

QUEST FOR THE ABSOLUTE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL VISION OF JOSEPH MARÉCHAL. By Anthony M. Matteo. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992. Pp. xix, 1-173.

The importance of Joseph Maréchal's work in the development of Thomism in the 20th century can hardly be exaggerated. While this work has been largely ignored in Anglo-Saxon Thomism, its influence has been monumental, along with that of Rousselot, in the articulation of Thomism as a contemporary continental philosophy dealing with contemporary questions, even to the point of obscuring the influence of Maritain and Gilson, who have so predominantly set the tone for Thomism in North America. One has only to think of the work of Marc de Finance, and Hayen in French, and Rahner, Lotz, Siewerth, Coreth, and Muck in German (to mention only the most prominent of those who have acknowledged their dependence on Maréchal) to see how considerable his influence has been. Lonergan's work is a singular exception to this obscuring slight of the Maréchal turn in English Thomism. Anyone familiar with Maréchal and his continental followers, however, would find no great surprise in the work of Lonergan and no great difficulty in seeing it as a development of Thomism at least partially influenced by Maréchal.

Whether this turn in philosophy is still Thomism has been a matter of debate for certain Thomists who arrogate to themselves the exclusive use of this term, especially when it comes to what they call realism. Whatever else may be said about this claim, there is no Thomist who has worked as closely with the texts of St. Thomas himself and what they were about as did Maréchal in his fifth *Cahier* or

Lonergan in his *Verbum* articles, not to mention de Finance in *Etre et agir dans la philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin* or Hayen in *La communication de l'être*. One cannot simply dismiss all this as non-Thomistic without even looking at the texts or accuse it of tendentious reading when one's own uncritical tendentious reading is at stake. The question in philosophy, as St. Thomas once said with regard to Plato, is not so much one of trying to figure out what Thomas might have felt in his mind, but rather to get at the truth of things and to enter into the movement of philosophy much as Thomas did in the thirteenth century with the arrival of Aristotelian logic and science. In modern times this movement of philosophy has been redefined, often in apparent opposition to Aristotelianism, by Descartes, Hume, Kant, and Hegel. Nevertheless, the resources for entering into this movement can still be found in Aquinas and Aristotle, and this is what Maréchal and others have sought to do in their re-examination of the sources which has been at the same time an advancement of the *philosophia perennis* in a contemporary form. The fact that it has been contemporary or, better still, that it has tried to meet the contemporary exigencies of philosophy does not of course guarantee that all is right about it, but it does make it truer to St. Thomas' own method in philosophizing, which was largely in the genre of commenting and critically elaborating on philosophical works in his day, than more dogmatic ways of doing philosophy that ignore

the importance of a critical method.

It is therefore with great pleasure that one welcomes this work on *The Philosophical Vision of Joseph Maréchal*. It comes long after the translation of Otto Muck's book on *The Transcendental Method* (Herder, 1968) and Donceel's edition of *A Maréchal Reader* (Herder, 1970), which is made up largely of excerpts from the famous five *Cahiers* on *Le point de départ de la Métaphysique*, especially the fifth, which presents Thomism as a confrontation with Critical Philosophy. Matteo's is the first book length study in English of Maréchal's monumental effort. It is short and concise. It is very much to the point, and it is well worth reading, especially as an introduction to this other side of contemporary Thomism about which we hear or read so little in English.

After a brief biographical introduction on Maréchal's work as a whole, the author proceeds to a systematic analysis of the five *Cahiers*. Chapter One reviews Maréchal's presentation of the first approaches to critical thinking in Aristotle and Aquinas in the context of their own refutation of skepticism. The idea of critical realism is carefully articulated (p. 17) as the antidote to any question *de ponte*, which starts from an abyss between subjective "knowing" and objective "being" and looks, in vain of course, for a bridge between the two. After a brief account of Thomas' recovery of Aristotelian critical realism, we are then led through Scotus' formalism and Occam's nominalism, to the breakdown of this synthesis into "the antinomy of sensibility and understanding" (p. 23) which marks modern philosophy before Kant.

Chapter Two traces these two antinomies as found mainly in continental rationalism from Des-

cartes to Spinoza and Leibniz and in British empiricism from Locke to Hume, which is the burden of Maréchal's second *Cahier*. Chapter Three deals with what Maréchal saw as a reinstatement of the ancient and medieval synthesis between sensibility and understanding (p. 65) in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. This is the burden of the third *Cahier*, where we find Maréchal's account of the transcendental turn in philosophy and of the gap left open by this turn in Kant's own philosophy.

This third chapter ends on the move from Kant's critical philosophy, which was still a realism according to Maréchal, to the absolute idealism of Fichte, which was largely the burden of the fourth *Cahier*, left unfinished by Maréchal and published only after his death.

Finally, in Chapter Four, we get to what was without doubt the most important of the five *Cahiers*, the confrontation of Critical Philosophy with what is referred to as Thomism. This is the longest of the five *Cahiers* and the key to all the other four. It is Maréchal at his very best as a philosopher interpreting both Kant and Aquinas in relation to the question of how we come to know objects objectively. Matteo's presentation does not attempt to follow the ins and outs of this complicated argument. He merely sketches the differences between a metaphysical critique and a transcendental critique of knowledge and outlines the theory of abstraction in Aquinas, often referring to other authors rather than Maréchal, in relation to the dynamism of intelligence and its basic orientation to the absolute (p. 101), which Maréchal makes so much of. It is here that the actuality of God is brought forth as the ultimate object of this dynamic orientation of intelligence, whence

the idea of *Quest for the Absolute* in Matteo's title, and therefore as the ultimate necessary condition for the ontological affirmation of any object or, as Matteo also puts it (p. 109), as "constitutive" of cognition rather than merely as "regulative," as Kant had claimed.

As it stands, Matteo's presentation does not get to the full force of Maréchal's argument. That would have required making his book and his fourth chapter considerably longer than they are. Perhaps it would have been worthwhile doing so, even if it were only to meet the *fin de non recevoir* which he quotes from Gilson's *Thomist Realism* in a footnote at the beginning of his concluding chapter (p. 159 n. 4) to the effect that "There is no middle ground. You must either begin as a realist with being, in which case you will have a knowledge of being, or begin as a critical idealist with knowledge, in which case you will never come in contact with being." It is precisely this kind of naïve and dogmatic realism which Maréchal is trying to overcome with the help of St. Thomas against Kant as well as critical idealism in a chapter entitled "Summary of a 'Transcendental' Critique Taken from Aristotelian Thomism," which purports to be a *critical demonstration of realism*. Whether this is a middle ground between realism and critical idealism or not, one cannot simply reject it out of hand without looking

at it. It is a realism, but one that is justified in the face of a contemporary critical philosophy, in other words, a critical realism. There is more to metaphysical realism than what meets the eye or one's sense of touch.

In his concluding critical chapter Matteo touches on a number of issues to which Maréchal's philosophical vision might relate, including not only objections to Maréchal's interpretation of Thomism but also Hegel's understanding of the absolute, Küng's washout of proofs for the existence of God, Rorty's naturalism, Margolis's pragmatic realism, and others. To this reader, this last part of the book was less interesting than the rest because it is done too hastily. But it does show how Maréchal can be understood as very much a part of the contemporary movement of philosophy even as Thomism.

One has to be grateful to Matteo for putting this excellent little book together. One has to be grateful also to the Northern Illinois University Press for deciding to publish it, even though it might appear to many as being so far out of the mainstream of contemporary philosophy. It is not. One can also hope that it will touch off more interest in one who was a truly great seminal Thomist philosopher in our time.

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THE HIGHROAD AROUND MODERNISM. By Robert Neville. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992. Pp. 339. Hard Cover \$59.50; Paper \$19.95.

Although *The Highroad Around Modernism* addresses the issues of postmodernism, this tract is not primarily a critique. We may wish that

it were so, but Neville believes that any categorical rejection of postmodernism would commit the same totalizing endeavour that modernism