

CHRONICLE

THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF PHILOSOPHY

THE Sixth International Congress of Philosophy held at Harvard University, September 13-17, 1926, was without question one of the greatest gatherings of the intellectual elite that has ever taken place on this Continent. About six hundred delegates and visitors were in attendance, representing the principal countries of the world, the great universities, and nearly all learned societies devoted to the study of philosophy. Several prominent European thinkers, many with international reputations, lent luster to the Congress by their presence and addresses. Out of the discussions of the numberless topics which were brought up for consideration arose a conviction, which was as general as it is sound, that philosophy is still the 'scientia scientiarum,' that in spite of all the obloquy poured out against this discipline by the scientists, philosophy has not yet surrendered her primacy as the best product of human thought and as the brilliant guiding star for human achievement both in the present and for the future.

The general impression of the Congress which was brought away by many of the delegates, was that of a great confused mass without head or articulation, without order or reason. On first thought it appeared impossible to disentangle from the babel of voices and of conflicting opinions a clear line of unified thought, a golden thread of agreement on a great fundamental doctrine which, if all its implications had been grasped and its profundities plumbed, might have developed into an acceptable system of truth. The confusion, however, was more apparent than real. One thought of a huge boiler shop, out of the noise, bustle, and seeming disorder of which there issues at the end of the day's work a perfect piece of machinery.

I do not mean to assert that there existed anything like positive agreement on any topic among the assembled philosophers, or even that the Congress is likely to produce in the future, as a result of its discussions, a type of thinking which can be accepted by the majority of philosophers. Neither a rounded philosophical system nor unanimity of philosophical thinking issues from the melting-pot of congresses of philosophy. But I do mean to assert that the implied principles, the tacit assumptions, the accepted postulates which seemed to underlie

and to govern most of the thinking of the Sixth International Congress point unmistakably to a state of agreement on fundamentals which has no parallel in the history of philosophy since the days of Kant. There are systems of thought, if the Congress is a sure indication of the direction of philosophical thinking, which are dead as far as our contemporaries are concerned, and among the dead systems materialism is to be listed first of all. Other systems are able to hold, though with difficulty, the loyalty of a scattered few, as for example, pragmatism. Realism was at all times in the saddle, with idealism showing a renewed vigor and a far-reaching influence which could not but be a great surprise to many, at least, of the American group. There were not lacking signs that a revolt against realism is in preparation; that a 'Back to Kant' movement is in the making. And its success is more or less assured unless realists get down to work immediately and make more explicit and acceptable the metaphysical ideas which underlie their system, a difficult though not insuperable task.

Idealism seemed to play a much more important rôle in the deliberations of the Fifth International Congress held at Naples in 1924 than it did at the Harvard Congress. Perhaps this was due to two causes: one, that the second centenary of Kant's birth was celebrated during the Naples Congress, an occasion which naturally drew a great deal of attention to idealistic teachings; the other, that idealism exercises more influence over Italian philosophy than it does over that of any other country today, even of Germany. Whatever may have been the explanation of the fact, one thing is certain, not only was less time devoted to idealism by the Harvard Congress, the influence of idealism on the thinkers present showed a marked decrease over a period of only two years since the last International Congress.

One of the most encouraging sides of the Congress was the attention paid to evolution and the searching analyses which were made of its many philosophical implications. Certain it is that present-day philosophers are not frightened by the bugaboo of science, by its worship of empirical fact and of mathematical formula. Nor are they willing to turn over the control of their own fields of investigation to the biologists. The metaphysical conclusions which have been drawn from the older types of evolution are now quite universally discarded. That evolution necessarily implies a crudely materialistic and mechanistic universe is so foreign to our present-day attitude that it is difficult to discuss the theories of Huxley, Spencer, and their followers with any-

thing but mild contempt. The sharp attack which was made by Professor Erich Becher of Munich on the Darwinian justification of war was an indication of how far men's minds have traveled as regards evolutionary theory since the end and, perhaps, because of the War. The older naturalistic views are now looked upon as pure abstractions, theories determined by the wishes of scientists and not by facts. Real evolution, as Professor Edwin A. Burt pointed out, is a process of the present and remains within the present, while advancing into both the past and the future.

It was inevitable that a great deal of attention should have been devoted to the theory of emergent evolution. There seemed to be, among the speakers, more or less agreement on the meaning to be given to 'emergence,' though it was no less evident that the theory itself has not succeeded in rallying to its side anything like unanimous support. The emergence theory, despite the fact that in clarity, definiteness, expositional value, and comprehensiveness it appears to be the best theory yet advanced, still remains on many fundamental facts and in its metaphysical implications almost as obscure as the countless other theories which have been put forward since the days of Darwin to explain the life process.

Professor Lovejoy is convinced of the fact of emergence and cited examples of four types with particular emphasis on "the emergence of psychical events and psychical objects as functions of special and late-evolved integrations of matter and energy." The present writer is not at all sure either of the facts or the logic exhibited by the paper of Professor Lovejoy. In particular, he feels that in repudiating teleology, the existence of a *nisus*, and of values in as far as the time-process of evolution is concerned, while all this may be regarded as strengthening the naturalistic basis of evolution, yet it cannot but be looked at askance by those who feel themselves obligated to respect metaphysical entities and to stand for the metaphysical approach. Driesch contended, and rightly, that the emergent evolution of Morgan is all too simple an explanation of facts whose complexity has never been fully appreciated. To view the cosmological process as one great emergent evolution possesses a certain sublimity; such a view cannot be harmonized with facts, at least in the inorganic world. Modern investigation proves that the science of the inorganic world has become *unitarian*, a conclusion which effectively deals the death blow to such all-embracing explanations as are advanced by the Morgan school. For

Professor Driesch himself, there exist in the organic world two alternative explanations of evolution, neither of which can be proved on the basis of present evidence. Unless we are willing to assume the existence of a super-entelechy, evolution becomes an *undetermined* process, about which it is impossible to predict anything at all with scientific accuracy. In the strict sense of the word, therefore, "emergent evolution is a matter of belief." Professor Driesch brought under discussion in this context the problem of freedom, both human and cosmological. He held out hopes of a satisfactory solution of this problem in the near future.

Professor Carr read a vigorous defense of creative as against emergent evolution, and from the metaphysical point of view presented a much stronger case for the position of Bergson than his opponents did for that of Morgan. His conclusion that "life and mind intervene actively and independently of their material conditions and of the means they employ, that life is not an emergent quality of the unstable carbon molecule, that neither in life nor in mind is there any analogy to the new qualities which continuously emerge with new chemical combinations," is one which, from our point of view at least, in every discussion of the evolution question must be made the starting point of metaphysical theorizing if we are not to render nugatory the best intentioned efforts of the philosopher to find a solution for this vexing question.

The General Session which heard discussions of the rôle of philosophy in the history of civilization was one of the most fruitful of the whole Congress. The brilliant paper of Professor Gilson is printed in full in this issue of the *New Scholasticism*. Both its spirit and logic are superb. While one or two statements made by Gilson, as, for example, that the idea of substance is the same in the systems of Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, and Spinoza, are not historically exact, his conclusions are stimulating and represent a correct reading as well as a truly synoptic view of the influence of philosophical thought on the course of civilization. Professor Dewey, in discussing the same question, concluded from the fact that philosophy belongs to the realm of values, that it is creative and additive, and that it is reconstructive not merely a searcher of new facts, that the type of philosophy which a given age produces is one of the best tests of the force and genuineness of that civilization. With reference to American civilization, its relatively low status is due to the fact that we possess so little original

philosophical thinking. "Until this deficiency is remedied, our arts and sciences, especially psychological and sociological, in spite of an enormous display of energy, will remain relatively random, superficial and uninfluential. The greatest need of our national culture is an awakening of courageous faith in the value of speculative imagination, provided it is supplied with an adequate body of experience."

To pass from the practical unanimity of opinion which existed on the place of philosophy in the progress of civilization to the utter confusion which reigned among the moral philosophers resembled nothing less than going from a sane world into bedlam. Whether the low status of present-day ethics is due to the low status of present-day metaphysics, or, vice versa, it would be difficult to say. Certain it is that contemporary ethics has about reached a condition where it is in imminent danger of being forever expelled from association with the other branches of philosophy. All the writers, with the exception of Professor John A. Ryan, were in practical agreement that there is no objective basis for ethics. Lévy-Bruhl, true to his positivist ancestry and to his professional commitments, represented the official ethics of the French Republic (I can imagine nothing more superficial from a philosophical point of view than the so-called 'lay ethics') by contending that in the elaboration of moral judgments the comparative method *might* be employed with success. The use of this method would help us in determining what men agree upon and what they disagree upon, *et voilà tout!*

In the discussion of the problems of mind, the paper of Professor Hocking of Harvard on "Mind and Near-Mind" revealed a vigorous tackling of a problem concerning which modern philosophy has uttered some strange and bizarre views. The behaviorists and neo-realists have discovered various substitutes for mind, 'near-minds,' but mind as psychology and philosophy reveal it to us in all its richness is none of these things. "No system of neutral entities however related is identical with mind, nor any impersonal process devoid of act, such as Bosanquet accepted. These conceptions lack depth; they are *mural* images of mind, decorative but lifeless substitutes," was the conclusion of Professor Hocking.

Of greatest interest to Scholastic thinkers is the position which was taken on the problem of essence and subsistence by Professor Moritz Geiger of Göttingen, a prominent member of the phenomenological school. Not only does Professor Geiger represent the turning towards

metaphysics which is so noteworthy a trend of contemporary German thinking, but he also accepts in the field of epistemology the principles of Aristotle. Professor Geiger rejects the naturalistic attitude because it leads, as he says, to nominalism. The phenomenological school looks upon "subsistent beings as a projection of mind and essence as an outcome of the idealizing faculty of the mind"; it is, therefore, a type of conceptualism if it consistently follows to their logical conclusions the principles it accepts. However, the phenomenological school, assuming as it does that the laws of nature are real, must conclude at the same time to the reality of essence in things. The result is an antinomy, the same antinomy which puzzled Aristotle and gave rise to the Universals controversy in the Middle Ages. The antinomy can be resolved, not however by any analysis of fact, but only by metaphysics.

If space permitted it would be interesting to report the discussions which took place on such subjects as mysticism, aesthetics, the philosophy of law, continuity and discontinuity in the sciences, and on time. The views of Professor Whitehead on the latter topic seemed to intrigue the imagination of many of the Congressists, due perhaps as much to the quaintness of his language as to the originality of his conceptions. Such phrases as 'supersession,' 'prehension,' 'objective immortality,' 'epochal occasions' fell on the ears of his bewildered hearers with all the force of a dynamite explosion. It is more or less of a question whether they departed with any clearer ideas of what Time really is than they possessed when they entered the hall.

To the present reviewer the place given to Scholastic philosophy by the Harvard Congress was not only not comparable to that accorded to this important contemporary current of thought by the Naples Congress; it represented an attitude towards Scholasticism as a philosophy which is to the defenders of that system a bit irritating, to put it mildly. There was an extraneous reason perhaps why the Naples Congress gave so much attention to Thomism since the six hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth of St. Thomas was celebrated during its sessions. Over and above that, the New Scholasticism was admitted to the different sections of the Fifth Congress on an equal plane with other modern systems and its contributions to contemporary philosophy were listened to and discussed with sympathy and appreciation. At Harvard, however, the New Scholasticism was shunted to the section "History of Philosophy" on the assumption, I venture to think, that it represents a mere recrudescence of mediaeval thought in

modern times. Such an attitude is hardly less ridiculous than it is unjust. The New Scholasticism, as every Continental thinker knows full well, and appreciates, is not a mere rewording of an ancient system, a mummy dressed up in modern clothes. On the contrary, it is a virile expression of the best which Western civilization has inherited from the past, clarified and ordered by a complete acceptance of the sound scientific and philosophical achievements of the present. If such is the truth, to bury the New Scholasticism amid discussions of mediaeval Jewish, Arabic, and Turkish philosophies is to exhibit not only a surprising lack of acquaintance with one of the leading tendencies in contemporary philosophy, but unjustifiably to condemn contemporary philosophy itself to the loss of the penetrating and profound critique which a conscious Neo-Scholasticism is capable of bringing to the discussion of the problems of metaphysics.

J. H. R.