

Book reviews**KNOWING GOD:***Restoring Reason in an Age of Doubt*

Anthony E. Mansueto Jr.

Aldeshot, UK: Ashgate (2002) vii + 23 pp.
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In this book, Mansueto - the founding director of the Seeking Wisdom Project, and a professor in philosophy, religious studies, and Western civilization at the University of New Mexico - argues from a Marxist-Thomist, against contemporary post-modern and other sceptical and relativistic perspectives, that there is a path to realist knowledge of the Divine. This path has a three-fold structure or, as Mansueto describes it, 'three degrees of abstraction': totalization (in which a logical whole is inferred from the parts), formalization (the abstraction or apprehension of an underlying structure) and transcendental abstraction (the inference of an ultimate explanation for, or a unificatory principle inherent in, all the particular things we observe). Mansueto argues that these three degrees of abstraction have a biological (neurological) basis in humans, and are also at least partly socially determined. In other words, the three degrees are human potentialities, though the social component may more or less distort their development. Mansueto argues particularly against the market economy which, in his eyes, has led to the relativist and sceptical tendencies in Western society; together with his use of 'dialectics' this shows the strong Marxist tendencies in his thinking.

For many ESSSAT members the particularly interesting questions will revolve around the role of science in all this. Mansueto's basic argument is that science, properly interpreted, leads to knowledge of God. The sciences exhibit "a drive towards complete explanation which is never satisfied by or exhausted in taxonomies or formalizations, but which inevitably must have recourse to teleological reasoning" (135). The phenomenon of self-organization, especially, cannot be explained in terms other than those of teleology: self-organizing systems point towards the ultimate *telos*. The nature of this *telos* is a subject for metaphysics. Metaphysics demonstrates that this *telos* must be an infinite, perfect and necessary being, and as such the sciences deliver the data for a proof of the existence of

God "which also shows the ordering of the universe to God and thus the ultimate meaningfulness of the cosmo-historical evolutionary process" (159). Metaphysics thus emerges out of the sciences, but it is also metaphysics which in the end rules science (164).

An argument which I found very surprising was that humans have the capacity to gain revealed or supernatural knowledge through an act of 'superabstraction'. This knowledge, says Mansueto, goes beyond that gained through the three-fold process of totalizing, formal, and transcendental abstraction; it is knowledge which is pre-conceptual, resulting from humans' participation in 'supersocial' structures, and illuminating the knowledge gained from 'normal' abstraction. It is this realm of supernatural knowledge that is the territory of theology.

For me, the book resonated in several respects with Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which presents in a way a synthesis of Medieval thought. The book's broadness is impressive, but I believe that is also its weakness, for it lacks philosophical rigor and depth. For instance, Mansueto argues for the truth of realism on the basis that realist representation has survival value, and that it yields more economical explanations than the alternatives (22f.). All of this is argued in just two paragraphs! Is this supposed to solve the complex question of realism in philosophy? Moreover, Mansueto assumes the validity of metaphysics, though at present there are also many strong anti-metaphysical (scientistic, naturalist) tendencies. Nowhere does Mansueto address these tendencies. Furthermore, the repeated hammering on an assumed causal relation between the market economy and present-day relativism becomes eventually simply annoying. Finally, it may be my protestant perspective, but the unification of science, metaphysics, theology and ethics (of which little is said in this review), for me is simply unconvincing as it resonates too much with Medieval thought. Why should we construct such a unificatory system? Why not leave the autonomy of all the different disciplines intact? My overall conclusion is that Mansueto presents admittedly an impressive system of thought in merely 200 pages, but it is of little use to the science and religion dialogue.

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