

## *schede bibliografiche*



AA.VV., *The Past and the Present. Problems of Understanding*, Grandpont House, Oxford 1993, pp. 102.

The six papers collected in this volume are the fruit of a conference held at Oxford, under the sponsorship of Grandpont House, on the theme of “Pre-Modern Europe and the Modern Student: Problems of Understanding”. As Andrew Hegarty explains in his introduction, the conference formed part of an ongoing effort by Grandpont House to respond to John-Paul II’s appeal to Europeans to rediscover the truth of their origins. The urgency of that appeal rests not only on the obvious fact that modern (and even “post-modern”) Europe cannot fully understand itself except in light of its past and its tradition, but also on the belief that the tradition itself contains precious resources for fortifying and guiding the search for truth, both historical and otherwise. Gaining access to those resources and using them discerningly, however, is anything but easy. Learning about the past, and learning *from* the past, encounter obstacles on all sides: in ourselves, in the past itself, and in the very nature of such an inquiry. The conference brought together six prominent scholars—three philosophers and three historians—to reflect upon some of these difficulties and ways of dealing with them.

In the first paper, “Knowledge and Belief in Human Testimony”, Peter

Geach argues, with typical force and wit, for the inevitability and indispensability of human authority as a source of knowledge. He shows the significance of this claim by drawing a sharp distinction between knowledge and belief. Belief is merely a kind of disposition, e.g. to judge or to answer a question in a certain way; but knowledge is a capacity, an ability—we might say a kind of *mastery* of something. Geach then takes up the acceptance of authority or testimony as one of our main natural means of acquiring knowledge. He argues that although it is sometimes necessary to choose between conflicting authorities, making such a choice does not imply having independent knowledge of the matter in question; “we cannot escape from resorting to testimony and authority”. It is “only by his trusting the testimony of others” that “the experience of mankind...is made available to an individual”.

Geach’s reflections bring to mind Aristotle’s dictum that he who wants to learn must trust his teacher. They also echo of Aquinas’ claim that theology, which rests on faith, is genuine science. Aquinas of course was speaking of faith in *divine* authority; but he did so in a cultural context in which human authority too was recognized as a source of knowledge. The medievals’ view of authority is perhaps one of the main obstacles to the modern student’s taking them seriously and learning from them. This forms the target of the volume’s second paper, “The Argument

from Authority”, by Christopher Martin. Martin thinks we can learn something from the medieval view of authority—not only something about them but also something about ourselves and our own conception of knowledge. This is that we too, willy-nilly, rely heavily upon authority, precisely because we still regard knowledge as something to be taught and learned. Not acknowledging the role of authority contradicts our own standards of reasonableness, those which we ourselves have learned and teach, and prevents us from exercising it or controlling it according to those standards. The medievals acknowledged it, and controlled it. For them the argument from authority “*was* an argument. Admittedly it was the weakest argument of all, so that any other argument was stronger: but it was none the less an argument. You needed another argument to refute it, before you could ignore it.”

The third paper, by John Haldane, presents a lucid account of four conceptions of human nature which have been prominent in the history of philosophy, and seeks to clarify and defend the one which is perhaps the least sympathetic to the modern mind: that of man as a bodily creature with a rational soul, a “psychophysical unity”, both organic and rational. This is by no means just one particular topic among many, in the domain of problems in historical understanding; it may be this very conception of man which best does justice to his historicity, which is to say, his temporal and visible personhood. As Haldane explains, to understand it is to perceive, “through observation of the multitude of activities and artifacts that constitute the human world, that there are persons, i.e. creatures such as ourselves with

aspects whose souls we are everyday presented.”

Limitations of space prevent much discussion here of the volume’s remaining papers, by the three historians; but they are well worth reading. Anne Duggan calls attention to various ideological obstacles to our doing “real history”—obstacles in our very conception of historical knowledge, and obstacles in our attitude toward certain dominant elements of Europe’s past, particularly our “aversion from the religious”. Jonathan Riley-Smith argues against the impossibility of an entirely neutral approach to the past—the questions we ask of it are always *our* questions—urging instead that we strive to be conscious of our own partial and conditioned vantage point, and that the historian seek to express “in comprehensible terms a necessary vision of society’s collective experience.” Finally, John Morrill insists that “you can get to know people in the past”, just as you can get to know people in the present: “you can come to have a sense of the rhythms of their lives, of the way in which they behave, of the way in which they respond to a certain kind of thing.” He also insists upon the value of a “horizontal” approach to the past, the effort to “re-create the contemporary context of events and actions in their fuller sense.” Doing so “teaches us something of the poverty of our understanding of our own culture.”

S.L. BROCK

Italo MANCINI, *Come leggere Maritain*, Morcelliana, Brescia 1993, pp. 57.

In questa opera, densa e breve, Mancini propone la sua ermeneutica del pensiero maritainiano. Essa parte

da un criterio preciso: il fenomeno Maritain è *intraecclesiale*, vale a dire, la sua opera può essere veramente compresa soltanto all'interno della comunità credente. Egli, infatti, «ha curato una filosofia incurante del filosofare» (p. 11), non tanto preoccupata di lasciare in eredità una scuola filosofica, ma di rendere un servizio in quanto proposta di comprensione cattolica.

Da questa premessa emergono tre modi distinti di lettura. Ed essi hanno necessariamente un sapore autobiografico perché altro non sono che le diverse riletture che nel corso del tempo lo stesso Mancini ha fatto dell'opera maritainiana.

La prima si colloca negli anni 50 dove Maritain appare come uno «schiaritore di concetti»; come la personalità capace — mediante opere come *La Petite Logique*, *Les sept leçons sur l'être* e *Les degrés du savoir* — di delineare «il nostro territorio di fronte alla ontologia fondamentale di Heidegger, alla ontologia esistenziale di Sartre, alle varie forme fenomenologiche» (p. 17).

La seconda lettura, di tipo politico, corrisponde agli anni 60. In questa decade opere come *Umanesimo integrale* e *L'uomo e lo Stato*, furono capaci di illuminare la coscienza politica mediante una riflessione profonda. E Mancini, a modo di esempio, indica cinque elementi ritenuti di particolare rilevanza: 1) la preminenza delle forme comunitarie e naturali di fronte a quelle più propriamente sociali; 2) la attribuzione del solo senso teologico al concetto di sovranità; 3) la critica all'iper-moralismo politico; 4) la dottrina dei mezzi atti a conseguire i fini politici; 5) la sua teoria della legge naturale.

Il terzo criterio di lettura ci porta invece agli anni 70, all'epoca del post-Concilio tutta intesa a rispondere alla domanda sul tipo di cristianità possibi-

le. Anche in questo problema — come dimenticare *Il Contadino della Garonna?* — Maritain ha molto da dire e da proporre: il rifiuto del medioevalismo, la sua valutazione del marxismo, le proposte per la nuova cristianità, ecc.

Ma tale lettura ci porta inevitabilmente ad un'altra, perché «la cristianità non basta». Il *kerigma* cristiano eccede sempre ogni sua possibile particolarizzazione culturale. E così appare l'ultimo Maritain. Scrittore non della cristianità, ma di cristianesimo, pensatore del rapporto personale con Dio. Paradigma incompiuto di tale atteggiamento è *Approches sans entraves*, che non poté correggere perché stroncato dalla morte.

Con questa ultima pennellata chiude Mancini il piccolo volume che lo vede ripercorrere in maniera lucida la maggior parte dell'opera maritainiana. Tenuto conto inoltre della sua ricchezza e densità di riflessioni esso si pone come una necessaria e bella introduzione al pensiero di Jacques Maritain. Un nome che, secondo l'autore, «il mondo cristiano terrebbe più vivo se fosse meglio abituato ai silenzi profondi e alla concentrazione» (p. 52).

J.M. BURGOS

Ricardo YEPES STORK, *La doctrina del acto en Aristóteles*, EUNSA, Pamplona 1993, pp. 510.

La obra se presenta como una investigación de las nociones de *energeia* y *entelecheia* en Aristóteles, que pretende, a partir de la recuperación de todos los sentidos del acto en Aristóteles, superar una defectuosa teoría del conocimiento — propia del racionalismo y las actuales doctrinas a

él ligadas — y la consiguiente descalificación del conocimiento metafísico de la realidad.

Para ello, trata el autor de dar cuenta de todos los estudios acerca de esta doctrina del acto, considerando su diverso valor y las principales aportaciones de cada uno de ellos; e intenta asimismo, teniendo en cuenta el problema de la génesis y evolución de sus obras, analizar todos los textos en los que aparecen estas nociones estudiadas, para hacer una interpretación sistemática y unitaria de las expresiones *energeia* y *entelecheia* en el *Corpus Aristotelicum*.

En la primera parte de la obra acomete la labor de mostrar que tal procedimiento unitario no es invalidado por una supuesta *evolución* de tales términos, puesto que la doctrina del acto, en todas sus dimensiones, está presente ya desde el inicio de la especulación de Aristóteles, cuando aún estaba en la Academia de Platón.

La tesis central de la obra — elaborada en la segunda parte — es la del triple sentido del acto: movimiento, forma (sustancia) y operación. Tal tesis no es, según afirma el autor (p. 29), un *a priori*, sino resultado de la lectura y estudio de los textos.

Comienza esta segunda parte (c. 4) con una consideración del sentido más general de *energeia* — contrapue-

sto a la potencia (*dynamis*) —, para pasar después a analizar cada uno de los tres mencionados sentidos: el movimiento (c. 5), la forma (c. 6) y la operación (c. 7). En el c. 8 se hace un análisis de la aplicación que este tercer sentido (“operación”) tiene en la teología aristotélica, para acabar esta segunda parte con un último capítulo, el 9, en el que recoge otros diversos pasajes en los que aparecen estas expresiones, de modo que se cumpla el objetivo que se había propuesto de analizar *todos* los textos en los que están presentes las expresiones que trata de estudiar.

Acaba la obra (c. 10) con una consideración global del sentido último que tiene el descubrimiento aristotélico del acto, exponiendo la interpretación que L. Polo hace de esta doctrina aristotélica del acto.

La obra resulta sin duda interesante para cualquier estudioso de Aristóteles, por la exhaustividad del análisis de los textos aristotélicos y de las principales interpretaciones, y por la indudable relevancia de la propia propuesta de Yepes sobre la diferenciación de los sentidos del acto. Pero por esta misma exhaustividad puede ser difícil de seguir para quien se acerque a ella sin un buen conocimiento del pensamiento del Estagirita.

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