

DEKU, HENRY

The Truth and Untruth of Tradition. Metaphysical Reflexions

[“Wahrheit und Unwahrheit der Tradition. Metaphysische Reflexionen”]

St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag; 490 pp.

This lengthy volume contains philosophical treatises by Henry Deku (University of Munich) written over a period of some thirty years (1953-1982), previously published in various journals, collections of essays and *Festschriften*, and now collected together to mark their author’s 75th birthday.

Deku belongs to a tradition of Western classical and medieval philosophy. The methodological starting-point for his acute and universally applicable reflexions lies in the Christian scholasticism of the Middle Ages. In spite of this, he does not argue immanently from the context of scholastic tradition, or indeed from the direction of any school, but is able to draw with equal certainty from an apparently inexhaustible fund of knowledge from all periods of philosophy, though primarily from Antiquity. He does not restrict himself to leading, well-known figures, but takes into account a number of lesser-known authors. His underlying intention is to set up rational clarity against irrationalisms of any kind, and to demonstrate the inadmissibility of the latter. As befits the tradition of classical thought, the precision of the mathematician is the yardstick by which all philosophizing is measured. In his ontological and metaphysical accounts Deku argues against theoretical atheism and nihilism on the basis of Aristotelian and Thomist proofs of the existence of God. Much space is devoted to essays on topics of practical philosophy. Politics, morality and ethics in their positive manifestations, as well as in the forms of their degeneration, are measured according to their proximity of rationality or irrationality. The theoretical roots of systems of lawlessness, be they of the political right or of the political left, are laid bare, and it is shown that in their dependence on irrationality they bear close affinity with one another.

Following, as it does, in the wake of classical and medieval understanding of theory, Deku’s thinking is always directed towards the practicability of even the most abstract reflexions. Were one to say that for him ‘logic’ was the basis of ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’, then one would not go far wrong. His writings consistently recommend, either implicitly or explicitly, a rigorously ascetic way of life. Given this standpoint, it necessarily follows that there are points from which criticism can be levelled at ‘modern’ views of the conduct of life in general, as well as specifically subjectivist maxims for life. He warns against the loss of awareness of trans-subjective norms (lost because they are transcendent), and points out the loss this entails of any certainty in the question of the meaning of human existence.

It is from this consideration that the radical rejection – so characteristic of

Deku – of present-day ‘subjectivisms’ in philosophy is to be explained. It seems to him illogical to take the ‘I’, even if only temporarily and for purposes of method, as the basis of knowledge. This means casting doubt on modern thought, beginning with Descartes and proceeding via Kant and German Idealism (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) right down to the present day. It is here that the reader is called upon to exercise critical awareness; for he may be prepared to be led by the author’s wealth of knowledge and logical clarity as long as his starting-point is Antiquity or the Middle Ages. But he is to exercise particular caution as soon as the whole of modern philosophy – insofar as it is methodically based on the immediate subjectivity of the thinking ‘I’ – is categorically accused of incompetence. But it is not easy for Deku’s opponents to refute, for example, his demonstration of an inescapable connexion between the theoretical positing of the individual as an Absolute and the murderous barbarism practised especially in this century.

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EBERHARD, KURT

Introduction to Theory of Knowledge and Science. History and Practice of Competing Paths to Knowledge

[“Einführung in die Erkenntnis- und Wissenschaftstheorie. Geschichte und Praxis der konkurrierenden Erkenntniswege”]

(Kohlhammer Urban-Taschenbücher, 386)

Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 160 pp.

The very subtitle of the book hints that it is not concerned with a specifically philosophical theory of knowledge. As the “classical epistemological problems”, the questions regarding certainty, evidence, truth and its vindication are, as Chisholm remarks, confusing, the author considers it justified “to avoid” these questions “initially” (p. 13). Instead he starts with “the question formulations typical of scholarship and practice”: the phenomenal question (“What is going on?”), the causal question (“Why is that so?”), and the actional question (“What is to be done?”) (p. 13; cf. p. 17 ff.). He goes on to investigate “the paths of knowledge . . . which bring people nearer to answering these questions” (p. 13). In particular the author stresses the “practice-relatedness” of his reflections, produced by “the questions and examples being taken from the social vocational fields” (p. 11).

In the first part of the book the “circulation of scientific epistemic processes” is schematically presented. From individual, collective, and societal problems, according to the author, three “epistemic interests” result, which express themselves in the above three questions. It is on a variety of “epistemic paths”