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Reviews

LEAVIS AND LONERGAN: LITERARY CRITICISM AND PHILOSOPHY by Joseph Fitzpatrick, *Hamilton Books*, Lanham, Maryland, 2021, pp. ix + 209, £28.00, pbk

English Literature as a university subject in Britain was shaped in the 'forties' and 'fifties' at Cambridge by F.R. Leavis (1895-1978). While he knew nothing of the Canadian Jesuit Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984), any more than Lonergan knew of him, or his literary-critical practice, so Joseph Fitzpatrick contends in this totally unexpected albeit fascinating pairing, exemplifies unwittingly the account of cognition detailed in *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957), Lonergan's principal philosophical text.

Formerly a member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools, now retired, Fitzpatrick is uniquely qualified to make this case, having read English at Cambridge in the shadow of Leavis, as well as studying philosophy and theology at the Gregorian University in Rome, where Lonergan's influence lived on much longer than his physical presence.

Lonergan was sent from Canada to study at Heythrop College with the British Jesuits (1926 to 1930). He began to develop his own version of Thomism, as well as taking external London degrees in mathematics and classics. He taught at the Gregorian from 1953 to 1964, going home to Canada for cancer treatment (successful), not returning to the post in Rome.

After four years on the Western Front with the Friends' Ambulance Unit, Leavis returned to Cambridge to graduate with first-class honours and to write a Ph.D. thesis (very unusual in those days), *The Relation of Journalism to Literature*. He taught for thirty years, resigning in 1962, by which time it was long plain, however unbelievable this was to admirers throughout the Anglophone world longing to study under him, that the inventor of 'Cambridge English' would never have a professorship there.

Leavis was always ambivalent about philosophy. In late 1929, he met Wittgenstein at one of the regular Sunday teas hosted by the prototypical elderly Cambridge philosopher, W.E. Johnson. They took to having long walks, never discussing philosophy, as Wittgenstein required, which did not restrain him from telling Leavis how to do literary criticism (see 'Memories of Wittgenstein' in Rush Rhees, *Recollections*, 1984). Much later, Leavis found corroboration for his ideas about the moral dimension of language in two singular books by prolific philosophers, neither in the

Cambridge mainstream, Michael Polanyi and Marjorie Grene: *Personal Knowledge* (1958, Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen) and *The Knower and the Known* (1966 — not Greene as on page 57: married to the classical scholar David Grene, she kept the surname after they divorced). The point was their recognition of the personal factors in any form of understanding, even in scientific domains — the 'tacit understanding' as Polanyi called it. Knowledge was held to be 'objective' but only when the 'subjective' is allowed to play its part.

Lonergan's theory of cognition, as Fitzpatrick says (p. 10), was built on his work on Thomas Aquinas's account of language, originally published in *Theological Studies* (1946-49). Far from providing more 'Cartesian' nonsense for Wittgensteinian analysis, as some critics of *Insight* used to assert, Lonergan, so Fitzpatrick shows (pp. 15–20), also overcame 'the Enlightenment notion of the inquirer as a disembodied individual consciousness confronting the world' etc. Moreover, as becomes evident in *The Living Principle: English as a Discipline of Thought* (1975), Leavis saw, or at least suspected, that the key words increasingly reiterated in his vocabulary (life, reality, the body, community, and so on) needed support by philosophers out to overcome disembodied individualism but without surrendering to logical positivism.

In chapter 4 Fitzpatrick shows that Matthew Arnold, a member of the Inspectorate of Schools for over thirty years as it happens (pp. 99–100), is of great importance to both Lonergan and Leavis, in particular with *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) — even if his name is never indexed in the twenty-five volumes of Lonergan's *oeuvre* (p. 132)!

Discussion of Matthew Arnold naturally extends to his ideas about religion (pp. 114–127). Leavis, professedly an agnostic, hated Christianity, like many others, no doubt as a result of his experience in the Great War. He once described himself as 'a Puritan without religion' (p. 196). As many readers have noted, however, especially in his enthusiasm for the work of D.H. Lawrence, he affirms a reverence for the ultimacy of 'life' which is essentially 'religious', of course more Wordsworthian or even Nietzschean than in any sense evangelical. He was well aware of the attraction his teaching had for Catholics, such as the Downside monk, Dom Sebastian Moore — to whom one may add, among many others, the Australian poet, Vincent Buckley, and the anthropologists, Peter and Godfrey Lienhardt. 'However hard they try, they won't succeed in assimilating me to Christianity or The Anscombe', he is reported to have said, a paranoid cry late in life (p. 196: G.E.M. Anscombe took up the principal philosophy chair in 1970). On the other hand, Leavis signed the famous letter to *The Times* (6 July 1971) protesting against Pope Paul VI's ban on the public celebration of the Tridentine Mass. More than 50 public figures, many non-Catholics, responded to the invitation by the refugee Slovakian poet Fred Marnau, a key figure in London literary circles, to petition the Pope to reconsider the significance of the Latin Mass in the history of European music and art, and so to refrain from such vandalism (when Cardinal Heenan showed him the letter, so the story goes, it was the name of Agatha Christie that first clicked with the Pope).

With *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) the young Leavis was the first university lecturer to uphold the importance of *The Waste Land* at a time when most readers did not regard it as poetry at all. In the second half of *Leavis and Lonergan* the author exemplifies what literary criticism helped out by Lonerganian critical-realist philosophy looks like: Frank Smith on psycho-linguistics (chapter 5); Hemingway's naturalism (chapter 6), and religious conversion in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (chapter 7). In the concluding pages of the book (pp. 196–201) Fitzpatrick reflects on the 'despondency' which afflicted Leavis in his last years, as friends and former students noted. Fitzpatrick found himself highlighting how regularly religion is described as a 'need', in the case of Tolstoy but sadly also in the case of *Four Quartets* in *The Living Principle.* The 'nullity' Leavis finds in the poetry of *Four Quartets* he attributes to sexual inadequacy on the part of T.S. Eliot – which does not seem one of Leavis's most substantial, or even particularly relevant, critical judgments. Lonergan was a much happier man.

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THOMISTIC EXISTENTIALISM AND COSMOLOGICAL REASONING by John F.X. Knasas, *Catholic University of America Press*, Washington, D.C., 2019, pp. xi + 327, £68.50, hbk

In the 1930s an approach to Thomist metaphysics emerged which emphasized the importance of *esse*. *Esse*, understood as the act of being (*actus essendi*), was construed as existential act and as such was distinct from and responsible for the reality of essence. Essence, on the other hand, merely specified the material and/or formal characteristics which categorised a thing within its species and *genera*. Essence was complete in its own order but subordinate to *esse* because it was in potency to *esse*. *Esse* alone could render essence actual in the existential order and thus able to exercise its proper function.

The scholars associated with this approach, such as Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, Joseph Owens C.Ss.R., and Armand Maurer C.S.B., became known as 'Existential Thomists'. John Knasas, a student of Owens, is their worthy successor and in this book, *Thomistic Existentialism and Cosmological Reasoning*, employs an account of *esse* as prior to and an attribute of essence first to defend a version of the cosmological argument