

Stengers, Isabelle (coordination scientifique), *L'effet Whitehead*, Paris, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Annales de l'Institut de Philosophie de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1994 (219 p.).

"His thinking is a prism", confided Mrs. Whitehead in Lucien Price's *Dialogues* (p. 16). And the only way to reconstruct the unicity of the incident light after its prismatic decomposition is to use another prism. It is indeed such a tool that Isabelle Stengers provides us with the eclectic *opus* she recently edited. *L'effet Whitehead* contains six original essays in French accompanied by Stengers' excellent translation of Cobb's essay on Whitehead published in the *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy* in 1993 and of Griffin's "Introduction" from the same volume.

The shimmering prism can be appreciated in two main ways : as a whole, i. e., as the synergy created by the supplementation of its parts, and as a sum of parts possessing each an internal coherence and a particular focus. On the one hand, the publication of this introductory book is a remarkable occurrence, especially considering the relative poverty of the literature devoted to Whitehead in the French language. As our prismatic analogy was suggesting, such a convergence of complementary approaches is particularly helpful in the case of such a wide-minded speculative philosopher as Whitehead. Perhaps no better introduction can be provided than a series of brush strokes.

On the other hand, we have to attempt to relate the substantial marrow of these essays, each being the locus of bare philosophical confrontation with the traditional characters of the speculative field (among whom Kant is the most prominent). To take again our visual metaphor, different colors, or, better, different intensities are present in the spectrum disclosed by this new tool. The best surprise we had while reading the essays came from the epistemological introductory words of Stengers and

Latour, especially because of the practical dimension unveiled in their prose. Considering that Cobb's and Griffin's articles are translations of large parts of a material already familiar to the readers, we will focus on their fellow travellers.

I. *Ab Jove principium*, the editor's "Introduction". Isabelle Stengers, from the University of Brussels, is a chemist and philosopher who is renowned for her analyses of the process of discovery in the sciences (especially from a socio-anthropological perspective) and the related question of language as our main communication tool. Two major philosophical influences are kneading her numerous works : Whitehead and Deleuze, who also shows an extensive knowledge of process thinkers such as Bergson or Whitehead.

Stengers' contribution is articulated as follows. First, a reflection on Whitehead's development through his continuous emphases on common sense (to the detriment of the "good sense"). The thesis here is that Whitehead's conceptual pilgrimage is the *reflection* of the dialectic between a basic problem -learning what common sense requires- and its solution -the invention of the necessary concepts. Second, a very suggestive analysis of Whitehead's categorial scheme from a Deleuzian point of view shows the internal necessity animating the four main types of categories. The importance of *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie*, as evidenced by its recent translation into English (Columbia University Press, 1994), is thereby exemplified.

II. Dominique Janicaud, from the University of Nice, works in a team of seven people attempting to *create* a French translation of PR (to appear in 1995). His essay, "Traduire la métaphysique en procès", proceeds as a kind of reappropriation of the movement of PR itself. First, he underscores that translation requires a tight grasp of the metaphysical principles at work in the *magnum opus* and derives from this his method of translation. Second, he shows

how this method works out in dealing with particular concepts. In conclusion, Janicaud raises the question of the legitimacy of speculative philosophy in the light of Kantian and Heideggerian themes. On the one hand, he states that Whitehead misunderstood the late Kant who himself went far beyond the prohibitions he ingeniously framed in the first *Critique*. On the other hand, the relevance to Whitehead of the Heideggerian critique of onto-theology is (only roughly) sketched.

III. In "Temps et perception", Luca Vanzago, from the University of Pavia, first historically locates Whitehead's misunderstanding of Kant. He then shows how for Whitehead time is rooted in perception in the mode of causal efficacy. To achieve this aim, our author undertakes an inquiry that leads him to examine the conceptualization of relationality in the development of Whitehead's thought. That journey includes a (not very instructive) depiction of the modes of perception culminating with the concept of prehension. The concluding paragraph raises the question of Whitehead's anthropomorphism. Unfortunately, Vanzago fails to make here the keynote distinction between the *anthropomorphism* that Whitehead considers justified simply because human beings are *fully part* of Nature and the *anthropocentrism* that is totally absent in process thought.

IV. Very little needs to be said of Henri Vaillant's "L'émergence de la métaphysique de Whitehead : 1925-1929. Les recherches de Lewis S. Ford". The author, an engineer who became enamored of process thought, takes it upon himself to introduce Ford's work to a French-speaking audience. Much of the article follows EWM word for word. Although both the quality and the unavoidableness of Ford's silversmith inquiry is not in question here, some -even furtive- allusion to the dangers of relying entirely upon such an analytic perspective is requested.

V. Jean-Marie Breuvert of the University of Lille who (along with Alix Parmentier) translated AI into French in 1993, asks "Y a-t-il une philosophie de l'histoire dans *Aventures d'idées?*". His meticulous inquiry begins by positioning AI in relation to Kant, an operation that results in the bold statement that Whitehead has betrayed Kant's intuition by failing to consider the primacy of the practical over the theoretical. Breuvert tragically finds missing the idea of the radicality of human freedom (what our author misses seems simply to be the price Whitehead pays to avoid every form of bifurcation). More light is thrown on the divergence between Kant and Whitehead by bringing Hegel into the picture and contrasting him with Fichte and Schelling with the help of Eric Weil who defines himself as a "Post-Hegelian Kantian". Beyond the similarities existing between the Hegelian and Whiteheadian systems, the difficulty implied by Whitehead's obliteration of Kant's and Hegel's claims regarding moral or political action is thereby shown, the human's practical destination being replaced by a theoretical one. Nevertheless, further analysis of AI's concepts of business, art, life, beauty and harmony, along with the binomial persuasion-force, leads the author, armed with Ferry's grid, to show how Whitehead's cosmological ontology does open the door to the possibility of genuine moral behavior. (A very suggestive parallel would have been to instil here some allusion to Plato's concept of *theoria*.)

VI. Bruno Latour offers us a brilliant exposition in "Les objets ont-ils une histoire? Rencontre de Pasteur et de Whitehead dans un bain d'acide lactique". The question is simple : how could Whitehead's ontology of events fit with an understanding of the discovery by Pasteur (in 1857) of lactic acid? The author makes an extensive use of Pasteur's memoir itself to specify the insurmountable difficulties encountered by those who maintain essentialist or phenomenalist claims. Against Kant, it is shown that the gaps introduced between ontology, epistemology and

sociology have to be overcome. Latour's seminal understanding demonstrates that process thought provides a very attractive way of saving realism without using the concept of substance. His accent falls on the definition of the "substances" science work with as an experimental protocol that involves the entire cosmic history. Furthermore, the historicization of the discovery process achieved here constitutes an implicit response to Breuvert's question. Let us finally emphasize that here lies, as far as we know, the first disclosure of Latour interest in Whitehead (which is of good omen for the development of interest in process thought on the Continent).