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**Pierre Rousselot**, *Essays on Love and Knowledge*. Edited by Andrew Tallon and Pol Vandavelde. Translated by Andrew Tallon, Pol Vandavelde, and Alan Vincelette. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008. 264 pp. Appendix and index. \$30.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-87462-655-2.

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Although Pierre Rousselot was one of the most powerful Catholic minds at the turn of the twentieth century in France, his thought has received very little attention thus far in the English-speaking world. If he is known at all, it is typically only as one of the “forerunners” of the transcendental Thomism associated above all with the theologian Karl Rahner. Many reasons have contributed to this neglect. The most significant is no doubt his early death. Rousselot, who was born in Nantes in 1878 and who entered the Society of Jesus at sixteen, died as a soldier in the battle of the Eparges in 1915, just seven years after having completed his doctorate in philosophy and taken up a teaching position at the Institut Catholique in Paris. In this short period of productivity he published an astonishing number of books and articles that garnered immediate attention, but one can only wonder what great projects were left undone. His influence, moreover, was diminished to some extent by a 1920 letter in which the superior general of the Jesuits asserted that Rousselot’s theory of faith was not to be followed by the Society, more because of that theory’s apparently precarious paradoxes than because of any outright error. This assertion was repeated by another superior general in 1951. Though the cloud of suspicion hanging over him has cleared, insofar as his writings were largely occupied, either directly or indirectly, with a problem that faced the Catholic Church at the end of the nineteenth century, they now strike some as dated.

Marquette University Press and editors Andrew Tallon and Pol Vandavelde have therefore rendered a great service in collecting and translating Rousselot’s writings and so giving us an opportunity to reassess his contributions and his more general significance. The first two volumes presented his “major thesis” (*L’Intellectualisme de S. Thomas*) and his “minor thesis” (*Pour l’histoire du problème de l’amour au Moyen-âge*), both of which appeared originally in 1908. The recently published third volume brings together a variety of essays and journal articles written between 1907 and 1914. Apart from the famous two-part essay called *The Eyes of Faith* (Fordham University Press, 1990), these three volumes represent all of Rousselot’s major published philosophical writings. Tallon intends to complete this collection with a volume that will present translations of Rousselot’s minor works as well as some of the material from the Jesuit Archives in Vanves, which has remained unpublished in any language.

The problem that frames the background of Rousselot’s work was a growing division between the Catholic Church and the secular world in France over the course of the nineteenth century. The *philosophes* in the previous century had endeavored to clear the ground intellectually and culturally for a general shift toward historicism and scientific materialism as the paradigm of rationality, a shift variously promoted by the work of such figures as Comte, Taine, Lamennais, Renouvier, and Renan. The major movements in art and literature toward the end of the nineteenth century no longer drew their inspiration from the long religious tradition in France, but were decidedly “lay.” The Church saw that it had begun to lose its hold on the culture, but its explicit condemnation of a list of errors (1864) and the forceful reaffirmations of tradition by the revival of Thomism spurred by Pope Leo XIII’s

encyclical *Aeterni patris* (1879) proved to be a basically ineffectual response. The philosopher Maurice Blondel once observed that the situation represented the exact inverse of the good shepherd in the Gospel who left the ninety-nine faithful in the hills in order to seek out the one errant sheep and bring it back home. In the nineteenth century, he said, it was the ninety-nine sheep that went astray, and, rather than pursue them, the Church opted to bind up the one faithful sheep as tightly as possible so that it could not escape.

In part as a result of the Church's failure to hold onto the popular culture, a new impulse, inspired by figures in German Protestantism (more distantly by Friedrich Schleiermacher, more proximately by Adolf von Harnack), sprung up inside the Church, which sought to return the institution to relevance by bringing it "up to date." On the one hand, leading theologians such as Alfred Loisy, George Tyrell, and Ernesto Buonaiuti embraced the new historical-critical method of scriptural exegesis, and on the other hand, placed a new and indeed exaggerated emphasis on the role of subjective experience in faith, which among other things relativized the objective significance of dogma. The crisis within the Church to which this movement led came to a head with the 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, published just as Rousselot was finishing his philosophical formation as a Jesuit. In this fiery document, Pope Pius X condemned these reinterpretations of Christianity according to the new categories of contemporary thought under the general name of "Modernism."

Two of the most interesting Catholic thinkers at work during this tumultuous time were Blondel and Rousselot, but neither one fits so easily on one or another side of the modernist-traditionalist divide. Blondel, with his "philosophy of action" that shared a phenomenological *point du départ* with those thinkers the encyclical condemns, endeavored as it were to open up the secular world to the heart of the Church from within its own logic by showing that a philosophy that remained rigorously true to itself eventually discovered its need for the "supernatural," which is proposed to it concretely in history by Christianity. While Blondel was often grouped among the modernists, it became clear—especially with the eventual publication of his *Carnets intimes*, but also with the further development of his public thinking—that, unlike many of the others, his devotion and obedience to the Church were steadfast. Pierre Rousselot, whose work can arguably be read as an attempt to criticize modernism at its intellectual roots, nevertheless internalized modernist themes in his rejection of an extrinsicist separation of truth from the dynamic order of goodness, on the one hand, and of nature from grace, on the other. The irony is that he did so wholly on Thomistic grounds. His work might thus be called "revolutionary" in Charles Péguy's sense, namely, not the rejection of all that came before, but the call from an imperfect to a perfect tradition. The two figures, Blondel and Rousselot, thus represent an inward opening of tradition to the modern world and vice versa, by deepening the point at which they stood rather than by compromising it. It is interesting to note a reciprocal influence between them: Rousselot discovered the significance of his favored idea of "connatural knowledge"—that is, knowledge that arises from direct, lived experience—in Aquinas through the reading of Blondel's master work *L'Action* (1893), while Rousselot's work gave Blondel an appreciation for the role of concepts, showed him the positive meaning of "intellectualism," and generally warmed him to the Thomistic tradition.

Up to now, Blondel has remained the better-known thinker in the English-speaking world, but insofar as Aquinas is at present enjoying yet another broad revival of interest, the time may be ripe for a reception of Rousselot's collected philosophical works. The seven essays brought together in this new volume are all essentially concerned in one way or another with the nature of intelligence in its relation to the world, to the orders of desire and will, and to faith. The importance of the questions raised here is becoming more evident only now in the twenty-first century. The essays are prefaced by a brief foreword by Tallon on the notion of "connaturality" and a more substantial introduction by Vandavelde on the role of love in Rousselot's epistemology. We witness over the course of the book a certain deepening in various directions of a single line of thinking from an early, unpublished essay, "Idealism and Thomism," written in 1907, to an article on intellectualism that he wrote for the *Dictionnaire apologétique de la foi catholique* in 1914, a year before his death. Perhaps the most evident development is

the more definitive role Rousselot gives to concepts in his mature text, whereas in his first writings, though he always affirmed their integrity and importance, Rousselot emphasized precisely the inadequacy of concepts to apprehend the real. There is also the notion of connaturality itself, which he claims in a letter to Blondel was part of his thinking for a long time (see the excerpt on p. 117), though it does not become an explicit concern, apart from a brief mention in his first book, until 1910. What we see in all of these essays is the impressive power of thought that is both well formed in the tradition and possessed of a deep originality, and that is capable of exquisite conceptual precision no less than agile and confident leaps of intuition.

The heart of Rousselot's contribution is no doubt his effort "to utilize some precious notions made available by modern philosophy and pertaining to potentiality, appetivity, and the voluntary [*voluntariété*] of all conceptual knowledge" (pp. 223-24). This effort set into relief the possibilities offered by the fairly marginal notion in Aquinas of knowledge "per connaturalitem," as distinct from knowledge merely "per notionem." According to Rousselot, connaturality is not simply a particular mode of knowledge, but in fact represents an indispensable, though necessarily hidden, dimension in all true knowing: knowledge in its most complete sense requires the knower's affective and volitional identification with the thing known, an identification that lies beyond a mere conceptual grasp of an idea. (Rousselot would have found fertile resonances of this insight in Paul Claudel's deep reflections on the etymology of "co-naissance," being "born with," in his 1907 *L'Art poétique*.)

A recognition of this more existential dimension allows Rousselot, on the one hand, to affirm the modern discovery of the "synthesizing" role of the subject in knowing while at the same time giving this active dynamism a fundamental and decisively un-Kantian *receptivity* as intuitive openness to the real. This insight enabled Rousselot to engage fruitfully with modern critiques of the scholastic tendency to reify the world by reducing that world to its concepts without falling into the "phenomenalism"—that is, the reduction of reality to our experience of it—that Pius X had decried as the root problem of modernism. Rousselot criticized rationalism, not in the name of a romantic sentimentalism or the promethean freedom of idealism, but precisely in the name of *intellectualism*, which subordinates all things to the intelligence, meaning by "intelligence" the mind's perfect coincidence with concrete reality. This coincidence is achieved perfectly only by God, but it is imitated in human knowing by the irreducible duality-in-unity of the abstract notion and the affective connatural identification he sometimes calls "sympathy."

This insight also led Rousselot to a bold new theory of the act of faith, which he develops especially in the last two essays collected here. The various approaches to the relationship between faith and reason tended either to assume that one could come to an understanding of the content of faith through natural reason alone, and then in a second moment give the assent of one's will under the influence of grace, or to think that the act of will came first and understanding would follow as a result. The problem of the first approach was that it effectively naturalizes faith and leaves inexplicable why a purely natural assent of the will should be impossible in this case if it is possible in all other acts of the understanding. The problem with the second approach is that it makes the assent arbitrary, if not strictly irrational. In *both* this rationalism and this voluntarism/fideism, reason and the will are taken to be without any internal relationship to one another.

Rousselot argues, by contrast, for a reciprocal dependence between the two along the lines laid out above. Thus, intellect and will operate simultaneously, bringing each other to completion: it is true that I understand only when I give my assent, *but it is also true* that I do not will properly except as a result of understanding. Given the paradox of this claim, it is not a surprise that Rousselot's view was so seriously misunderstood by his immediate critics. Besides the overcoming of the problematic separation between the intellect and will, and implicitly between nature and grace, Rousselot's interpretation has the great merit of affirming the integrity of the natural knowledge of the existence of God, as Vatican I insisted, without having to affirm the odd notion in modern theology of a "natural faith" to which a

supernatural faith would subsequently be added. For Rousselot, it is entirely consistent to say that truths about God are naturally intelligible in themselves, and to add that we nevertheless need a graced reason to understand them, just as colors are visible, even though they require illuminated eyes to be seen. The notion of graced reason, reason that is elevated beyond itself through a free response of the will elicited by grace, is what is designated by the phrase most associated with Rousselot, the “eyes of faith.”

The essays in this book are of varying quality. It is clear why Rousselot had left the first two unpublished: while they are certainly interesting and reveal Rousselot’s typical brilliance, they are overly technical and ultimately unsatisfying (as Rousselot himself remarked in his note on the manuscript: p. 76). Moreover, they address questions that Rousselot takes up again in a more finished form later, especially in the fifth essay, “Thomist Metaphysics and Critique of Knowledge.” The two best-known essays in this volume, “Spiritual Love and Apperceptive Synthesis” and “Being and Spirit,” which form a pair, present the heart of Rousselot’s philosophical vision in a compact way. “Remarks on the History of the Notion of Natural Faith” explores the historical antecedents to Rousselot’s theory of faith and those he critiques, pointing to Scotus as the origin of the dualistic modern interpretation. The final essay, the dictionary article on “Intellectualism,” is simply a masterpiece of concision and one of the most illuminating of the collection. The breadth and depth of thought revealed in these few essays, not to mention the previous two volumes, ought to promote Rousselot in the English-speaking world beyond his mere mention as a historical forerunner to Maréchal and Rahner, and show that he anticipates, as well, some features of another great movement of twentieth-century Catholic thought known as the “Ressourcement,” of which both John Paul II and Benedict XVI may be called heirs. Or, even more, it ought to secure him the status of an original thinker in his own right.

This is not to say that there is nothing to criticize. With regard to Rousselot, one may raise the question, as the Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar did, whether Rousselot’s renewed emphasis on subjectivity sufficiently recognizes the importance of the objective form that elicits our desire to know. With respect to this particular volume, three objections can be made. The least weighty concerns the editorial choice to begin this collection with the two unpublished essays. While it is true that they were actually written before the others here presented, their placement lends them a prominence that they do not seem to warrant. The volume may have been better served if they were included at the end as an appendix. Second, this volume, unfortunately like the two preceding ones, contains a shockingly high frequency of typographical errors and grammatical mistakes. One wishes that more care had been taken with books of this importance. Third, and most significantly, the foreword by Andrew Tallon is out of place. It presents a “Whiggish” interpretation of Rousselot, showing how Rousselot anticipates certain new ideas in cognitive science in a very distant way, but ultimately comes up short in comparison. Whatever value these new ideas may have in themselves, they touch only obliquely on the primary concerns of Rousselot’s own thinking. One might do better to ask to what extent these ideas themselves measure up to Rousselot’s insights into the human mind, will, and heart, and into their transformation in grace.

All of that aside, this volume is essential reading for anyone desiring a greater understanding of modern Church history or of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century French Catholic philosophy. But it will be enrichment worth the sometimes demanding effort for anyone with a philosophical bent who is interested in the nature and destiny of the human being, and convinced that this destiny has an ultimate transcendent dimension. We may be grateful to the editors for collecting the philosophical works of this unjustly neglected thinker, and we look forward to the fourth and final volume.

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