

L. VAN BECELAERE, O. P.  
Membre de l'American Philosophical Association  
[Van Becelaere, Edward Gregory Lawrence]

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La  
Philosophie en Amérique

DEPUIS LES ORIGINES JUSQU'À NOS JOURS

(1607-1900)

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## INTRODUCTION

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I have been asked to write a few words by way of introduction to the scholarly and careful study which Father van Becelaere has made of the past and present conditions of the study of philosophy in America. It becomes naturally my task to express the kind of interest which American members of my profession may be expected to feel in such an undertaking. I write as one who is, in theological opinion, decidedly remote from the view which Father van Becelaere represents. But I speak also as one who takes a decided interest in that effort to arrive at a mutual understanding between thinkers of different schools to which this undertaking unquestionably owes its origin. In times not far distant, it was not customary for our own representative students of philosophy in America to pay much attention to scholastic philosophy. But it was also certainly not very customary in those same times for a scholastic theologian to take much interest in our development. Father van Becelaere has shown how, without any abandonment of his own philosophical opinions, it is possible to give an impartial and appreciative review of tendencies with which the theology of his own church has possessed only a remote connection for a long time. On the other hand, I think that such modern American students of philosophy as are of my own sort of opinion, without sacrificing the clearness of their own convictions, and without accepting the presuppositions of scholasticism, will take delight in such an appreciation as the present one, and will learn much from it. From this point of view I cordially recommend this volume to the attention of my colleagues.

Two kinds of reflections are most likely to be aroused in the mind of the American student of philosophy when he reads this book. First, he will be interested in considering how his country's activities in the philosophical field appear when thus viewed from without. Our own historical reviews of our national philosophical literature have been so few, and relatively so incomplete, that we can only gain from a new contribution so different in its nature as the present one is, when compared with all those accounts that we who study philosophy in

America have given, or are likely to be able to give, of ourselves. But secondly, the American who reads this book will be stimulated to new reflections of his own upon what he takes to be the significance, and the probable future, of American contributions to philosophy. I shall try briefly to suggest in a few words what, at the moment, I have to offer in the way of reflections of both these types.

As to the first matter, it is of course possible to differ at various points from the estimates, and sometimes from the summaries of doctrine, which Father van Becelaere has expressed. The book has seemed to me, as I read it, to possess one good fault. It is too brief. In several notable cases, a somewhat fuller statement of doctrine would seem to me needful in order to make sufficiently clear the precise position, and the individual merits of some, especially of our recent philosophical teachers. As regards myself, in so far as Father van Becelaere has so kindly sketched something of my own position, I have no complaint whatever to make. But sometimes I have wondered, in case of certain of my colleagues, whether the conditions which the brevity of the author's statement has forced upon him, did not too much tend to make it hard for the reader sufficiently to individualize, and to distinguish, some of our recent varieties of method and of opinion. In recent American thought there is a lively activity, whose significance the author of this book is quite plainly very ready both to recognize and to expound, so far as his limits permit. The incompleteness, however, is the result of the brevity of the text. I can only hope that in future study the author will be led to apply his kindly spirit, and his scholarly method, still more elaborately, and in greater detail, not only to the exposition, but to the criticism, of the various tendencies in which he has taken so much interest. It is, furthermore, impossible in a statement of the present sort, for the author wholly to escape certain minor errors, regarding the official positions, the personal fortunes, or the literary relations, of certain individuals. Such errors as I have noticed, in matters which have to do with our contemporary philosophy, relate mainly to details of this type, and need not be noted here, since so far as I have observed, they will not anywhere affect the opinion and the estimate which the foreign reader of this book is like to form regarding the persons most interested. It is

rather on the side of a few omissions, or of occasionally inadequate characterization of certain very recent tendencies, that our own American scholars are likely to find their most frequent ground for criticism. But as I have said, such incompleteness, where it is present, seems to be mainly due to the brevity of Father van Becelaere's presentation. Everywhere the earnest effort to collect the material and to present fairly the result, is evident. And we students of philosophy in America will certainly feel thankful for what we get in this study in the way of exposition and comparison; and we shall hope for more in the same spirit. We, ourselves, possess no study made by one of ourselves that is anywhere nearly as adequate.

The most notable general omission that I venture to point out as in a sense needing supplement in Father van Becelaere's treatment, relates to the recent study of logic in our country. As in the person of Mr. Charles Pierce, and in the essays which his friends and pupils published already in 1882, in the "Studies in Logic by members of the Johns Hopkins University," we have the beginnings of the new school of logicians; as one of the members of this school, namely, Mrs. Ladd Franklin, has given the most successful reduction of the theory of syllogism which has ever been proposed, and as considerable new material is now appearing, which relates in various ways to logical studies, no doubt, in some future study, Father van Becelaere will be glad to give a fuller account of this, one of the most recent, but also one of the most original, of our types of philosophical activity. It is in the meanwhile not at all surprising that the scattered and not easily accessible literature of this branch of study should have temporarily attracted less the attention of the author of this book. I myself, to whom Father van Becelaere appeals for suggestions regarding his investigation, ought to have attracted his attention to more of the evidences which exist of this side of philosophical study amongst us. That I did not do so is due merely to the fact that we for the most part discussed more general matters together; and that the omission has attracted my own attention only as I have come to read Father van Becelaere's little work as a connected whole.

Another recent tendency, whose evidences are perhaps too recent to have been able to receive sufficient attention for Father

van Becelaere's purpose, I may also mention the work of Professor Dewey's pupils at the University of Chicago. This work bears also upon logic, but has in addition very great promise in its bearings upon general philosophy. I am also disposed to think that a fuller account, not merely of the psychological work of Professor Ladd, but of the decidedly systematic whole of philosophical conceptions which his most recent works have now made decidedly manifest, would have been advisable to make more adequate the perspective of Father van Becelaere's account of our recent speculation. The school of Yale and the school of the University of Chicago are two of the prominent centres in recent American philosophy. I am not sure whether the reader of Father van Becelaere's discussion will sufficiently appreciate their fecundity, and their just influence.

These remarks are made, not by way of complaint, but by way of supplement, and of bare suggestion. It is decidedly in our author's spirit that the studies which he has so ably begun should be further continued upon the line of such indications as I thus venture to make. How carefully, and on the whole how successfully, our author has endeavored to hold the scales of justice, and to give various opinions their due significance, is evident from the beginning to the end of his work.

If I now turn to the other kind of reflection which seems to me natural on the part of the American student of philosophy, this, as I said, has to do with the question as to how we students of philosophy tend to estimate our own national bias and disposition, in so far as these concern philosophical problems. Here we are led very naturally to compare our own consciousness of our purposes with the dispassionate, although distinctly kindly view that our foreign co-laborer expresses in this book.

Father van Becelaere recognizes that, especially in recent American thought, idealistic tendencies are prominent. At the outset of his study he, nevertheless, calls attention to the strongly marked realism, which our national inheritance from England, and the material conditions under which our life began, at first determined. I am not sure that I myself feel, as an American student, that these tendencies are in as marked opposition to one another as the foreign observer may at first suppose. National characters, in cases where we can define them at all, are always likely to bring into union traits which

the external observer may suppose to be paradoxically various, but which those whose nationality is in question may find to be very natural things, and easily capable of union. That the Jewish race has in all ages united the cynicism and shrewdness of the author of Ecclesiastes with the religious fervor which produced the prophets, is a fact of history. That the Scotchman joins a marvelous tenderness and depth of sentiment, and a tendency to romantic superstitions in his less cultivated folk, to lofty poetical earnestness in his highest type, with his well-known obstinacy of conviction, fondness for argument, and critical intellectual keenness of vision:—all this is again well known. That the English, whose philosophy has been so empirical, and whose political life has been so practical, show themselves in poetry capable of the loftiest flights into an ideal world: this is a well-known problem of national genius. The American has as yet no perfectly finished national character. But that which he has possessed and developed of independent national spirit is what those other cases show to be so common in the life of nations. In us, too, there is a union of distinctly various, and in some respects opposed traits. The early American struggled with the wilderness. This was a material activity. But, as Father van Becelaere has shown us, this same American spent a great deal of his time in dealing with what, for him, was a supernatural world. And the very fact that he did not deal with this world in merely traditional ways, that he showed great originality, ere long, in the invention of new sects, and even, sometimes, in the devising of distinctly new superstitions, all this shows that he was far from being merely a realist, even when his cultivation was still very imperfectly developed. The extension of his national territory has been carried out under the influence of what have often been decidedly fantastic national ideals. His frontier history is full of romance. But romance is not at any time determined merely by exciting material conditions. It results from the type of the minds by whom the adventures are directed, and estimated. The American always conceived his adventurous frontier life in decidedly ideal terms. One has only to know any company of old pioneers, in any part of America, and to hear how they narrate the story and the meaning of their early local history, in order to appreciate that the ordinary American is by no means a barren

realist, or merely a lover of material prosperity. The largest material enterprises, in which Americans have succeeded, have constantly been inspired by decidedly large ideals, frequently by fantastic ideals. The tendency to which Father van Becelaere makes several references:—the modern tendency of the American man of wealth to give large sums to educational and other public endowments, is a symptom of a type of national idealism, which has probably nowhere else been so richly developed. The individual giver may be indeed in some cases a sordid person, but the public opinion, and the social tradition which make it so attractive for him to give, are due to the influence of a widespread idealizing tendency present amongst the American people. In brief, by the development of new sects and religions, by the practical efficacy of large social and political ideals, by the prominence given to educational plans, even when these plans have stood for very imperfect stages of intellectual evolution, and by the way in which even the pursuit of wealth, and the material conflict with natural forces, have been moulded by interests in far-off and often in fantastic ideals:—by all these things the American has shown, that quite apart from philosophy, quite apart from recent tendencies and quite apart from the better influences of his higher cultivation, the American is a good deal of an idealist. The offense with which some of his more unsympathetic foreign critics early and not always unjustly charged him:—namely, the offense of idle and unfounded boasting, has frequently been but a symptom of this national idealism in its uncultivated form. The prominence of ethical motives in American literature and in the national civilization has been emphasized by Father van Becelaere, and is characteristic of the cruder as well as of the more cultivated regions of the country, of the lower as well as of the higher forms of our intellectual life. In brief, as appears also from Father van Becelaere's account, American idealism is not a new and foreign feature grafted on to the life of the country by the Transcendentalists, or by their most recent successors amongst technical philosophers. On the contrary, idealism goes, side by side with interest in material prosperity, throughout the whole of our national life, is present and prominent in all the phases of our civilization, appears amongst us in evil as well as in good forms, and is responsible for very much in our national life besides philosophy. It is true that, as Pro-

fessor Creighton has said, and as Father van Becelaere has agreed (page 5 of this book), the philosophical tendencies of America, like those of England, have been profoundly influenced by practical motives, so that theoretical thinking, the pursuit of insight for its own sake, has had a harder struggle amongst us to obtain its due recognition than has been the case amongst some other peoples. But Father van Becelaere would be the first to maintain that practical motives are by no means identical with realistic interests, or with interests in conflict with material nature. The decided prevalence of religious interests, Father van Becelaere has recognized as characteristic of our whole national tendency in philosophy. In sum: The most natural characterization of American thought, as it has developed in various schools, in various grades of culture, and in various stages of our history, would be:—Religious Idealism, tempered by a strongly individualistic tendency, and in recent times greatly modified, as Father van Becelaere rightly says, by the influence of foreign study, and by the general tendencies present in the recent thought of the world.

The individualism which Father van Becelaere so well recognizes as characteristic of much of our thinking, is, as he is aware, by no means confined to the technical philosophers. It showed itself at an early stage of our national life in that strong tendency towards the differentiation of sects which I have already several times mentioned. It has been, of course, prominent in our politics. In various forms it determines the social life of our most notable communities. The Southern planter, in his day, exemplified one form of it; the New England farmer, another; the New England parson, from whom the later Transcendentalists descended, still another. The Western trapper, explorer, emigrant; the California pioneer gold-seeker,—these are yet other instances of the results of American individualism. Individualism, of course, does not necessarily imply originality. It may mean merely personal indifference to one's actual relations to and dependence upon social guidance, tradition, or history. The individualist may be commonplace enough as to the matter of his belief, or as to the routine of his life. What makes him an individualist is the formal characteristic that he declines to regard himself as a mere member of his social group. And so also amongst our students of philosophy. Whether



amateurs or professional students, whether crude enthusiasts, or founders of sects, or students of foreign literature, or genuine scholars, they have been disposed, like very many of the rest of their countrymen, to cultivate individuality. They have not necessarily been originators of new opinions. They have simply been indisposed to call themselves disciples. And all this, as Father van Becelaere has well recognized, is with us a national trait. It has, of course, close connection, not only with a certain vigor of national character, but also with the absence of certain social traditions.

I hope that this trait will long remain characteristic of our life and of our thought. The hardest task that the scholastic philosophy, if it comes to be more widely taught in our country, will have to face, in endeavoring to make itself clear to American students, will be dependent upon the scholastic tendency to use the method of appeal to authority—a tendency which has been so characteristic of the teaching of scholastic doctors in the past, and which is so foreign to our own national spirit. If American philosophers were ever, in great numbers, to become, for the time, disciples of St. Thomas, they would, if they remained true to their national spirit, soon transform what they had learned into a hundred shapes whose common origin would ere long be hard to trace, and whose relation to the master would in the main be that of cheerful hostility, or at best of respectful disposition to alter his views to meet new problems. In America we who love philosophy may readily admit that truth is eternal; but we are certain to insist that the problems and the formulations of our own age are and must be new. Truth we may accept, but authority never, except as a temporary expedient, or as a transition to a stage in which we shall have thought out the truth in our own way.

That all this is perfectly consistent with an openness to foreign influence, Father van Becelaere has well recognized. This openness to foreign influence is indeed a necessary complement to our individualism, and may help to preserve the latter from crudity, or at all events to enable it gradually to outgrow its crudities. Much as I hope for the permanence of the individualistic spirit amongst us, quite as much do I hope, that we shall always be wisely open to foreign influences, and wisely sensitive to the calm and thoughtful criticism of foreign observers. And that is why I hope that observers whose

opinions are so different from those now prevalent amongst us as are some of the opinions of Father van Becelaere, will be induced to take more and more interest in our work, and more and more frequent counsel with us. Agreement in opinion is not the goal of philosophy. That insight should more abound: this is the main purpose of philosophical inquiry. Insight, however, as it occurs in individual human beings, inevitably implies variety. The proper check to this variety is mutual understanding. And mutual understanding is worth most when it takes place between those who have decidedly various points of view. Herein lies one of the highest values of such undertakings as that of the present book.

As to the far-off future of our American thought, as to whether we shall ever unite Orient and Occident in some higher synthesis, or shall ever produce thought comparable in its significance with that of Greece, I, for my part, think little about such matters. I feel confident that if we look about widely enough, accept enough influences from foreign sources, and still keep true to our individualism and to our national idealism, we shall accomplish something worth doing, and something that the world beyond our borders will be able to use for its own purposes. As I do not believe that the future will tend towards a unity of creed, still I all the more believe that the future will tend towards a unity of spirit amongst people of various creeds, in the common service of truth. And when the truth looks for servants, I believe that she will always find many efficient ones in the America of the future. More than that it is hard to be certain that any nation will furnish.

I thank our author for his careful study, and wish his work careful attention, as well as future supplement from his own hand.<sup>1</sup>

JOSIAH ROYCE.

<sup>1</sup>Indépendamment du grand honneur qu'il veut bien lui faire, par la peine qu'il a prise de lui écrire la présente "Introduction", l'auteur croit devoir encore formuler l'expression de ses meilleurs remerciements au Professeur Royce pour la bienveillante sincérité des remarques qu'elle contient. Sans parler de l'intérêt qu'elle présente par elle-même, nos lecteurs y trouveront sans doute un complément d'information que l'auteur ne peut plus à son grand regret mettre à profit pour la présente édition, mais auquel il saura faire la justice qui lui est due si la faveur du public lettré lui permet une seconde édition.

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