

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme

MARTIN JAY

Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005; 431 pages.

This book offers a history of one of modernity's most contested philosophical concepts: experience. This is no small undertaking given the centrality of experience for thinkers in philosophical traditions ranging from rationalism to idealism, empiricism, and historicism. We are fortunate to have in Martin Jay an intellectual historian who is up to the task of tracing the history of this concept in order to find its most important articulations. No book could exhaustively treat this topic, so Jay's attempt should be judged on the merits not of completeness but on his use of a tool indispensable for the historian: selection. While some of Jay's inclusions seem relatively unmotivated (e.g., the religious thinker Rudolf Otto and the postmodern theorist Roland Barthes), most of the central characters we would normally expect are present: Montaigne, Descartes, Locke, Kant, Dilthey, Dewey, and the critical theorists and poststructuralists who are Jay's own specialty. One may wonder why Jay winnowed such figures as Russell and Husserl but, as every book reviewer understands, one must start chopping somewhere.

The book divides into three parts, although one will not glean this from the table of contents. The first part consists of a brief introduction which thematizes the many aspects of the concept of experience, followed by a first chapter tracing the long history of the philosophy of experience leading from Greek thought to Montaigne, Bacon, and Descartes. The upshot of this story is that the early moderns turned the concept of experience away from Montaigne's experimentalist view of experience in favor of a concept of experience reconstituted around a "penchant for purification and boundary creation" (38). It is in modernity, Jay tells us, that specialized forms of experience become objects of interrogation in their own right (Weber obviously looms in the background of this view). In the book's next two parts Jay deals first with various spheres of experience central to modern thought and then with twentieth-century traditions that have sought to reunify the divided forms of experience that the moderns so carefully purified.

The book's second part consists of five chapters which explore five different realms of experience. These are, in order, epistemic, religious, aesthetic, political, and historical experience. It would take far too long to engage Jay's able expositions of the best representatives of each of

these traditions. I will instead focus on a lingering concern occasioned by Jay's narrative here. There is a worry that Jay understates Kant's impact upon modernity's central concept of a purification of various forms of experience. This results in Jay's seeming lack of appreciation of Kant's influence upon his own historiographical procedures. If Jay's overall narrative of experience is shaped by a Weberian conception of modernity as divided up into various spheres of experience, each of which comes in its own purified form, then his story is itself already a result of the logic of partition first perfected by Kant. It was Kant who implemented "the radical modalization of experience," which disaggregated the unified images of experiential wholeness (260). The unfortunate result of Jay's neglect here is that his presentation of modernity tends to follow modernity's presentation of itself.

Perhaps Kant was right about what modernity would become. It would, however, be nice to see a little more argument as to exactly how it was that Kant and Weber were right that we moderns could carve ourselves up into divided bits (here a scientist, there a moralist; here a historian, there an aesthete). This would be especially useful in the context of *Songs of Experience* since the common Kantian-Weberian narrative is criticized by some of the thinkers Jay takes up in the book's third part, especially poststructuralists like Foucault and pragmatists like Dewey who refused to accept modernity's standard narrative of itself to the effect that facts and values can be neatly distinguished.

In the third part Jay turns to contemporary traditions that challenge modernist modalization. He devotes a chapter each to three traditions that seek to "reverse the process of differentiation" initiated sometime around Kant and culminated sometime around Weber (263). As readers of his previous books will expect, Jay is best in describing how critical theory (Benjamin and Adorno) and poststructuralism (Bataille, Barthes, and Foucault) sought alternatives to modern conceptions of experience. Jay's consideration of pragmatism (James, Dewey, and Rorty) as offering another such alternative represents a promising new line of inquiry in his work. Some readers will also wish that phenomenology and existentialism had been considered.

Unfortunately, the concern cited above remains in the final chapters. In presenting each of these traditions as importantly critical of modernity, Jay's narrative masks some deeper differences. Whereas pragmatists and poststructuralists mounted a substantial challenge to both modernity and modernity's standard historiography, critical theorists too often accepted modernity's own presentation of itself. On the one side, pragmatism and poststructuralism broke from modern philosophy in attempting to historicize the very history of modernity. On the other side, lingering universalist aspirations within critical theory encouraged resistance to

such strategies. The resulting difference was that thinkers like Dewey and Foucault historicized modernity in ways that enabled them to break away from modernity's narrative of itself more profoundly than could Benjamin, Adorno, and later Habermas. The merits of each of these moves remain debatable, of course. The point in the context of this review is that a greater sensitivity to the modernist inflections of his own historiography could have sharpened Jay's presentation of some of the decisive differences which continue to separate various traditions of twentieth-century thought, their important similarities notwithstanding.

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Against Cartesian Philosophy

PIERRE-DANIEL HUET

Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2003, trans. Thomas M. Lennon; 248 pages.

Against Cartesian Philosophy is the first and long overdue English translation of Pierre-Daniel Huet's *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae*. Its translator and editor, Thomas Lennon, is a seventeenth-century scholar perhaps best known for producing, with P. J. Olscamp, the authoritative English translation of Malebranche's *Search After Truth*. Here, in the first volume in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy's* new JHP Books series, Lennon brings his erudition to bear on a work that, though now largely forgotten, may well have been the nail in the Cartesian coffin.

Huet published the first edition of his *Censura* in 1689, apparently at the urging of the Duc de Montausier. The work censured not just Descartes, but Cartesians in general, in particular Malebranche, whose *Search After Truth* Huet had publicly denounced four months after it first appeared. What is today striking about the *Censura* is the extent to which Huet's interests in Descartes anticipate those that have particularly occupied scholars over the last half century. That is, unlike his contemporaries who were more preoccupied with the *Principles*, and with Cartesian physics and metaphysics, Huet concentrates his attention on the *Meditations* and on Descartes's methodology, in particular his method of doubt, the *cogito*, clear and distinct ideas, and so on. Thus, while the *Censura* in principle censures all of the Cartesian philosophy, with each of its chapters corresponding to some central tenet of Cartesianism, fully half the work is concerned with issues central to Descartes's first two meditations. As the text makes clear, however, Huet did not regard it as necessary to refute every point of Cartesianism since