Review
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Reason, Reality, and Speculative Philosophy. Arthur E. Murphey. Edited with an introduction by Marcus G. Singer. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1996. Pp. xlix + 280. $45.00 h.c. 0-299-15040-2

The career and work of Arthur Murphey (1901–62) reflects much, but not all, of the general character of academic philosophy in the United States during his lifetime. His former student, Marcus G. Singer, supplies the contexts and details in a memoir and introduction for a lucid portrayal of this sympathetic, if now minor, figure of American philosophy. Evidently Murphey was conversant with every "ism" and doctrine extant, and he engagingly wrote and taught about every one. He was highly skilled as a teacher and department head, holding positions at no less than thirteen major universities. Friends of American philosophy should hold him in esteem, not only for his impressive writings, but also for his role as a "Johnny Appleseed" sowing the seeds of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, George Santayana, and Alfred North Whitehead across America. At his stations of greatest duration, Cornell University, Brown University, the University of Washington, and the University of Texas, the many dissertations trailing in his wake, and the lasting respect for his favored philosophers, testify to his influence in the face of mainstream disdain.

No friend of analytic philosophy, Murphey held that linguistic analysis is inferior to his preferred method of "contextual analysis." This method, and not speculative philosophy, is the major player of this edited drama. Nearly 900 pages of manuscript on "Speculative Philosophy," and the rest of his papers, were forgotten for decades until Singer's revived interest has brought them back into light. Singer's efforts to condense and distill Murphey's papers must be praised, and this volume and another portion (1993) will hopefully not be the last to be published. Perhaps only now, as renascent respect for the history of philosophy grows, could such a massive and complex survey of the major philosophical tendencies of the period from 1890 to 1940 receive proper appreciation.

Murphey was a philosopher's philosopher irrespective of his lack of trendiness because he was a master of the game of "comparative" philosophy. This game, intentional or not, seems well designed to produced students who, like himself, could exhaustively explain the merits and demerits of each theory in its turn. Murphey's own final convictions do not surface, and Singer is not explicit either (but see Singer 1985). But that is quite in character, apparently, for this volume quickly gives the impression that Murphey believes that it is more important to exhibit the limitations of each school separately than to use the pieces together to construct an improved philosophy. Readers should turn to Murphey's two other monographs (1943, 1965) for his more positive efforts, primarily in

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ethics. No speculative philosophy having Murphey's approval is presented here, but only a series of close calls and frustrating disillusionments.

We are told that speculative philosophy and contextual analysis have quite distinct tasks. Contextual analysis has logical priority, despite the fact that most philosophers too quickly jump to speculation. Speculative systems by their very nature are well designed to prove all rival systems false, since each has the resources to show how the others fail to pay proper respect to that aspect of life/experience/reality which is embraced as all-important. Following Whitehead's *Adventures of Ideas*, Murphey hastens to defend the speculative motive as reasonable and human. Philosophers draw attention to neglected means of better organizing and dealing with life's real problems. The competition of philosophies is a natural phase of cultural growth and not simply a confirmation that philosophies are relative to societies or eras. But instead of conducting contextual analysis aiming at some mutual adjustment among valuable ways of dealing with the world, as Santayana's *The Life of Reason* illustrates, philosophies are very often taken too far. Speculative excess takes one mode of thought to be the only correct mode of thought adequate to reality.

Many of the systems under Murphey's scrutiny have contextual validity and worth, right up to the point where their advocates make a transition to claiming authority over "absolute" reality. Murphey is skeptical of this notion, although he praises, with Peirce, the very human quest for final standards of truth and worth in the face of individual disagreement and cultural divergence. We are driven by acquaintance with alien ways to doubt what had so far worked as the criteria and rules for practical purposes. And the search for more inclusive standards to adjudicate contested modes of thought rationally is, in accord with Dewey, a necessary phase in the growth of the organization of human experience. Idealisms (F. H. Bradley, J. M. E. McTaggart), pragmatisms (Peirce), realisms (S. Alexander, G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, R. W. Sellars), and naturalisms (Santayana, Whitehead) all earn praise from Murphey for their protection of some portion of human life and their mediation with other portions. However, no system's standards have the right to legislate out of existence any legitimately useful modes of interacting with the world—which is exactly what most of them end up doing.

Philosophies metastasize when their basic concepts are generalized too far beyond their original meaning. The extension of concepts is the essence of scientific and philosophical progress, where a theory can illuminate unorganized and problematic experience. But speculative philosophers attempt to apply one set of important concepts to all of reality, which necessarily displaces and disvalues other theories incompatible with those concepts. The spiritual values taken to be ultimately real by idealists forbid scientific thought from describing reality. The usually wholesome appeal to practical experience made by pragmatists degenerates into a demand that experience consists solely of perceptions amenable to hypothesis testing. Realists fall into the circular pattern of selecting

out given absolutes in experience to fit some selected logic, and justifying that logic by pointing to the givens it serves. Most disappointing is Whitehead's *Process and Reality*, which bestows feelings to ultimate entities indiscernible by any scientific investigation, and Santayana's *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, which detaches unchanging immediate enjoyment from the practical reasoning grounded on common sense. Murphey concludes by renewing a call for a philosophy adequate to all varieties of experience. A genuinely methodological and pluralistic attitude toward reality is not even mentioned as a live option, probably because that would abandon speculation as Murphey defines it.

Murphey's work is the finest critical survey of the philosophies of the first half of the twentieth century. For this alone, it could serve as a companion to advanced undergraduate and graduate courses, with the added bonus that it exemplifies the reasoning habits essential to a fearless and nondogmatic mind. More than that, it is an opinionated insider's guide to a wide variety of systems of thought that philosophers ignore at the peril of being doomed to repeat them.

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