

Reviews

MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY: BETWEEN PHENOMENOLOGY AND STRUCTURALISM by James Schmidt. *Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hants.* Pp. 214. £20.00 HC, £6.95 PR.

This book will be welcomed by both Continental and Anglo-American philosophers. Continental philosophers will find here a useful exploration of Merleau-Ponty's peculiar relations to phenomenology and its nemesis, structuralism. Prof. Schmidt traces the development of three prominent themes in Merleau-Ponty's social thought (the relationship between philosophy and the human sciences, the problem of others, and the nature of expression and historical meaning) via a (usually: see below) careful examination of the relationships between Merleau-Ponty's thought and that of the philosophers who most influenced him: primarily Husserl, Sartre and Saussure. His discussion of Husserl on psychologism in Chap. 2 is particularly valuable.

The book is not aimed at the Anglo-American audience; references to philosophers from that tradition are studiously avoided. Wittgenstein's absence, indeed, is virtually a ghostly presence: Schmidt alludes to the private language argument (p. 61), but his footnote refers us to Malcolm; and even his discussion of duck-rabbits (p. 169) refrains from mentioning Wittgenstein. Still the book is readable—no small praise in this territory—and the determined Anglo-American can glean some understanding of those formidable terms 'phenomenology' and 'structuralism' and of Continental approaches to questions of mutual concern.

I mention two reservations. First, Merleau-Ponty has a maddening habit of knocking down straw men labelled 'Sartre', only to replace them with men suspiciously resembling Sartre himself. Schmidt, careful as he usually is to guide us through Merleau-Ponty's creative misrepresentations of other thinkers, is of little help here. Just one example: Merleau-Ponty holds that 'the body of the other is given to me as animate—as a *Leib*—and not simply as a physical object—a *Körper*' (p. 73), which view he explicitly *contrasts* with Sartre's: 'self and other meet as incarnate beings, not as sovereign *regards*'. *Chez Merleau-Ponty, everything happens as if Sartre had never written Part Three, Chapter Two of *Being and Nothingness*, and unfortunately Schmidt perpetuates that myth.*

Secondly, Schmidt has not sufficiently explained Merleau-Ponty's attraction to Saussure; consequently, Merleau-Ponty's move away from phenomenology, which it is Schmidt's brief to illuminate, remains undermotivated.

Sartre sees linguistic signs as tools whose function is to signify objects. One would have thought, given Merleau-Ponty's (very Sartrian!) emphasis on concrete existence, that a natural rejoinder to this view would involve looking at our actual linguistic practices. Had he done so, he might, like Wittgenstein, have found that language is a mixed bag of tools, whose character is seriously distorted if one tries to force all words into the 'naming' mould. Instead, Merleau-Ponty turns to (his own peculiar version of) Saussure: to the idea that signs only take on meaning by virtue of their differences from other signs. Signification thus becomes a mere 'secondary power' of language. Why does he make this move?

It is at best a partial answer to say that Merleau-Ponty was seeking a way out of the being-for-myself/being-for-others duality which landed Sartre with untenable views about the Other. Undoubtedly Merleau-Ponty was right to look to language for a solution: but the particular theory of language he adopts, which rejects phenomenology—the 'philosophy of consciousness'—in favour of systems of

unconscious structures, is equally untenable. (Merleau-Ponty's insistence on a 'lived equivalent' for these structures is feeble.) The Post-Structuralists accuse structuralist ethnologists of 'bizarre attempts to learn the rules of languages which appear to have no native speakers' (p. 166); they exempt Saussure from this criticism. But the unconscious structures which Saussure and Merleau-Ponty claim to have discovered beneath the practices of speakers are themselves, in principle, 'rules' of languages which have no native speakers: such 'rules' have no conceivable role to play in guiding, justifying and correcting the activities of language users.

Had Merleau-Ponty instead moved away from the Cartesian conception of consciousness as private and subjective, to a view of consciousness as internally related to public concepts, he could have overcome the aforementioned duality (and others which worried him) by making the items internally related, without surrendering the 'philosophy of consciousness'.

These remarks, however, are principally targeted at Merleau-Ponty. If Schmidt is insufficiently critical of his philosopher, his is still a decidedly worthwhile book.

KATHERINE J. MORRIS

ORIGEN, by Joseph Trigg. *SCM Press*. 1985. Pp. xvi + 300. £9.50.

This is an excellent general introduction to the life and writings of Origen, which will be welcomed by English-speaking students. The author writes sensibly, with sympathy and enthusiasm, and manages in a relatively concise book to convey both the interest and the importance of Origen as a scholar, exegete and speculative theologian. His insistence on O.'s literary competence as a *grammaticus*, whose comments on scripture are therefore not totally alien to the interests of modern biblical scholarship, is a useful reminder that there is more to Alexandrian commentaries, whether pagan or Christian, than the allegorising which is at first sight so off-putting for modern readers.

It is, of course, possible to cavil at some of the author's remarks. In my view, he oversimplifies O.'s christology; it is, no doubt, true that O. can be taken as supporting a subordinationist view (and the same is true of Justin, for instance). But some texts can be cited which tend in an anti-subordinationist direction (e.g. *Cels.* VI 69; *Heract.* 4). The truth of the matter is surely that O. does not have a single, systematic christology; depending on what point he is arguing, he will say different things in different contexts. Against the tendency of some naive Christians, he wants to stress the transcendence of God beyond the Logos (and especially beyond the incarnate Logos). But, to underpin the doctrine of prayer, for instance, he needs to stress the adequacy of the Son to the Father. Similarly he needs to stress the adequacy of the Son as the revelation of the Father.

Similarly the author sometimes gives the impression that O. was inventing doctrines which he may very well have received as part of a theological tradition. If he takes *theos* to refer primarily to the Father, he is simply being true to scriptural usage (as Karl Rahner reminded us). His exegetical concern to interpret the bible in a manner worthy of God and of the patriarchs derives from Judaism (as Strecker taught us, among others). Even the belief in the pre-existence of souls could probably have come from contemporary Judaism.

Trigg is certainly right to say that the scholastics made less use of Origen than some earlier western theologians; but to say that they had 'little use' for him is perhaps exaggerated. St. Thomas, for instance, makes considerable use of his exegetical works in his own scriptural commentaries.

Scholars will surely continue to debate many facts of O.'s life and thought; but Trigg has at last provided a clear introduction to him which will make him accessible to a much wider public, and this is no mean achievement.

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