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REVIEW OF MARK D. MORELLI'S "AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE HALFWAY HOUSE: A STUDY OF BERNARD LONERGAN'S ENCOUNTER WITH JOHN ALEXANDER STEWART"

Msgr. Richard M. Liddy

In the early 1970s, when interviewed about the sources of his thought, Bernard Lonergan recalled a particular book on Plato that had affected him deeply as a young man. He had forgotten the author's name, so "I went down to the library, patiently worked through the cards listing books on Plato and, finally, when I got to 'S' found my man. I got the book out of the stacks, took it to my room, and found it fascinating reading" (*A Second Collection* [264]). The book was John Alexander Stewart's *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas* (1909). It influenced Lonergan immensely. "From Stewart I learnt that Plato was a methodologist, that his ideas were what the scientist seeks to discover, that the scientific or philosophic process towards discovery was one of question and answer."

That Stewart's work is still fascinating reading is corroborated by Morelli's present study as he narrates in intriguing detail just who John Alexander Stewart was and how he fit into the philosophical currents of late-19th- and early-20th-century Oxford. M., detective fashion, does an immense amount of research on Stewart, a virtually forgotten figure in contemporary philosophy. It was Lonergan's genius to find in this Oxford don's writings an anticipation of his own mature philosophy. Indeed, it was the original genius of Plato who set these two late modern philosophers on the journey into their own minds to find there anticipations of "the Forms."

M. paints a broad picture of modern English philosophy, shedding light not only on Stewart's journey but also on Lonergan's. For Stewart the major conflict in Plato studies lay between the translators, the "textualists," who were only interested in what Plato said, and the "interpreters" who, as Stewart put it, sought to identify in their own experience what Plato was talking about. They asked, "What human and psychological experience was Plato talking about?" The textualists tended to make Plato's ideas seem fantastic because they did not relate them to the facts of present human psychology.

Anyone familiar with Lonergan's thought will recognize why these ideas rang such a bell. According to Stewart the Forms are not separate "things" but rather "points of view" according to which the sensible world becomes intelligible. They are heuristic structures arrived at through insight that enable the scientist to get a bead on the data. For him the Ideas, so far as their methodological significance is concerned, are nothing more than concepts-in-use—the instruments by the employment of which human understanding performs its work of interpreting

the world (this sensible world, not another world beyond). In a word, Plato was a methodologist: he was interested in the heuristic structures along which human consciousness flows; and this was Lonergan's over-riding interest.

The book is a meticulously researched account of Stewart's early life as the son of a minister in Edinburgh and of the philosophical influences that shaped his thought, including the influence of Mark Pattison, who had been an early devotee of Newman at Oxford. M.'s account is a dramatic narrative of the idealist currents that descended upon Oxford in the late-19th century, their rejection by various empiricist and "realist" movements, the dawning influence of pragmatism and Stewart's position in the midst of it all. Anyone who wants to learn something of the history of philosophical currents in England would do well to read this book. I can imagine M. deeply enjoying his research as it led him to Oxford, its philosophical battles, factions, and intrigues. And all this sets the stage for understanding Bernard Lonergan's critical realism in the context of modern philosophy. M. has a very interesting and extended section on what Lonergan meant by his own early "nominalism" and how Stewart, along with Plato and Augustine, contributed to Lonergan's major philosophical breakthrough: what he called his intellectual conversion.

Three observations, the first more substantive. The book could have referenced John Henry Newman more liberally, especially the importance of Newman's "assent" as the background for Lonergan's notion of judgment as mediating reality. After all, Lonergan considered Newman "his fundamental mentor and guide." Second, a quibble: this very fine book deserves an index. Finally, a small complement among many: there is a great picture of an English house on the cover of the book, presumably Stewart's in Oxford?

In summary, if John Alexander Stewart's name goes down in the history of philosophy, it will be due in no small part, I would wager, to his influence on the young Bernard Lonergan. M. has gifted us all by spelling out that influence.

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