

Compte rendu

Ouvrage recensé :

DUPRÉ, Louis, *Metaphysics and Culture*

par Suzie Johnston et Leslie Armour

Laval théologique et philosophique, vol. 51, n° 1, 1995, p. 216-218.

Pour citer ce compte rendu, utiliser l'adresse suivante :

URI: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/400909ar>

DOI: 10.7202/400909ar

Note : les règles d'écriture des références bibliographiques peuvent varier selon les différents domaines du savoir.

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter à l'URI <https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche. Érudit offre des services d'édition numérique de documents scientifiques depuis 1998.

Pour communiquer avec les responsables d'Érudit : info@erudit.org

avoir souligné la part d'instabilité associée à cette idée, l'auteur se met à nouveau à la recherche d'une instance de stabilité. C'est autour du thème de l'« incarnation plurielle » de Dieu qu'il la trouve. « Ce n'est que dans les interférences parallaxiques des perspectives locales et dans la polyphonie babélique des discours fragmentaires que la voix ou l'image de dieu peut aujourd'hui se faire apercevoir, s'incarnant dans le pluriel » (p. 219).

La question de Dieu amène naturellement O'Leary à aborder le problème christologique (chapitre VII). Il s'agit de concevoir une christologie en termes pluralistes et relativistes, qui permettrait de situer le Christ dans l'horizon interreligieux, sans pour autant trahir l'orthodoxie nicéenne et chalcédonienne. « Il nous faut trouver le chemin intermédiaire entre un attachement substantialiste aux langages mythiques et métaphysiques de la christologie traditionnelle et une dissolution désespérante de ces langages » (p. 292). À cette fin, l'auteur propose de substituer la figure du « Christ vide » à celle du « Christ plénitude ». Cette christologie, dont l'auteur nous fournit seulement l'ébauche, mériterait d'être développée bien davantage, mais il est tout de même permis d'en souligner l'originalité.

On a déjà relevé ce qui nous est apparu comme l'aporie majeure de cet ouvrage : l'articulation inadéquate de l'instance discursive et de l'instance de vérité. L'auteur n'a manifestement pas réussi à dégager les implications inhérentes à l'inscription de la théologie dans le paradigme langagier. Une plus grande rigueur épistémologique l'aurait sans doute incité à contourner moins facilement certains obstacles se dressant devant lui. Si, pour retrouver sa pertinence, la théologie doit passer par Foucault ou par Derrida, comme O'Leary le pense (p. 13), elle doit assumer son choix jusqu'au bout et emprunter ces chemins inconnus qui s'ouvrent devant elle, dans l'espérance qu'ils mènent quelque part. À cet égard, l'ouvrage d'O'Leary, en raison même de son caractère exploratoire (p. 19), constitue un essai courageux et audacieux ; il s'inscrit dans une démarche de recherche authentique.

François NAULT
Université Laval

Louis DUPRÉ, **Metaphysics and Culture**. The Aquinas Lecture, 1994. Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1994.

Dupré argues that culture is basic to reality, and thus influences the nature of things. Following Lévinas, he says it is culture which brings meaning to being (Cf. Emmanuel LÉVINAS, "Détermination philosophique de l'idée de culture", in *Philosophie et culture, Actes du XVII^e Congrès Mondial de Philosophie*, Montréal, Éditions du Beffroi, 1988, p. 73-82). Cultures and languages are essentially what make human beings human and therefore alter the nature of things and bring new kinds of things into being. Metaphysics must therefore treat culture as within the fold of its investigations, as belonging to an analysis of "ultimate" reality.

It is Dupré's contention that the cultures which have developed in the modern world since the separation of theology and science have divided us, making contact between people extremely difficult. He says that at the beginning of modern era : "Being and knowledge came to be separated" (p. 2). "The metaphysical search for the ultimate ground became transformed into a quest for epistemic foundations. The mechanistic concept of causality of the seventeenth century annulled the traditional metaphysical question as meaningless : being meant no more than the sum of all beings" (p. 3). Nostalgia does not help : "A simple return to the metaphysics of the past never suffices for justifying the present" (p. 24).

But we have chosen forms of culture which divide rather than unite and we have lost faith in the overarching story of the unfolding of Spirit and its reunification in the Absolute. Even Hegel is read by Dupré mostly in terms of the understanding of spirit. "Cultural products that should assist the incarnate mind to find its way home out of the dispersion end up cluttering the road to their spiritual destination" (p. 21). According to Dupré, spirit is lost in the bric à brac of material, mundane, mass-communicated and dispensed "ordinary" cultural life. Modernity is seen as bending and breaking under the weight of its own cultural products: "[...] the more creative a society is, the more it risks to bury the mind under the sheer abundance of its cultural objects" (p. 21).

Dupré puts the problem of cultural unity and metaphysics this way: "For the unity of metaphysics to be possible, the culture in which it takes place must already have formed a coherent synthesis of its own. Its members need to agree on the most basic values and to share an overall vision of the real" (p. 42). Our problem, the problem of modernity is that, in the chaos of contingency, multiplicity and choice, when tradition has "lost its former authority" (p. 44), "the lack of such an integration deprives a metaphysical reflection on culture of its precondition" (p. 43).

But perhaps we may find a way out through the study of language and the understanding of metaphor. Dupré recalls that "Western thought came to view language *itself* as revelatory and as transforming the entire visible but mute world of appearance into verbal metaphor. While finite realities possess their ground in the eternal Word, it is the human word that, by means of its unique metaphorical capacity, retraces their forms to this divine origin. Heidegger and Ricoeur have recently reminded us that without the ability to speak metaphorically there would be no way to refer visible appearance to invisible ground, and hence no metaphysics" (p. 5).

The difficulty with Dupré's hopes for reunification is that it invokes a basic ambiguity. Emmanuel Lévinas, on whom Dupré hangs a central argument, has always been concerned to distinguish between totalities and infinities. Totalizing cultures that "thematize" and immerse everyone in the same cultural bath, produce totalitarianism, the disease which mass culture and mass communication have made central to our time. The infinity on which Lévinas draws is expressed in a passage in Descartes' *Third Meditation* in which infinity is described as that which transcends all attempts at totalization; boundlessly infinite – infinitely out of mind – and beyond knowing. The infinities to which Lévinas refers can only be expressed through the richest possible plurality; infinity itself is the overflowing superabundance of such a plurality. In the name of solidarity totalities repress and destroy the community they seek to solidify. The solution is to develop a social order which is open to all the modes of expression except those which repress pluralism.

But one should be aware that there is a paradox to be overcome. While a fragmented "standpoint" culture sets men, women and cultural groups at each others' throats and creates gulfs and gaps across which no communication *seems* possible – especially the gap between technical knowledge and being – a culture built around a principle of unification threatens to become stifling and stultifying. Indeed, the dizzying deconstructions of post-modernity are spun out of a frenzied flight from Absolute Unity and Logocentrism. Freedom is freedom from the One, from religious intolerance and political tyranny. Dupré's plea for unity and Derrida's demand for endless deconstruction fall on the two sides of the paradox. Only if one can take Lévinas' infinity seriously does it seem that we could escape from the paralysis of paradox.

Overcoming the paradox involves shifting and transforming prevailing definitions of both culture and metaphysics. Indeed, the portrait we philosophers paint of the "nature" of philosophy itself would seem to need revisions. The source of an uneasy ambivalence with regards to such a project are at the heart of the paradoxical nature of Dupré's lecture. Lévinas' "ethics as first philosophy" lies at the center of the dilemma: despite invoking Lévinas' treatment of culture as bringing meaning to being, where the logos activates and revelates the letter, Dupré's text ends with an

oblique critique of Levinas' philosophy of the in-finite. A.K. Min is quoted against Levinas' optics of infinity as supporting Dupré's plea for unity: "[...] it becomes [...] necessary to maintain totality as the ideal horizon of critical intelligence and liberating praxis" (p. 50). Despite the infinite's ability to emancipate being from existence, and thus open human reality to culture, Dupré persists in emphasizing the absolute need for unity, and thus, for totality.

Dupré wants in some respects to follow and in others to reject Levinas' treatment of culture as the coming of meaning to being, or knowledge to existence. He writes that culture "holds out a spiritual surplus that urges humans beyond the satisfaction of immediate needs" (p. 14) while also maintaining that culture, above and beyond this impulsive creativity, is fundamentally a unified tradition. Dupré's desired unity calls for the meaning of culture to culminate in thematized coherency. He writes: "Undoubtedly the task of culture is to unite the objective to the subjective in a higher union. But modern culture rarely succeeds in fully harmonizing the individual mind with the transindividual expression" (p. 19). "Sooner or later," he tells us, "the cultured person feels [...] a captive of his own creations, enslaved to a constraining tradition. The mind's education occurs in a dialectic of moving outward and inward, but rarely does this process result in total success" (p. 19).

Going from Hegel's ominous choice between alienation and objectification, it appears that Dupré favours objectification. Culture, according to Dupré, is by definition something that unifies. But our culture is unravelling, and the position of an "objective" observer has shattered to shards. Unity or totality is combatted by Lévinas for the sake of the other, for love and justice. But Dupré says our modern culture must be made coherent – and this for the sake of metaphysics.

The crux of Dupré's problem is that culture, which used to provide a coherent base from which to begin metaphysical reflections, is not coherent. But the answer may be that what makes metaphysics possible is – as Lévinas and Descartes insist – that we constantly confront the infinite. Infinity can only be expressed through an infinite plurality. Seen thus, a limitless cultural pluralism which always recognizes "the other" without absorbing all otherness is the only morally acceptable unity.

Suzie JOHNSTON, Leslie ARMOUR
Université d'Ottawa