L’enigma della mente; il “mind-body problem” nel pensiero contemporaneo by Sergio Moravia

Remo Bodei
capitalism was no doubt doomed, he reasoned, the logical course of action was to encourage its eclipse by the more "progressive" fascist regimes and thus accelerate the movement of western nations toward an expected convergence with the USSR in bureaucratic collectivism; for the latter, in spite of its inequalities, was clearly the more efficient form of social organization and therefore more likely to lead to socialism. Although this line of thought was perhaps less disagreeable to Rizzi (who shared with the fascists a deeply seated anti-Semitism) than it was to many others, it should be noted that such opinions were by no means unheard of on the Left in the era of the Hitler-Stalin pact; the most appropriate example in this context is James Burnham’s *The Managerial Revolution* (1941), a book often thought to have been influenced by *La Bureaucratization du Monde*. Nevertheless, Rizzi soon repudiated his support of fascism, leaving his political allegiances in a state of uncertainty.

Certainly the complexities of European history in the thirties are easier to grasp in retrospect than they were at the time; however, one need not have any great insight into the period to recognize what even a novice rhetorician can identify as a pair of false alternatives—aggravated by a commitment to oversimplified teleological thinking on both sides—in the difference of opinion between Trotsky and Rizzi. Although it is clear that Rizzi’s willingness to break with orthodox dogma was justified and prescient, his grasp of twentieth-century history has proven to be no surer than anyone else’s; and the relative crudeness of his analysis does not repay close attention. It is, however, revealing to look into how his book has been received over the years, as Adam Westoby does in his superb introduction to *The Bureaucratization of the World*, and in particular to examine the interest in Rizzi evinced by such latter-day “Buddhists” as Daniel Bell and Bettino Craxi, whose shamelessly expropriating preface adorns the most recent Italian edition. It is here, rather than in the confused intricacies of Rizzi’s own politics or the direct influence his obscure tract might have had, that one encounters the most pressing political legacy of what Westoby correctly identifies as an interesting but ultimately minor piece of sociological folklore.

GARY HENTZI
Baruch College/CUNY

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By Sergio Moravia

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Merleau-Ponty once remarked, with his usual concise effectiveness, that a smile is not a simple muscular contraction. It is that also, obviously, otherwise no smile would be possible. But could it be that it is something else? something more?

Framed in this fashion, the question triggers a conceptual trap. The contraction of the muscles is taken as the real, true base, and the smile is understood as an extra which may or may not be there. Without realizing it, we have fallen into a double metaphysic: we have monism if we consider the smile the direct expression of the muscular contraction, and we have dualism if we consider it something else. Despite the fact that monism can take on different forms, such as physicalism or (a more or less popular) materialism, the end result is the same: the emphasis is on the primacy of the visible, or that which can be empirically or “scientifically” demonstrated. Against monism there stands, as its pendant or reactive formation, spiritualistic dualism with its emphasis on the primacy of the invisible and the inevitable concomitant notion
of a soul imprisoned within the body. There have been several attempts made at resolving the problem of dualism, beginning with Descartes' pineal gland and through Malebranche and occasionalism, down to this century's much debated "mind-body problem." However, all these efforts tend to betray an unspoken desire for conciliation, and yet they do not seem to address the more fundamental question of the origin of the initial scission, the presupposed separation between the corporeal and the psychological dimensions.

But what if the smile, the assumed "something else," were not an extra, but "something else," a different way of looking, the gateway to another field of phenomena? This is precisely what Sergio Moravia suggests and argues for in his book, guided by deep insight and backed by a vast knowledge of the literature on the subject. Moravia cuts this Gordian knot of the world, this Weltknoten, by means of a "rational reconstruction" of the fifty years the issue of the mind-body problem has been debated, starting with the Feigl of 1934 and the Australian school of Smart and Armstrong, right through our leading contemporary representatives, such as Putnam, Davidson, Grene, Kim, Nagel, Rorty, to Margolis's refined thesis of embodiment, covering in short the entire field of contemporary Anglo-American philosophy.

Addressing the recent turn toward physicalism, which many tend to underestimate, Moravia demonstrates that materialism and spiritualism are complementary, and that moreover physicalism should be not only corrected or refined but also resisted, as should be resisted the correlative theory of the homo duplex. In sketching what he perceives as a crisis in Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy, Moravia states that his position is "neo-historicism" or "hermeneutic." He proceeds to give evidence of the concreteness of contents (institutions, cultures, systems of norms) which organize and structure subjectivity, with reference to those aspects of the practical and the pragmatic which in different guise have also been given relevance by Rorty, Margolis, and others. Yet what is striking about L'enigma della mente is the radicality of Moravia's gesture to shift the ground of investigation, removing from the mind-body problem that fastidious trait which made Charles Taylor say it is high time we bury the question altogether. Working from within the intertwined parameters of theoretical analysis and historical research, this gesture discloses new fields to investigate and yields an entire series of items ready to be elaborated and organized. Moravia shows the centrality of the concept of person as a public knot of relations even as he leaves open the question of its unity [unitarieta] (understood as Fodor's modularity of mind, or as the modular me of symbolic interactionists such as Goffman, Berger and Lasch). This concept of the person could in fact become a new locus for a reexamination of the deeper kinships between various currents that operate fundamentally "within" the Analytic School, as well as for the possibility of a "rational hermeneutics," which may disclose untrodden fields for research and thought or perhaps reopen old issues (for instance, the theory-praxis knot).

The pars destruens of the book is excellent: tightly argued, rich in its network of references, and never far from its central theme. It is a conceptual machine we have before us, very complex and with lots of tiny cogs and springs, yet potentially capable of marking a turn in this field of study not only in Italy, where this tradition occupies a small portion of the philosophical spectrum, but also in the Anglo-Saxon world, where Moravia's approach may unravel several important theoretical knots. I cannot say I agree with everything Moravia submits to the reader (for instance, his em-
phasis on the notion of “human” when arguing with the physicalists), but disagreements are also what go into the making of a book that deserves to be read and discussed.

REMO BODEI
Università di Pisa

Omaggio a Sesto Properzio
By Ezra Pound
Ed. and trans. by Massimo Bacigalupo
Genoa: Edizioni S. Marco dei Giustinianni, 1984

Massimo Bacigalupo, author of The Formed Trace: The Later Poetry of Ezra Pound (L’ultimo Pound, winner of the Viareggio Prize for nonfiction in 1982), has turned his attention to Pound’s earlier work. His edition of Homage to Sextus Propertius contains the English text and first Italian translation, an historical and critical introduction, an annotated selection of letters and criticism (1916-1979), explanatory notes, and a list of textual variants (not easily come by elsewhere).

The introduction focuses on the linguistic relations between Pound’s text and the Propertian original, tactfully characterized as an “ambiguous fidelity.” Bacigalupo helpfully places the poem within the context of Pound’s career. Composed in 1917-18, it is a transitional work that combines the Imagist and Vorticist virtues (image as “radiant node”; “planes of relation”) of Lustra (1916) while announcing the more variable dramatic tone, narrative juxtaposition, and visionary historical spaciousness of the Urcantos and The Cantos, already under way. But if Pound “presses the organ pedal” in Homage, he knows how to back off his rhetoric “with a grimace,” a tribute to his “vigilance” or aesthetic tact. In this sense Pound loses his sense of proportion—and worse—from time to time in The Cantos.

Bacigalupo succeeds admirably in conveying the contrary moods, voices, and qualities that critics have found in Homage: its “technical expertise” (Blackmur), “sensuousness” (Fraser), and “wit” (Dekker); “an ideal of civilized intelligence” (Perkins); its deliberate “translatorese” (Davie) of a “scolaretto” (Bacigalupo); its “polyvalence,” “contrasting styles,” the “reduction of elegiac and mythological elements in Latin culture to commonplace, joke, cliché,” the “elegant brio” that unifies the tone of the sequence (D’Agostino)—one could reconstruct High Modernist poetics on the basis of this “per-version” (Ruthven) of Propertius. Chiefly Bacigalupo aims for directness and clarity, sometimes achieving his end with an almost word-for-word translation:

I shall have, doubtless, a boom after my funeral
Seeing that long standing increases all things regardless of quality.

Avrà di sicuro un boom a funerali fatti,
Visto che l’antichità accresce tutto indipendentemente dalla qualità.

(23-25)

Bacigalupo does not overplay his hand: “Out-weariers of Apollo” (10) becomes simply “Gli estenuatori di Apollo.” In its ninetyish way Pound’s “veiled flood of Acheron” impresses with its dark foreboding, the linguistic equivalent of Sibelius’ Swan of Tuonela. Bacigalupo’s “flutti velati” serves well, even if it cannot catch the archaism of “flood.” Elsewhere he translates “flood” by “La piena” in “The flood shall move toward the fountain/Ere