PHILOSOPHY RENDERED USEFUL

LARRY A. HICKMAN: John Dewey's Pragmatic Technology, Bloomington and Indiana-polis: Indiana University Press, 1990, xv + 234 pp.

Yes, right you are. Here is the very Larry Hickman — at once dizzily intelligent, touchingly sanguine, and seismographically responsive — we have known from his both short and animating visit to Bratislava. Exactly the Larry Hickman who, not so long ago, benefited members of the Slovak Philosophic Association (ameliorated by esoteric knowledge-seekers) by having addressed them with his perfectly postmodern „technological" creed — if „the post-modern" in philosophy is taken to denote the habit of thought eschewing, undermining and, finally, abandoning modernism's —
— paeans to reason, authority, hierarchy, and „eternal" values
— belief in existence of sort of fail-proof *philosophia perennis* wedded to
   notions of one ultimate truth, a final solution, and a final signified
— commitment to binary thinking, determinism and necessity
— preoccupation with the universal and essential
— predilection for authoritarianism and elitism
— cult for the object
— practice of egyptifying outdated, as often as not unwarranted, dogmas
— indulgence in the moods of despair and exhaustion as well as in comforts
   of „cause-and-effect" thinking on whose face one can still play with the
   idea nightingales abstain from their night nip for the only reason not to
   miss the chance of charming his/her ear by their sweet songs.

Yes, here is Larry A. Hickman, Professor of Philosophy and Humanities at Texas University, the author of *Modern Theories of Higher Level Predicates* and the editor of *Philosophy, Technology, and Human Affairs,* with his recent remarkably illuminating and knowledgeable *John Dewey's Pragmatic Techno-logy,* for one thing, to remedy a considerable omission of Dewey's studies in this country (the last Dewey in Czech was published as early as 1946, in Slovak in 1968), for another, to bring home to continental readers Dewey's unchallengeable relevance to the postmodern culture and his invaluable servi-ces to the latter (alongside Wittgenstein and Heidegger) in terms of shattering modernism's sterile notions and sounding out its long-dead idols which for too long a time have been forcing into the procrustean bed of preconceived order a reality that is much more inderteminate, plural, fragmented, contin-gent, complicated, and interesting, for that matter. Now John Dewey's philo-sophy of technology, notably his instrumentalism, that is L. Hickman's major concern in the monograph (available on the shelves of Department of Philo-sophy library, Comenius University, with the author's dedication, too) is no less than one of the plausible exits out of the ossified logocentric apparatus of Western culture of modernism which seems to be largely responsible for the latter's incommensurability with other cultures as well as for dwarfing man's meaning-bestowal activity, hence robbing man's being-in-the-world of its par excellence human significance.

L. Hickman's marvellous retracing through Dewey's pragmatic technology is organized into seven chapters mounted in *Editor's Forward* by Don Ihde, the author's *Introduction,* and *Epilogue.* Given the density of significance and challenge harboured in Dewey's instrumentalism — boldly refined and taken further by Larry Hickman, too — mine is not intended as book-review claiming to accomodate the wealth of author's govering tenets. It is just to launch a dialogue, to invite — or challenge, if you please, those more equipped for the task that they should join the author in his critique of technology.

What follows is the menu to choose from.

Entitled *Locating Dewey's Critique of Technology,* Chapter One bespeaks its concern. Antifoundationalism in treatment of actually each and every traditional issue of metaphysics led Dewey to radical reassesment of commonly shared conceptions and terms. No wonder, then, that thus arrived at results would defy pigeon-holing into existing taxonomies, which is exactly the case of Dewey's instrumentalism. What renders unique his critique of technology, argues L. Hickman, is the contention „that tools or instruments cut across traditional boundary lines such as those between the psychical and the physical, the inner and the outer, and the real and the ideal" (p. xii).

Technology as addressed by Dewey is more meaningfully defined against the backdrop of his „Copernican" revolution in modernism's epistemology. Contrary to traditional doctrines of knowing, Dewey's theory of inquiry is not preocuppied with the latter's traditional candidates for such a certainty, be it Plato's perfect eternal forms or Hegel's Absolute Spirit. Stripped of all mysteries and prejudices, inquiry for Dewey is no occult internal operation whatever, but coming to terms with continually changing situations for which suitable tools are designed (theories, proposition, hypotheses, and, say, recommended methods enjoying the same status as „material" instruments). Knowing is taken as outcome of inquiry (cf. the title of Chapter Two: *Knowing as a Technological Artifact).* What distinguishes it from the traditionally understood result of knowing is, for one thing, its location (it is no longer situated inside the cortex or the like) and, for another, its degree of finality (it is no longer a final certainty or ultimate truth, but a technological instrument to gain control of a problematic situation).

Consistent with the above argumentation, then, would be one of the multiple definitions of technology in Dewey as „the appropriate transformation of a problematic situation, undertaken by means of the instrumentalities of inquiry, whatever form those instrumentalities may take" (p. 45).

In the ensuing tree chapters *(Productive Skills in the Arts, From Techne to Technology,* and *Theory, Practice, and Production).* L. Hickman examines Dewey's treatment of aesthetics as apart of his critique of technology (a dainty dish for art theoretists and critics!), his account of the history of the philosophy of technology, and the inversion Dewey performed in Aristotles' hierarchy of ways of knowing — accordingly. Describing science as a kind of productive technology, Dewey powerfully argued that one the major obstacles on the way to a consequential inquiry is the recourse to no longer needed tools, among which belong „the principle of cause and effect" and „the principle of necessity". In his analysis of this issue, „Dewey undertook a massive undercutting of received views", contends the author. „His radical proposal is that cause and effect are not ontological categories, but logical and instru-

mental ones. The two notions represent abstractions from a whole fact; they are phases of it that are logically abstracted from it. They are not distinct entities in the existential or ontological sense" (p. 122).

In Chapter 6 *(Instruments, History, and Human Freedom)*, L. Hickman seeks to pay tribute to Dewey's contribution to the issues of technological determinism. In the author's opinion, Dewey succeeded due to placing the problem into a broader public framework. e. g., „choice may be obstructed or facilitated not only by natural exigencies, but also by laws, economic systems, technical constraints, and other human artifacts" (p. 156).

Finis coronat opus. The last chapter *(Publics as Products)*, providing a glimpse into Dewey's social and public philosophy, gives way to *Epilogue* which brings the monograph to an exciting climax, i. e. Larry Hickman's „responsible technology" a sort of the postmodern categorical imperative designed by him, whose major implication consists in being ready to accept responsibility for the consequences of one's own actions and being responsive to the communities in which we live. Of the three great philosophers of the twentieth century, whose intellectual breakthroughs prepared the demise of modernism contends the author, only Dewey rose up to the principle — owing to his concern with public and social philosophy, philosophy of education, and schemes of practical social amelioration. „Responsible philosophy", „responsible philosopher", „philosophy turned into action", „praxis-oriented philosophy" ... All these are embraced in L. Hickman's noble metaphor as philosophy's possibilities to become relevant to human quotidian life and expand its human meaning.

Philosophy as a technological tool applicable to ever changing situations of human society cannot afford to be *philosophia perennis* otherwise it may well go useless — is one of the lessons to be learnt from J. Dewey's (and L. Hickman's) pragmatic technology.

Here, then, is Professor Larry A. Hickman — with his brilliant piece of pragmatic studies and his invitation to the philosophy of technology.

Emma Nežinská

ÚVAHY O NÁRODE

E. POLAKOVIC: Pensando la nación (Úvahy o národe). Buenos Aires 1986, 199 s.

V poslednom období sa na stránkach našej dennej tlače, v masovokomunikačných prostriedkoch, ale aj v bežných rozhovoroch medzi ľuďmi často skloňujú slová ako národ, národné cítenie, národná suverenita, národná identita, ba nezriedka sa oháňajú aj takými pojmami ako nacionalizmus, šovinizmus a pod. Používame tieto výrazy vždy adekvátne a jednoznačne? Označujeme veci pravým menom? Dvojzmyselnosť a nepresnosť v používaní uvedených výrazov môže v súčasnosti spôsobiť vážne škody, preto ich hlbšie poznanie a pochopenie je nevyhnutným predpokladom praktického riešenia národných otázok. V tomto smere je významným príspevkom aj monografia, ktorá vyšla v roku 1986 v Buenos Aires pod názvom *Úvahy o národe (Pensando la nación)*. Jej autorovi, Štefanovi Polakovičovi, je táto téma obzvlášť blízka. Ako slovenský emigrant, dlhodobo žijúci v Argentíne, chápe nielen racionálne, ale takpovediac aj existenčne, čo pre človeka znamená národné cítenie, „potreba pa-