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Merleau-Ponty and Philosophy: In Praise of Philosophy

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If one were to seek for the most dominant theme or thought that unites these people, it will perhaps be this—the realization of a need for new techniques which are in keeping with the democratic ideal of “mutual respect” and with the idea that “in a democratic society all are born with equal opportunities to develop their individual uniqueness.” The solutions are sought in the relaxation of traditional molds and the expansion of narrow conceptions of what an ideal child should be.

The mathematical child, for example, is seen as possibly having unique ways of arriving at numerical concepts and relationships, which are frustrated by “excessive rigidities” and lockstep procedures that fail to make use of his unique experiences.

Lowe and Lovel, who write the final article, propose a counselling procedure which involves the active participation of the whole family. Both the parents and the child discuss their problems in “open sessions”, that is, in the presence of their neighbors, friends and the child’s teachers and arrive at a better understanding of the interrelationships that exist between the behaviour of the “difficult child” and the parents’ methods and attitudes. Lowe and Lovel are unambiguous in their stand that “there is no principle of learning acceptable to the writers which support the notion that children can learn to live democratically having been raised or taught in an autocratic atmosphere.”

EDUARDA A. MACARANAS

MERLEAU-PONTY AND PHILOSOPHY

IN PRAISE OF PHILOSOPHY. By John Wild and James M. Edie. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1963. xxiii, 67 pp.

This present work is an English translation of the inaugural address of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, delivered on January 15, 1953 after he had been elected to the chair of philosophy at the College de France. He was then the youngest professor ever to be named for such a post. What is significant about this work is that it was addressed not to the professional philosopher but to the ‘world at large’. In this short work, one finds Merleau-Ponty himself explaining to the world how he understands philosophy.

This short book is divided into six sections. The first three sections are concerned with Lavelle, Bergson and Socrates. The last three treat of Religion, History and Philosophy. In these six short sections the author shows what philosophy is by being the philosopher and thinking the philosopher who must have the “...taste for evidence and a feeling for ambiguity” (p. 4). And this ‘feeling of ambiguity’

he describes further when he says: "what makes a philosopher is the movement which leads back without ceasing from knowledge to ignorance and from ignorance to knowledge and a kind of rest in this movement" (p. 5)". And this is precisely what he does in the first three sections. He traces this movement in the thought of Lavelle, Bergson and Socrates.

After a brief but expertly clear treatment of Lavelle's basic insight, he lays this 'movement' bare when he concludes the section with these words: "...but this also means that one does not go beyond the world except by entering into it and that the spirit makes use of the world, time, speech and history in a single movement and animates them with meaning which is never used up. It would be the function of philosophy then to record the passage of meaning rather than to take it as an accomplished fact" (p. 9).

Again in the section on Bergson, the author pursues the same theme. Understanding Bergson begins only when one has gone beyond the first appearance of Bergsonism (p. 10). This "first appearance of Bergsonism", Bergson himself defines when he says that philosophy is that semi-divine state in which all problems "which put us in the presence of emptiness" are ignored (p. 12). The mechanism of negation already presupposes the presence of positive thought, that naive contact between the mind and the real, this simple act which is beyond intellect and logic where there is direct access to the real in a simple act, without any point of view or an "interposition of symbols to the exterior of things" (p. 12). But once again the paradox of philosophy repeats itself when Bergson the wholly positive philosopher later makes the negative re-appear in his thought and is progressively re-affirmed. In this second stage, he did admit a qualification, a restriction of this "fusion" between mind and the real, this "massive grip on being without exploration, without interior movement of meaning" (p. 12). There is need for a point of view now, of a symbol, of a perspective. Philosophy is now no longer a mere discoverer, the unveiler of an "out there" real. Philosophy is "meaning-becoming" which builds itself in accord with itself and in a reaction against itself so that a philosophy is necessarily history (philosophical), an exchange between problems and solutions in which each partial solution transforms the initial problem in such wise that the meaning of the whole does not pre-exist it except as a style pre-exists its works, and seems, after the fact to announce them" (p. 19). Philosophy then has to interrogate being and derive meaning from this dialogue. In this dialogue, however, philosophy "only aims at being obliquely", that is, "...it never determines its position except with respect to the one it has just left" (p. 20). Philosophy must have this component of negativity and ambiguity without which it would be blind. With this feeling for ambiguity, philosophy becomes "...a groping finality" in which end and means, meaning and chance, evoke one another.

In the following section, Socrates is assessed on the same point. What is significant in this chapter is a section where the author brings Socrates and Aristotle in sharp contrast: "...Aristotle, seventy five years later, will say, in leaving the city of his own accord, that there is no sense in allowing the Athenians to commit a new crime against philosophy. Socrates, on the other hand, works out for himself another idea of philosophy. It does not exist as a sort of idol of which he would be the guardian and which he must defend. It exists rather in its living relevance to the Athenians, in its absent presence, in its obedience without respect. Socrates has a way of obeying which is a way of resisting, which Aristotle disobeys in seemliness and dignity" (p. 36). These are reminiscent of the lines he wrote concluding the section on Bergson, describing the role of the philosopher. "Hence the rebellious gentleness, the pensive engagement, the intangible presence which disquiet those who are with him" (p. 33).

The chapter on Religion is the author's posing of the theology-philosophy problematic. Here Merleau-Ponty energetically excludes theology from the frontiers of philosophy. Theology makes use of philosophy only to remove its sense of wonder. To arouse this sense of wonder is proper to philosophy as it encounters the contingency of human existence. But theology distorts this basic contingency of human existence only to derive necessary being from it. Philosophy is an absolute relationship to knowledge but knowledge is always in the context of ambiguity.

If philosophy is "becoming-meaning", then "history is the situation in which all meanings are developed" (p. 50). The chapter on history is devoted to this dimension of philosophy. Philosophy is in history and can never be free from it. Becoming—meaning comes to birth in a situation only to transcend it and enter into communion with other times and places where meaning occurs. Philosophy then is that center where history and life cross paths and in this very crossing both emerge into being with the birth of meaning. Hence philosophy always stands beyond what is already there. Philosophy can be itself only if it acknowledges that to be itself, it constantly has to go beyond itself, when it ceases to coincide with what is already expressed. It has to live this distance in order to see its meaning.

The task of the philosopher then is to give articulate expression to this basic ambiguity of human existence. Human existence as well as man himself is encompassed by this ambiguity. "And man contains silently within himself the paradoxes of philosophy, because to be completely a man, it is necessary to be a little more and a little less than a man" (p. 64).

The translation is to be praised for its easy readableness and at the same time for its preservation of the fine nuances of context in Merleau Ponty's thought. The introductory notes are an excellent

guide for any serious student who wishes to acquaint himself with the thought of Merleau-Ponty.

JOSE A. CRUZ

AUSTRALIA AND IMMIGRATION

ASIAN MIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA. By A. T. Yarwood. Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1964. 210 pp.

In 1901, the Australian Federal Parliament passed the Immigration Restriction Act. Though determining the large issue of Asian immigration and settlement, the Act itself and its administration remained subject to pressures which brought about important modifications. *Asian Migration to Australia* concerns itself with these pressures and their effect on government policy.

Basically, the book consists of two parts. The first part depicts parliamentary opinion which led to a settled immigration policy against the background of British imperial and Japanese diplomatic pressures and of community attitudes and representations by various economic groups. The second part examines the different treatment of the immigrant Japanese, Chinese, Indian, and Syrian groups, with the aim of bringing out the domestic and overseas influences that determined public attitudes and administrative policy in each case. If the author's main concern in this book is to focus on the policy of protectionism favored by the Commonwealth during the early part of her history, he succeeds admirably.

The reader will appreciate the author's desire to portray the fear amongst Australians of creating a racial situation similar to that of the American southern states, South Africa, Kenya, and Fiji. This race consciousness underlay what has become the much maligned "White Australia" policy. The exclusion of immigrant labor involved a measure of national self-denial and implied acceptance of limited national development—no small price to pay for racial homogeneity at a critical period of nation-building! Critics of the policy decried its self-destructive and morally reprehensible elements and pointed to the danger of invasion by overpopulated Asia. Exponents of the policy challenged these criticisms on the grounds of national security and dignity of labor.

Over the years however, a change occurred in the administrative emphasis of the Immigration Act. By 1923, Australian politicians disclaimed any suggestion that the exclusion policy assumed racial superiority and instead referred to the differences between Eastern