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A SCHOLAR OF GOOD WILL GETS A HEARING*

EMILE CAILLIET

IN a book to be praised unreservedly for the intellectual honesty which inspired it, the admission is made from the outset that philosophy at its highest has always been great in vision, poor in proof. As the author sees it, an eminent philosopher is first and foremost a man who somehow caught an awe-inspiring insight into reality, then proceeded to find reasons to support his view. Admittedly, some, if not most, of such reasons were henceforth challenged, mostly by scientists. What of it? Let philosophy abandon to science the rigor of final demonstration and keep for herself the field of vision. But more. Let philosophy learn from science; her field of vision will be all the richer for it.

In an age when philosophy loses province after province to a science claiming the whole field of the knowable, the true call of philosophy is to embark upon the ocean of possibilities to be discovered by a well informed imagination. The cruise however should not be to some unheard of, distant havens. It should not be a sort of wild, or even jolly week-end party. Rather, the author would urge "a sober and conservative cruise along the shores of fact, keeping within easy distance of the great landmarks of established knowledge and directing our imaginative vision only upon those possibilities which are severely pertinent to the truths already discovered and to the truths that are still to come. In short, philosophy should be concerned not

with bare possibilities but with real possibilities." (p. 14)

Such an attitude would at first seem to amount to a surrender to scientific disciplines; but further reading reveals that this is not the case. Dealing with Plato and his vision of eternal things, for instance, the author sees Plato's essential message in the vindication of the eternally significant *possible*, regardless of the actual vicissitudes of existence in place, time and custom. This view is shown to be increasingly relevant throughout the present inquiry until the author, in his Epilogue, comes personally to grips with the issue at hand. Should one object that the conceptual surely depends upon the perceptual rather than the other way around, the issue would then be forced upon him in the form of an epistemological paradox such as this: "The rain on Monday night as an idea in my mind is created on Tuesday morning by the visual perception of puddles. But the puddles are themselves the consequence of the rain the night before." And so, while it is true that the conceptual world is constructed out of our percepts, it remains undeniable that this same conceptual world is *presupposed* by those percepts. "I create, or seem to create, the very world which contains and creates me." (p. 464)

The Epilogue from which this con-

* *Great Visions of Philosophy: Varieties of Speculative Thought in the West from the Greeks to Bergson*, by Wm. Pepperell Montague. The Open Court Publishing Company, La Salle, Illinois, 1950. Pp. xvii 484.

clusion was just quoted, is a fortunate innovation in such a treatment. We now live in hurried times when works painstakingly written, sometimes over a whole life-span, are likely to be disposed of in the most impressionistic manner, without being read. Or the critic may jump to conclusions for having used as a pretext, a text taken out of its context. But see what we have here: an author submitting to the most pertinent and thorough questioning of an extremely well-qualified critic. In the light of the full treatment which precedes his Epilogue, it is noticeable that the author delights in ascribing the best part of the argument to this ideal critic. Truly the days of the gentleman are still with us in the realm of thought. Yet this innovating Epilogue is to be welcome for a better reason still.

The work under consideration is emphatically not the current type of detached speculation with that neutral pro and con equipoise which does not imply the slightest involvement. Neither does it suggest the shooting gallery type of lecture course, where a system is presented only to be immediately upset with equal skill. An author already revealed as an intellectually honest seeker endowed with imagination—a rare specimen in the academic world—, is further seen to be guided by an increasingly clear personal viewpoint. In other words, we meet in this book a teacher who believes in something and is not afraid of admitting the fact. And this is gratifying. The usual curse in the philosophy classroom of our day may be exposed as a sort of inveterate sophistry which leaves students disappointed and, in a real way, crippled. Such dilettantism is likely to lead to cynicism, to that "I do not care" attitude which is worse than atheism be-

cause the atheist believes at least in his own unbelief. And since we live, and move, and have our being in a universe to which God is more intimately present than it is to itself, an honest seeker is bound to secure some genuine insight into the deeper reality of the things that *are*. Professor Montague is no exception.

What then is the point of view, the *idée de derrière la tête*, which forced itself upon the author's mind to become the criterion according to which the great visions of philosophy were caught and finally sized up? It is most unfair to try to sketch such a faith-principle—Montague would say, a probability—as was seen to take shape over some five hundred pages. The attempt is made therefore with due apologies to the author and resultant warning to the reader to be on his guard against this reviewer's oversimplification of a careful argument. Professor Montague adopted the imaginative method that he did because to him, as to Douglas Fawcett, the very works of nature bear all the earmarks of creative imagination. The ways of imagination and vision, therefore, are "man's best approach to the ways of primordial Being." (p. 25) But what, or who, is this primordial Being? Although doing full justice to Aristotle, Professor Montague is not far from regretting with Francis Bacon, and, in a way, with Alfred North Whitehead, that Aristotle's vision eclipsed that of Democritus, with the result that stagnation considerably delayed the progress of science and philosophy—not to say anything of theology. But then, we should immediately qualify our statement by pointing out that Professor Montague is fully aware of the limitations of a naturalism bent upon reducing data to the commensurable,

the homogeneous, that is, to the calculable and manageable; hence an unbearable emphasis upon the quantitative to the detriment of the qualitative. The truth is rather seen by Professor Montague to be somewhere in between the *ab extra* mechanism of the Democritean atomism and the *ab intra* purposiveness of the Aristotelian dominant type of causation. But then, does not the Aristotelian view owe most of its attraction to the fact that it remakes nature in our own image? The most acceptable conciliation is finally found in Bergson, more especially in the Bergsonian notions of creative evolution and "duration-history." Thus the strange mode of being we call consciousness is seen arising from the vicarious presence of the past. The same implies the further vicarious presence of a possible future we call purpose. At this apex, the *ab extra* breaks into the *ab intra*. Sheer mechanism now yields to conscious teleology. Having accepted Bergson's invitation to pilgrimage, Professor Montague is led to a view of potential energy "in which the successive episodes of the past are experienced together, yet with their distinctive order preserved." (p. 468) In this light he takes cognizance of a reversal of the natural trend towards dissipation of energy in the universe with a corresponding growth towards a richer organization of energies. Henceforth the second law of thermodynamics emphatically could not constitute the last word in a universe where a world-mind is seen at work reversing the process according to which things tend to go over into disorder. The reference is of course to the statistical meaning of entropy.

With such a "natural theology" remaining, as promised, within easy dis-

tance of the great landmarks of established knowledge, we now stand at the point where the author is ready with this ultimate admission: "Yes. It is to God and also to His creatures that this Bergsonian evolution pertains." (p. 470) Some will ask whether or not this God is the Christian God. Bergson himself left no doubt that it is so. But Professor Montague does not leave us guessing for the very good reason that in his treatment of the Christian vision he already admitted that this "vision of God incarnate in the Man of Sorrows, and of charity or love as not only the highest ideal but the deepest reality, is something to move and exalt the soul of anyone who truly understands it." (p. 237) And Christian charity would have us believe that Professor Montague is one of those who truly understand it.

The question then is: why should not this vision of the deepest reality become the faith-principle and supreme reference for him as a philosopher? The answer seems to be indirectly provided in the author's denunciation of dogma as a "canonization of old beliefs . . . as psychologically inevitable as it is logically indefensible" (p. 194) with a resulting "blocking" of "progress"; (p. 194) further, in a statement of his revulsion (the word is not too strong) for an ecclesiastical authoritarianism which proceeds to "encrust" the original vision "with an ascetic inversion of moral values and use it as an instrument for the repression of individual freedom and social progress." (p. 237)

This type of XVIIIth century thinking may be found harsh by our readers; yet this reviewer, who spent some twenty years on the American college campus, must admit that both the judg-

ment and the language which express it, are matter of fact currency in our universities today—and this, without the balance which the whole treatment of Professor Montague provides. Rather the prejudice stands as a rule in the way of such an honest inquiry as is provided in the present volume.

Should the reaction of Church and Seminary be a branding of the author with the current stigma "darkened mind," the situation would not be helped thereby. For the American campus where the leaders of tomorrow are being trained is part of our mission field. We should therefore in Christian charity, give a hearing to such men of good will as Professor Montague. Could it be also that *some* of the criticism leveled by him at the church is actually grounded here and there in weaknesses which could be prayerfully considered?

This much is certain: the proclamation of Bible truth pertains to the whole

important problem of communication. Our most urgent task, after we have made the truth our own, is to explore and study the mission field where this same truth is to be presented. We must painstakingly learn what is on the mind of our contemporaries, how much they are willing to grant. In so doing we are likely to realize that their problems are age-old problems, just as their failures, or partial failures, are age-old failures. How, then, why and where, did man's perennial quest for truth ultimately miss the mark? Only a careful consideration of the record can tell. For such a consideration the present volume is one of the best available inasmuch as it represents the honest inquiry of a scholar of good will in our day. And to turn away from such an inquiry would merely amount to blowing out one's candle in order to see better what is there.

PRINCETON PAMPHLETS

Alumni and friends of the Seminary will be interested to know that the Committee on Publications has been editing a series of booklets known as *Princeton Pamphlets*. There are six items already available in the series, and additional pamphlets are being considered. The titles are: No. 1 *A Bibliography of Bible Study* (85 cents); No. 2 *A Bibliography of Systematic Theology* (65 cents); No. 3 *A Bibliography of Practical Theology* (50 cents); No. 4

A Guide to the Preparation of a Thesis, by Bruce M. Metzger (30 cents); No. 5 *Pascal's Short Life of Christ*, translated with an Introduction by Emile Cailliet and John C. Blankenagel (75 cents); No. 6 *Johann Georg Hamann, An Existentialist*, by Walter Lowrie (75 cents).

The pamphlets may be secured from the Theological Book Agency, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.

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