

**Quintanilla, Pablo, Escajadillo, César y Orozco, Richard Antonio (2009),
Pensamiento y Acción. La filosofía peruana a comienzos del siglo XX, Lima:
Instituto Riva-Agüero/Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 184pp.**

by Raúl Zegarra

The rigorous and academic investigation of philosophy in Peru entails a still unresolved task. It is true that there are many valuable efforts with this purpose and, in fact, the latter years have shown an important interest for a reflection in our philosophical tradition, although it has been through isolated exercises.[1] In this respect, *Pensamiento y Acción. La filosofía peruana a comienzos del siglo XX* (hereafter, PA) constitutes a first class labor in the task of not only developing a detailed study of our tradition, but in the effort of consolidating a systematic compromise and even less isolated examination and critical reappropriation of our prior intellectuals' thoughts.

The team of philosophers that assumed the enterprise of elaborating the book is formed by Pablo Quintanilla, Richard Antonio Orozco y César Escajadillo, all of them Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) professors. It is an enterprise where the team work becomes notorious hence the text written by the three authors shows a well coordinated work that is made clear in the balanced treatment of the subjects and in the absence of enforced unions between chapters and subchapters. A situation that deserves attention taking into account the difficulty that the joint writing of a text means.

As was mentioned in the text Prologue, PA represents the visible manifestation of an interest that the authors have sustained for many years, that being, the one related to the "development of the classical philosophical Pragmatism, as well as (as of) its contemporary versions." [2] This interest conducted the authors to also examine the historical influences of such philosophical doctrine further than the United States, this situation led them to lay their eyes over Peru and the role that Classical Pragmatism had in the development of the thoughts of the leading Peruvian philosophers at the beginnings of the 20th Century.

With this in mind and as it is indicated in the Introduction, there were two doctrines that had great influence in Peruvian philosophy at the beginning of last century: the already stated Classical Pragmatism and the French spiritualism. However, what has been left unsaid is that this influence responded to a particular historic situation, this being, the overcoming of positivism in its most representative versions: August Comte and Herbert Spencer. By letting go of the positivist weight in their reflections, the Peruvian philosophers migrated, almost in their entirety, towards French spiritualism, mainly in the version of Henri Bergson. Similarly, there was an important reading, mostly of William James, that saw itself reflected in more than one of the Peruvian authors' philosophical work.

With this brief context, I think we can now enter a more detailed examination of the work. The first chapter of PA — that at the same time is divided in three subchapters, pattern that will follow through the whole work — carries the title of “El espiritualismo francés: Henri Bergson.” This chapter, after making some conceptual precisions[3] and checking Bergson’s main spiritualist antecessors, directs in whole to the analysis of the central thesis of this author. Hence, as it is indicated in the text, “Bergson’s central concept of philosophy is the intuition of the duration,”[4] this is, the intuition of the internal sense of time. The authors specify, “[t]o Bergson, while the conceptual analysis separates into simple elements all the already known, and, therefore, it does not move forward producing further knowledge, instead it distributes and reorganizes all that’s already known, the intuition is inventive because it is a type of sympathy, in the Humean sense, that allows to recognize the objects in their particularity and unexpressability.”[5] Now, this way of conceiving intuition involves, as it is noted in the book, certain problems. The major one being the internalist character of intuition that leads Bergson not to take into account the intersubjective elements in the intuitive process. In other words, what is intuited to Bergson would have a transparency level that could not be questioned; however, as we know, this is a rather arguable affirmation.

On the other hand, and in the same field of the Bergsonian notion of intuition, the authors emphasize in an early stage, their distances with the thesis of Classical Pragmatism. So, the French author distinguishes in *Creative evolution* between the *intelligence* that would be in charge of addressing to the concrete action in nature and the *intuition* that would be addressed towards life, to know, in a more broad and comprehensive way than the mere ordinary action in nature. Here, Bergson takes a distance from the pragmatists since none of them could comprehend the existence of any kind of conscience whose origin is separated from the solution of immediate problems of life.[6] Anyway, Bergson is relevant to the authors because he achieves to outline through his intuitive answer a level of knowledge that cannot be subsumed in what is merely sensory and with this he becomes an important counterpart of positivism and its monism vision of knowledge.

With this said, it is convenient to move towards the second chapter of PA: “El pragmatismo estadounidense: William James.” As in the first chapter, here we deal with a general and informed presentation that pretends to give the non specialized reader an appropriate context to understand the next two chapters. In that way, it does not pretend an innovative study of James nor a major contribution of a bibliographic order or interpretation wise. It is, though a basic presentation, and in this way positive and well carried.

After some broad indications around the origins of Pragmatism — the role of the *Metaphysical Club*, the decisive article of Pierce, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” and the developments of the first Peircean intuitions done by James —, the philosophers enter slowly into the conception of knowledge of the author of *Pragmatism*. There, the jamesian special approximation to the subject of truth is outlined: a notion that

transcends what is merely intellectual and that is based in the practical consequences for the life of the individual.[7] It is not convenient to start a debate of this controversial affirmation by James in a book review, it is enough to say that the authors make a good general presentation for the means of the book, characterizing the theory of the truth of our author as instrumentalist,[8] as opposed to ultrarationalism[9] and as antirepresentationalist.[10] What is left to see is to what point are these affirmations sustained, as well as the rest of the precisions made by the authors when entering a more technical debate. As it is suspected, whoever is further interested in a more specifically manner in this issue would have to migrate outside of PA.[11]

The chapter ends with a final paragraph dedicated to the determinism issue and to the way in which James responds to it based in his strong belief in human freedom. Hence, it is inquired into the very same James's existential dilemma and into his effort to overcome the inconsistencies of determinist naturalism. There are also worth mentioning, the final counterpoints with Ludwig Wittgenstein that give some very interesting approaches to both authors.[12]

Finally, and after a somehow extended overlook, we reach the two last chapters of PA. I am referring to the last chapter, titled "La filosofía peruana a comienzos del siglo XX" and to the fourth "Pedro Zulen. La crítica al espiritualismo y los inicios del pragmatismo." Let's start then by the third chapter so later we can study thoroughly into the peculiarities of Zulen's thinking.

The first aspect worth noticing is that after the abandonment of the scholastic and through the influence of the French Illustration and the English empiricism, the Peruvian philosophers from the late 19th century and the early 20th century gave a special attention to positivism. One of its greatest entrepreneurs outside the university senate was Manuel Gonzales Prada, to whom the authors dedicate some pages; however, they soon come to concentrate in the representative scholars of this movement. Among them, the ones that mainly stood out were, Javier Prado and Jorge Polar. Prado assumed positivism from its thesis and with it some kind of actualized Kantianism, especially in that related to the concepts of phenomenon and noumenon. In that way, Prado differentiated between the scientifically-philosophic thought and the religious one to sustain that the first one was supported by objective and verifiable realities, while the second one was based in individual faith and had a subjective character.[13] With this, he subscribed Spencer's evolutionism to whom he considered to be one of the great geniuses of the 19th hundredths.

As said before, besides Prado, the figure of Jorge Polar also stands out. In his *Nociones de estética*, surely his most important book, Polar declares his positivism by pretending to "explain these esthetic notions in strictly physical terms, without resorting to any metaphysical notion." [14] Although, to be more precise, what turns him into a positivist is his belief that this kind of explanation is the only valid one for esthetic phenomena. Notwithstanding, Polar, like Prado, reserves a privileged place for faith and God. This also got him to assume the Kantian dualism in order to rescue the noumenic dimension of reality.

Both Prado and Polar slowly grew apart from positivism, although not in an absolute way. In Prado's case, the influence of Alejandro Deustua in the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos was crucial; for Polar, his interest in esthetic and his religious convictions were the main reasons for his estrangement. In general, what started to be objected was the epistemological monism of positivism and more than one internal inconsistency of it. The narrowness of positivism was, then, incapable of responding to the concerns of this generation of philosophers and was abandoned — at least in its most rigid versions — almost entirely by the early nineteen hundredths.

Thus, a group of converted thinkers emerged slowly; they called themselves “intuitionists” and “spiritualists.” When putting aside the strongest thesis of positivism, they ended up developing a “new epistemology that Mariano Iberico called *symbolic intuitionism*, which main features [where] the epistemological pluralism and the antirepresentationalism.”[15] The relevance of Deustua in this transit was fundamental, particularly through his critiques to the *intellectual prejudice*, this being, the unbounded trust of the Peruvian philosophers in the power of science. The reaction was “spiritualist” since a vindication of the spirit against this tyrannical hegemony of science was necessary, although not only in the Bergsonian sense, hence there was also an important reading of William James.

It should be noted that the spiritualism of Iberico — another important figure of the Peruvian philosophy of the 20th Century — with Bergson, maintained that a dimension different from that of scientific knowledge existed, a type of knowledge that was related to intuition. The interesting part is that even though with some dualist residues, Iberico reaches to maintain a sort of existentialist metaphysic by which the Kantian dichotomy between phenomenon and noumenon is overcome. In that way, indicate the authors, Iberico developed a sort of phenomenology of the *Dasein* with strongly Heideggerian echoes that allowed him to take a distance from a theist metaphysic to maintain that even that being of metaphysic manifested itself in a phenomenological way. They are valuable ideas that PA brings to the debate and that could invite the interested reader to a more detailed study on the matter.[16]

Finally, we arrive to the fourth and last chapter of the book. Now is turn to briefly examine the thoughts of Pedro Zulen and see how this thinker takes distance from the spiritualist philosophers to choose the Pragmatist path. Two are the works of Zulen that show his interest for both, spiritualism and Pragmatism. The first one, *La filosofía de lo inexpresable*, was one of the most sharp critics to Bergsonianism; the second, *Del neohegelianismo al neorealismo*, was a lucid presentation of the Anglosaxon philosophy at beginning of the 20th Century.

The first thing that stands out in *La filosofía de lo inexpresable* is the respectful and at the same time critical treatment of Bergson. There he is considered as one of the most important figures of that time, but complains of the non critical appropriation that has been done of his thought. In this way, it ceases to rescue the value of the French author's philosophy, mostly in what concerns the opposition to every rigid schematism of reason. However, Zulen was not indulgent with Bergson and had no

repair in being very critical also. On one hand, he was very severe with the intellectual logicism of Bergson, since he made him fall in a vice that he himself pretended to overcome, this being, the excessive rationalism of the prior philosophy. On the other hand, he also criticized his intuitionism because with it Bergson fell in the game of pretending to seize the absolute and, at the same time, of believing to have an integral knowledge of our experience.[17]

Besides that, the propositive part of Zulen's thought could be organized, as maintained by the authors, around the idea of a sort of *sui generis* realism. Zulen defended the thesis that there was an autonomous world of external objects whose laws are independent from us and along this affirmation, also maintained that our relationship with the exterior world should not be to a naïve knowledge of the same, but to its transformation.[18] In that way, it is a philosophy strongly influenced by Pragmatism. Thereby, he maintained a conception of truth in a clear compliance with the one from Peirce, understanding the last one not as something fixed, but as an ideal purpose of the investigation. This, clearly, supposed taking a profound distance of positivism, but at the same time a critic to Bergson's intuitionist dream. Zulen was, in that way, a nearly confessed Peircean fallibilist.

Now, to talk about the subject matter of his second book, *Del neohegelianismo al neorealismo*, it would have to be said that it has a different content than the first one. It is about a text that pretends to achieve an integrated presentation of the main currents of thought that influenced the author. In that way, what Zulen pretends is to articulate in an intelligent manner, neohegelian philosophies as those of F. H. Bradley and J. Royce along with Peirce's Pragmatism. However, it is an unfinished project due to the early death of the author from tuberculosis; despite that, the authors indicate, you can see an almost clear guideline in the project: a sincere concern for the nature of reality[19] which is responded with an idealistic position with Pragmatic elements — its main benchmark was Royce — although critical of James, Dewey and neorealism.

In general, Zulen thought that James — and also Dewey — had made some subjects of philosophy excessively immediate and of a daily usage and that represented a problem, if not absurd in more than one case; because of that, Zulen preferred to opt for a posture like the one of Royce and in that way defend a neohegelianism that held that “the individual as the thought are part of a universal whole, a whole to which we approach to incorporate ourselves to it.”[20] In that same line, Zulen finishes the work we have been commenting:

What do we study? [...] in the pages of the men that thought [...] to satisfy the human desire of penetrating into the afterlife? We aspire to the soul of those men that emerges real, concrete, and genuine from those pages, to be shown to us in all its individual characteristics, and prove us with the most clear and decisive of evidences the eternity of the spiritual world.[21]

Zulen would have been a seriously concerned author for the defense of spiritual reality, because of that he became critical of Pragmatism and neorealism, positions he thought harmful for such purpose. What makes it clear, at least in the case of James, is that

Zulen was a reader that didn't know how to embrace the complexity and broadness of the Jamesian thought, which had as one of its most intense and declared objectives the defense of that spiritual dimension that Zulen yearns for and defends, sometimes, of people that are far away from ever wanting to attack it.

What will we say then, of PA to conclude? Firstly, that it is a very good book that deserves reading and discussion. PA offers an informed work that stimulates the interested reading and that should help consolidate the systematic investigation of the first Peruvian philosophers. Secondly, it is a book that not only inserts itself in the domain of Peruvian investigation; but that is placed in an even bigger spectrum: the Latin American and worldwide interest for this kind of philosophical-historical work. I had the pleasure of sharing with two of the authors, Escajadillo and Orozco, a discussion table in the First International Conference on Pragmatism and the Hispano Latino/World, celebrated in February 2010 at the University of Texas A&M, USA. If something was clear from this event, it was that there is a growing interest from the scholars specialized in Pragmatism for this kind of study. In that measure, PA not only contributes to Peruvian national thought, but becomes an important piece of an international line of thinking that seems to be opening itself a solid path.

Despite of the already said, we should not lose sight that it is an introductory text and not so much a critical study that, I have the impression, loses the opportunity of offering a more profound entry to the Peruvian philosophers, because it dedicates too many pages to Bergson and James. Then, the pending step is the one of a direct critical work over the ideas of our thinkers; a work that beyond the general introduction — always useful and important — allows us to progressively draft the true content of its influence in the national imaginary and in the configuration of the guidelines of philosophy in Perú. PA constitutes a significant initial contribution for that task.

Notes

[1] You can see, for example, the recent publications of Augusto Castro (2009 and 2006, respectively): *La filosofía entre nosotros: cinco siglos de filosofía en el Perú*, Lima: PUCP, Fondo Editorial and *Filosofía y política en el Perú: estudio del pensamiento de Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, José Carlos Mariátegui, Víctor Andrés Belaunde*, Lima: PUCP, Fondo Editorial. As well as the older texts of David Sobrevilla (1996 and 1989, respectively): *La filosofía contemporánea en el Perú: estudios, reseñas y notas sobre su desarrollo y situación actual*, Lima: C. Matta and *Repensando la tradición nacional: estudios sobre la filosofía reciente en el Perú*, Lima: Hipatia. It is unnecessary to say that the great initiator of this exercise of reflection and study of our past was Augusto Salazar Bondy with his *Historia de las ideas en el Perú*

contemporáneo. *El proceso del pensamiento filosófico* (1965), Lima: Francisco Moncloa.

[2] Quintanilla, Pablo, Escajadillo, César y Richard Antonio Orozco (2009), *Pensamiento y Acción. La filosofía peruana a comienzos del siglo XX*, Lima: Instituto Riva-Agüero/Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, p. 7.

[3] *Idem*, p. 16. It is worth mentioning that PA offers the reader a not so insignificant number of notes of conceptual precision. It is a valuable exercise, mostly for the reader that has not been initiated in philosophical technical terminology.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Idem*, p. 25.

[6] Cf. *Idem*, p. 34.

[7] *Idem*, p. 83 ff..

[8] Cf. *Idem*, p. 84.

[9] Cf. *Idem*, p. 86.

[10] Cf. *Idem*, p. 88.

[11] I recommend reading Putnam, R.A., ed., (1997), *The companion to William James*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Specifically, the article by Hilary Putnam about the truth in James. Likewise, you can see Carrete, J., ed., (2005), *William James and The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London and NY: Routledge. There is worth revising the debate of the subject of the truth between Hilary Putnam and David Lamberth that, in fact, has Putnam's text (1997) as a source.

[12] For a revision of the relations between Wittgenstein y James, you can see the book of Russell Goodman (2008), *Wittgenstein and William James*, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[13] Cf. Quintanilla, P. *et al.*, *Op. Cit.*, p. 116.

[14] *Idem*, p. 125. [15] *Idem*, p. 130.

[16] It is worth revising footnote 56 to this chapter, in which some bibliographic precisions and suggestions are made.

[17] *Idem*, p. 148.

[18] *Idem*, p. 152.

[19] *Idem*, p. 160.

[20] *Idem*, p. 168.

[21] Zulen, P., *Del neohegelianismo al neorrealismo*, p. 67, quoted in Quintanilla, P., *et al.*, *Op. Cit.* p. 174.