

Vicente Santuc: *El topo en su laberinto. Introducción a un filosofar posible hoy*, Lima: Universidad Antonio Ruiz de Montoya, 2005, 510 pp.

This is a book intended for teaching philosophy and, at the same time, defending both philosophical discourse and reasonable action. Without pretending to build a system of true knowledge, philosophy continues its work like 'the mole in its labyrinth,' presented by Nietzsche in his prologue to *Aurora*, trying to find its way under the surface. In an attentive dialogue with Eric Weil, which extends throughout the book, Santuc shows that the philosophical effort towards meaning, intelligibility, coherence, and dialogue is not primarily opposed to ignorance and error, but to violence. Thus he presents a practical philosophical effort that turns the moral imperative of universal and equal respect towards human beings into an imperative of intellectual honesty, which forces us both to study history in all its harshness and to put the philosophical tradition into use.

The book arises from the author's college lectures. This fact is reflected in its style, its present-time examples, and the occasional references made to events occurring in Peru. Therefore, the book is also a testimony of the practical and the intellectual commitments that Santuc has assumed in this country.

In the introductory chapter, which concerns the nature of philosophy, he examines the problem of knowledge. Plato's dialectics and Aristotle's logic are studied, with a special focus on the various meanings of the word 'truth.' Where the frank and explicit ancient metaphysics ends – metaphysics which is, for this same reason, a fertile ground for criticism – a time filled with diverse worlds that claim to have no overall theories but rest on massive assumptions begins. To debate such assumptions is to resume metaphysics as an activity. From this point on, the book considers Eric Weil's radical claim, 'truth is not the problem for philosophy.' The problem, according to Santuc, is how to overcome violence through the use of reason.

After this introduction, the book unfolds in three parts: the representations of man, the historicity of philosophical knowledge, and the question of language. The contemporary transformation of the problem of man is the first main topic. Far from proposing a metaphysical anthropology of Aristotelian (or rather Kantian) style, Santuc shows the break with modernity that characterizes this problem on its various levels: the new 'space and time'

beyond the modern mechanicism; the deconstruction of history under the concept of 'postmodernism,' the Freudian break with the modern subject, and the structuralist approaches which followed; as well as, finally, Karl Otto Apel's proposal of asking for 'that which enables' inter-subjective communication. But at this stage, where the reader would expect a systematic assessment, the debate opens up even further, as the preceding investigation has posed, according to Santuc, the challenge of recognizing the unity of philosophy throughout its history. Lessons on Aristotle, Kant and Hegel come next, the main thrust of which is the 'Aristotle/Kant dialogue,' and the resultant identification of philosophy 'with the history of philosophy and with the mere history.'

The third part of the book contains an astounding transition from deep skepticism towards metaphysics of action. Through an analysis of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Sense and Non-Sense*, Santuc finds the 'universal that we share' reduced to the perception that opens us up to the external world and the factual agreements in a dialogue, but he also finds 'the fundamental metaphysic fact' of 'consciousness that *there is something, there is being external to me,*' and that 'this being is for me.' Santuc follows the reunion of ethics and hermeneutics that identifies contemporary French philosophy, where the granting of meaning, the characteristic act of interpretation, is undertaken as creation and transformation. In the final part of the book, devoted to critical investigations aimed at giving way to a dialogue between philosophical discourses, there is a 'passage from discourse into action: sacrifice.' Meaning has been revealed as the most universal category, but nonetheless, it is not to be found already actualized or disposed towards being known within things; it is a rather practical category, it beats within the thinking individual as 'demand of meaning.' The issue is not to take this unity of thought as something able to be fulfilled, even within the entire world or the whole of mankind. Without the thinking subject assuming a practical stance, there is no entrance for meaning into the human world. This is why philosophy 'should be able to understand the fact that this or that individual gets killed for yesterday's discourse or attitude... It will understand how to be willing to die can be a way of putting life into meaning, knowing that *the* meaning of existence is to have *a* meaning.'

Although the book does not consider (except, maybe, through a reference to Apel) the current debates on justice, equality, democracy, and politics of recognition, it incorporates itself into the process of political and social thinking in a peculiar way that will not go unnoticed by anyone who knows the context of its edition and authorship. The style of an address to

students is kept throughout the book. Due to this feature one can recognize a certain familiarity, conscious or not, of the book with the 'discours aux étudiants,' characteristic of the late 19th century French liberalism. Professors such as Ernest Rénan and Anatole France, who were also active intellectuals in defense of public causes – a species that has become rather rare nowadays – employed a new genre of essay in which liberal ideas became political positions by calling college students into action. Literary form and political commitment are enjoined with philosophical enquiry in addresses to these youths. Their style is characterized by creating an atmosphere of solemnity and unction which prepares to assume an indeclinable task. This genre has had an important life of its own in Latin America. To it belongs José Enrique Rodó's *Ariel*, and José Ingenieros' *Las fuerzas morales*. These authors had a decisive influence in the university reform movement (1918-1933) that engendered a new generation of politicians in Latin America. The genre showed a revival in Peru throughout the 90's by means of Salomon Lernes Febres' discourses – by that time Rector of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú – within the context of the double struggle for democracy and university autonomy. Vicente Santuc's book, being a philosophical study, shares in this task and contributes to it with a long discussion that inserts itself squarely in contemporary experiences and ideas. The circumstance of Santuc being one of the founders of the Universidad Ruiz de Montoya cannot be separated from the style and purpose of the book.

Ciro Alegría Varona
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú

(Translated from Spanish by Michel Nicholson)