Piotr Lenartowicz. The Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century. Edited by Józef Bremer, Damian Leszczyński, Stanisław Łucarz, Jolanta Koszteyn. Krakow: Ignatianum University Press, 2019.

Part of a series of books devoted to Polish Christian Philosophy in the twentieth century, this latest study introduces the life and work of Piotr Lenartowicz (1934–2012). Lenartowicz, a member of the Jesuit order, held several professional positions, but spent most of his career at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. Approaching philosophy from an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective, his interests ranged over the philosophy of animate nature (known as the philosophy of biology in the English speaking world), the theory of evolution (especially topics relating to paleoanthropology and the origin of man, the nature of life and of the life-cycle), topics in the philosophy of science, and epistemological issues, especially concerning the nature of human cognition. The book contains chapters covering Lenartowicz's biography, the milieu in which he worked, his general approach to philosophy, and more detailed discussion of the main theoretical problems in which he was interested, as well as about his influence. The second half of the work reprints three of the Jesuit philosopher's most important papers relating to the phenomenon of life, fossil hominids, and a critique of the anti-realist understanding of the philosophy of science in the work of Paul Feyerabend, all from the perspective of an Aristotelian realist approach.

The authors describe well in Chapter 2 the philosophical milieu of the latter half of the twentieth century. It is one dominated by a move to anti-realism and even skepticism concerning the nature of knowledge (including in the philosophy of science), as well as one that focused heavily on the philosophy of language, inspiring the position that consciousness and meaning are largely linguistic. There is also the trend of regarding philosophy as a kind of handmaiden to science, with a strong emphasis on naturalism and mechanism in the study of nature (including biology), accompanied by reductionisms of various sorts in areas such as evolution, psychology and neurology. Many Christian thinkers working in philosophy and other disciplines became concerned about these trends, regarding them as going against common sense and driven as much by political motivations as by the

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outcome of dispassionate philosophical reasoning. Consequently, there is an important group of philosophers, teaching and writing in many countries, whose work involves subjecting these philosophical theories and presuppositions to more rigorous examination. Lenartowicz may be classified as a member of this group of contemporary thinkers; as a consequence, he was often seen as an outsider, who did not belong to the mainstream—a description he no doubt would have regarded as a compliment! Indeed, he often suggested that his views would hold up well against modern trends which might well be passing fads (e.g., anti-realist views of knowledge), views that would eventually be judged as lacking explanatory value, leaving us with not only important questions unanswered but in a state of skepticism (e.g., regarding moral values), and lacking an objective grounding for our beliefs at the social and political level.

There are many definitions of philosophy, each capturing something important to the discipline. The authors tell us in Chapter 3 that Lenartowicz's definition is: "(a) the cognition (b) of all forms of reality (c) fundamental (d) methodological (e) with the natural consciousness of man." By cognition, Lenartowicz meant the immanent dynamic of the subject, a form of sensual-intellectual contact with reality in the case of human beings (a central theme in Aristotelian-Thomistic Philosophy). Although philosophy ranges over all forms of reality, Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophers are interested in specific issues, such as cognition, form and structure, causation, first causes, and other metaphysical issues. One of the contemporary difficulties for the Aristotelian-Thomistic approach is how to reconcile its general philosophical orientation, which invokes the notions of secondary and primary substance, substantial form, potency and act, etc., with modern developments in physics and biology—more specifically, with atomic theory and the theory of evolution. Primarily concerned with the latter theory, the authors note that for Lenartowicz, "key within his philosophy was the concept of a living organism understood as a life-cycle." His main concern was that in many biological systems the whole is greater than the sum of the parts: there is always something more in an organism's expression and realization of its various capacities, properties, and functions than an analysis of individual parts yields, and this is partly why biology has found it so difficult to dispense with the notion of teleology.

This issue relates also to the difficulty of arriving at a satisfactory account of life that explains what is added to biological phenomena when they are said to be alive, other than just observing that they have a peculiar capacity to self-develop, or to self-organize, or to bring to realization various potentialities—all useful descriptions, but not explanations, of the puzzling

life-cycle of biological organisms. Lenartowicz believed that Aristotelian-Thomistic notions, such as the concept of substantial form, could be helpful. The application of notions from traditional metaphysics would require that one not approach the topic of evolution from the point of view of a philosophical naturalism that rules out anything but a physical, mechanistic explanation by definition or as a matter of policy, since such a move is question-begging. Much of Lenartowicz's work, according to the authors, adopts this general approach to the study of evolution.

Although Lenartowicz accepted the overall theory of evolution, he held the view that there are important aspects relating to the dynamics of biological organisms, their life cycles, their overall organization, that a purely naturalistic explanation (relying on chance and mechanism only) struggles with. The authors provide us with an overview of his reflections on the notions of epigenesis, totipotency, and the relationships between phenotype, genotype and the genome, all of which he approached from the same general perspective (his main work on this subject, *Elementy filozofii zjawiska biologicznego* (*Elements of a philosophy of biological phenomena*) was published in 1986). Lenartowicz seems to fit somewhat into the tradition of French Jesuit philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, in that he posited a kind of dynamic force that may be present in living organisms that gives them their overall unity and is the catalyst for the realization of their in-built potentialities, a view that may be classified as vitalist in orientation. Aware of the general disparagement of vitalism in contemporary science, Lenartowicz's general argument seems to be that even if a type of vitalism cannot explain the gaps in biology, something essential is missing in purely naturalistic explanations. Indeed, recent discussions of the controversial concept of "emergentism" are an attempt to respond to these problems.

Although overall this study would benefit from more critical engagement with the topics mentioned above, the book will appeal to philosophers who work in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, especially those with a special interest in evolution. Lenartowicz's work is yet another reminder of how it is both fruitful and healthy to pursue a critical engagement with the philosophical issues raised by biology and evolution. It shows clearly that, whatever one's perspective, the theory encounters both philosophical and biological difficulties that remind us not to be satisfied with bland reassurances from some influential evolutionary biologists that everything is just wonderful with the theory, and that there are no serious concerns, other than technical ones, that we need to address.

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