

EIFI Seminar Series 2020: AFFECTIVITY, COGNITION, HUMAN SOUL

Third Seminar: **Affectivity and Cognition with María Zambrano**

Barcelona, 12 December 2020

REPORT

At the opening of the seminar, Raúl Fornet-Betancourt emphasised that he was very pleased that EIFI had been able to win Professor Juana Sánchez-Gey for this lecture. For to speak of María Zambrano means to engage with the meaning of the spiritual experience from which the Spanish philosopher's writings emerge, and not just to quote her texts from memory. And this is precisely what distinguishes Juana's conversation with María Zambrano.

Guest speaker Juana Sánchez-Gey expressed her gratitude for the opportunity to share something about María Zambrano and began her presentation with some biographical references describing the cultural atmosphere (an era of pedagogical missions in Spain) and intellectual and artistic influences that shaped the author (vitalism; proximity to philosophers such as José Ortega y Gasset, Manuel García Morente, Xavier Zubiri, José Gaos, to the 1927 generation; friendship with outstanding poets, painters, etc.).

Before moving on to the main part of her talk, Juana recounted an event from 1934 to illustrate the original originality of María Zambrano's thinking: When Ortega had read an essay by his pupil on the subject of "knowledge of the soul", he had her called into his study, where he received her standing up and shouted to her: Why do you go beyond that? In a first reaction, María Zambrano ran out crying... But Ortega's question was not so much a rebuke or a complaint, but rather a genuine recognition of the novelty of her thinking, which was not limited to the vitalist model, but went beyond it.

Along this line, Juana spoke about three moments of María Zambrano's central approach: poetic reason. Drawing on the metaphor of the mandarin or orange, she compared the different dimensions of her compatriot's thinking to columns that start from a single pivot point, and which, in the manner of the familiar Aristotelian notion (being has different ways of expressing itself), represent alternative ways of relating to this notion as their living centre. Thus, poetic reason takes on different names depending on the subject: mediating reason when talking about education; merciful reason when talking about religion; and fear of God when talking about one's relationship to others, and so on.

First, in the first point of the presentation, poetic reason is interpreted from the search of the heart, the most significant word being innermost, especially since there is a simultaneity of reason and poetry in order to renew understanding and arrive at a further, more open reason that seeks the primordial, healing, which refers back with reminiscences along ontic lines to Pythagoras, Plato, St. Augustine; but now here poetic reason not only strives for truth, but it encounters it in the poetic (in poiesis, in creative action, in the bringing forth of new worlds, of a new truth), where the logos is both reason and intuition.

The second way of understanding poetic reason is from transcendence, especially as the poet-philosopher experiences himself sustained, possessed, looked upon by someone who looks upon him mercifully; and this moves him to seek the Other in his otherness, not in order to be loved, but in order to love him with feelings of godliness (and this consists in the ability to treat the Other/the Other appropriately). Thus man is a cosmic Other-seeking the transparent, the transcendent in his worldly roots.

In the third and last point, poetic reason was then characterised from the aesthetic, where the logos is transformed into a transforming word. In her work *Why does one write?* María

Zambrano answers this question by saying that one writes to escape loneliness, especially since as a human being one is in a kind of isolation that can be communicated. Because it is possible to create community through the word; a word that liberates from the situation and rescues us from boredom. This is achieved in hope, in sharing bread with others, in a concretely lived and radical metaphysics, wherein an ethical reason gives us support, which does not seek dominance, but which makes us people who humiliate no one, who oppress no one ...

In the course of this presentation, Juana mentioned various works by the author, among others: *Horizontes del liberalismo* (1930); *El hombre y lo divino* (1930), Eng. *Man and the Divine* (2005); *La agonía de Europa* (1945), Eng. *The Decay of Europe* (2004); *Claros del bosque* (1977), Eng. *Forest Glades* (1986), etc.

At the end of her presentation, Juana took part in an exchange that included various questions about María Zambrano: Relationship with Xavier Zubiri (whose student she was); position towards feminist thought (where María Zambrano took a stand from her feminine identity); her links with the mystical tradition, with John of the Cross as one of her points of reference; the origin of poetic reason, which moves towards the search for the innermost, for liberation from dualisms and encounter with the fullness that finds the soul, the heart, mercy, love as the root of all thought; its topicality when it claims the concept of the soul (in contrast to European philosophy, whose centre is the subject), and when it enters into dialogue with constructivism and neuro-constructivism, for example; the theme of desire, with the suggestion of its educational shaping (so that it does not turn into possessiveness), and of the practice of a detached desire capable of facing the experience of uprootedness; democracy, which Maria Zambrano considers the best political system to do justice to the human person; exile as an ontological situation: Maria Zambrano knew how to live exile creatively, combining it with the strong rootedness that was nourished by relationships with friends in the countries where she lived in each case, and in doing so she experienced the revelation of transcendence at the moment when she needed it most (so that she felt sustained by what she lacked most in the metaphysics of the exile she had to live for many years); the tragic, a situation that confronted Maria Zambrano with the source of hope (unlike Unanimo, who was lost in the tragic); education, thinking of the human person as an inalienable mystery, and the need for a philosophy of education that should renew authentic paideia and see the teacher as a mediator before whom the student can voice his questions, but before whom he can also ask himself the meaning of his existence and his vocation.

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