophically therefore the Dionysian dialectic through cataphatic and apophatic to the mystical and on to worship and prayer. Is it a *collapsus ad esoterica* at the end, or simply seeing anew what Plato speaks of in *Laches* (the subject matter of the Postscript), that truth must be both eternal and unknown, that there is no final truth even of finite things, and that the quest ends in silence and interiority?

It seems that the great teacher of truth is, therefore, Socrates. Unless, of course, one brings in the One who, when presented with the question ‘what is truth?’, simply remained silent (*John* 18.38). There are some intriguing references to the Neoplatonist ‘trinity’ informing the Christian Trinity but this point, her third requisite if there is to be truth – that the eternal must itself be dynamic or self-expressing – seems to require another book, showing how, as Aquinas says, human beings cannot think rightly about

the world's creation or about human salvation without knowing about the divine Persons.

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THE WOMEN ARE UP TO SOMETHING: HOW ELIZABETH ANSCOMBE, PHILIPPA FOOT, MARY MIDGLEY, AND IRIS MURDOCH REVOLUTIONIZED ETHICS, by Benjamin J.B. Lipscomb, *Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022, pp. 326, £18.97, hbk*

Benjamin Lipscomb's intellectual biography gives readers a vivid account of the interconnected lives and careers of Elizabeth Anscombe (1919-2001), Philippa Foot (1920-2010), Mary Midgley (1919-2018), and Iris Murdoch (1919-1999). In some ways, which Lipscomb acknowledges, these four thinkers could not be more different. And yet it was more than their tie to Somerville College, Oxford, that connected them. Rather, it was primarily their shared rejection of a particular worldview (which Lipscomb calls 'the Dawkins sublime', after the British biologist, Richard Dawkins) and their respective attempts to offer something in its place.

The Dawkins sublime, according to which the universe is inert and valueless, has 16th, 17th, and 18th century roots familiar to students of British and European philosophy. The idea that the universe is valueless gets its most famous articulations in David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* and, more recently, in A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*. As Lipscomb explains in his first chapter, philosophers who share Hume's and Ayer's view of a valueless universe draw what is known as the fact-value distinction, according to which facts are empirical and, therefore, can be discovered and investigated by reason and science whereas values are merely the expression of the affective states of people who sincerely make value judgments. In the first half of the 20th century, Richard Hare was the most influential Oxford philosopher to embrace and defend the fact-value distinction, but he also defended a universal, duty-based ethic wherein each person chooses their own moral principles—an attempt to retain ethics in a world devoid of values. Hare's prescriptivism, as he called it, and the distinction between facts and values that it presumed, struck Anscombe, Foot, Midgley, and Murdoch as seriously false.

Before presenting their criticisms of the fact-value distinction and of the respective solutions each philosopher proposed, Lipscomb offers some scene-setting chapters. These chapters prove helpful, especially for a general audience, but professional philosophers can learn from them,