

QUESTION: What are you trying to do?  
Answer: I am not merely trying—I'm doing it—and I have done it.

Q: Are you then, presenting the finished product, the final result of your philosophy?

A: In philosophy, there are no such things as finished products or final results—they are as nothing apart from the activity of thinking, which is forever beginning anew; and unless they are re-born in other minds, they are dead stuff, gathering dust on library shelves.

Q: Are you not contradicting yourself?

A: Yes, I am this living contradiction—and so are you.

Q: Why?

A: Because you ask real questions, and expect true answers. Questions make no sense without answers, and answers make

and woman makes man. They are mutual partners in a dialectical whole—the family.

Q: Have you other examples?

A: If you will look at the table of contents, you will find quite a list.

Q: I am looking—and it looks rather bewildering to me. Is there any order in this?

A: If you mean by "order" a gradual progression from a more simple to a more complex knowledge—as in mathematics, empirical object sciences, or in language studies—then there is no order. Since reality is equally present in all points, you may start reading anywhere.

Q: If there is no order, then how shall I find my way around?

A: I did not say that there is no order. There is an order of complementary contraries where one value is known by what it is not, as for example, art is not science—and you have to keep all those related differences in mind—and there is also the order of contradictories where one value maintains itself by overcoming its negation—as for example, in the struggle of truth against error, evil against good.

Q: Where and how did you find your opposites?

A: I found them in myself as well as in the history of metaphysics.

Q: What is metaphysics?

A: As I use the term, metaphysics means whatever man has found to be ultimately real and important to his existence. . . .

Q: . . . And if I find money to be ultimately real and important to myself? . . .

A: . . . Then acquiring money is the practice of your metaphysics—the chapter on the Essence of History deals with many such obsessions—but in the history of metaphysics, the problems of nature, of history, and the whole of reality, encompassing both have been the perennial and major metaphysical concerns of man; they are also called "world," "soul," and "the Absolute," or "God." The book is arranged in this order—but every one of these themes is also contained in the two others.

Q: Is this the meaning of your sub-title: A Dialectical Ontology?

A: Yes. Being is the unity of all opposites, the Coincidentia Oppositorum as Nicolaus Cusanos called it. The word "ontology" is derived from the Greek word for "Being." Philosophy thinks that which is. My metaphysics, you see, is an ontological affirmation of many equally important aspects of the One Being, a multi-universe.

Q: Why do you philosophers always use Greek and Latin words?

A: What would you think of a Christian theologian who would avoid the

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# INTERPLAY

## A PREFACE

no sense if they do not answer questions, and what was supposed to be an answer, may become a starting point of a new question. Thus, we grow and mature in a living process of overcoming our former self in a wider or expanding self. We are this dialectical movement of a never-ending beginning.

Q: So this is what you mean by interplay of opposites? Why do you call it an interplay?

A: I like aesthetic terms—philosophy, like art, thinks the concreteness of life—a cosmic dance in which sometimes one, sometimes another partner comes closer—or a play in which director, actor, and audience together enact the whole show. The chapter on Language and Imagination deals with this analogy of philosophy and art, but if you prefer, I could also speak of "reciprocity" or "mutuality" of opposites.

Q: Explain.

A: I am what I am by not being you, and you are what you are by not being me—and so, together, we are engaged in the same situation; think of husband and wife as another example: man makes woman,

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Bible? They are our sources—well-springs of wisdom.

Q: Is there anything that is not dialectical?

A: Certainly. Dialectic itself eternally is—it has no opposite outside of itself.

Q: Are you joking?

A: An absolutely certain uncertainty. But seriously speaking—as you would understand the term “seriousness”—everything can be thought undialectically—simply isolate it and keep it in a neat little box—in a cute “ism”—as you see, the table of contents teems with such undialectical “isms.” All special-isms melt in the loving embrace of dialectic. They all meet their doom as well as their resurrection. They all are cancelled as well as preserved. It is the necessary function of abstraction to fix and isolate; it is a necessary function because without it, dialectical wholes would not become articulate.

Take for example, a mathematical law as if it were real, apart from the infinite irrationality of qualitative events which it is supposed to measure: If you forget this radical inequality of the measured contents, then you can be quite safe with your exact equations; or, if you abstractly think a moral law apart from the evil to which it is opposed—and by being opposed to it defines it as evil—then you have perfectly lovely undialectical goodness in your heart.

Q: Are you sarcastic?

A: I'm merely “trying”—to be true to life is always “trial.”

Q: Can one learn to think dialectically—as one can learn a science?

A: You can not avoid dialectic if you will pay respectful attention to what the “schools” of philosophy say with reference to one another—or if you simply are honest with yourself. Dialectic is a developed self-knowledge.

Q: How long does it take to read your book?

A: Just a few hours.

Q: Are you serious?

A: As serious as a physicist who measures time by split-seconds; or as serious as a busy executive who is so bored with what he has to read, that he has acquired the art of reading diagonally.

Q: Are you hinting that there is any other than scientific time?

A: Why don't you look into the first chapter on This Temporal World—and you will find out—but take an easy chair and a bottle of old wine—to sip. . . .

Q: Are there pre-requisites for understanding your book? You consider it advanced, don't you?

A: The more advanced, the more heartfelt—think of artists. There are no “pre-requisites” in philosophy—except having a mind for it. I have seen unwarped minds without training understand perfectly and I've also seen warped minds with a lot of training understand nothing at all. Everywhere and in everything, there are levels of understanding which must be understood in turn.

Q: You are not writing for experts then?

A: I'm writing for you. If I were writing for experts, in their very own privileged jargon, then no pundit would ask me: “For whom do you write?” Philosophy is for Everyman—according to his level.

Q: What good would I get out of it?

A: No less than you put into it. But that is merely starting. . . .

Q: Starting toward what?

A: Starting towards finding balance in movement, harmony in conflict, truth in errors, peace in troubles . . . God in creation.

Q: This sounds mysterious—almost religious—but I do not believe much in what is not factual and useful, or scientific—philosophy can not make atom bombs.

A: No, philosophy is not that glamorous. But this belief of yours is of course a belief in a metaphysical dogma—you see, you have a metaphysics whether you know it or not—but there is no dogma that is not questionable—and if you will find the answer to this question: What is the value of the “Factual,” “Scientific”? then you will have become contemporary.

Q: Do you expect many followers? Is dialectic American?

A: Ask a pragmatist that. Since we are involved in dialectic anyway, the question is not one of “following,” but of self-knowledge—without which we would have no philosophical voice to proclaim our dynamic multiplicity and its unity to the world.

## A VETERAN PHILOSOPHER HAS COMPLETED HIS TWENTY-SIXTH BOOK



GUSTAV E. MUELLER

Dr. Gustave E. Mueller, research professor of philosophy at O. U., probably is one of the best-known living philosophers. A native of Switzerland, he was educated there and in Germany, England and Italy before working as a Swiss foreign correspondent in London in 1924. The following year he came to America. Five years later he began teaching at the University of Oklahoma.

In his nearly three decades of teaching, Mueller figures he has instructed some 4,500 O. U. students, but his 26 books (14 of them written in German) have spread his ideas around the world. His most familiar works in English include *Education Limited*, *Discourses on Religion*, and *Dialectic*. Volume one of his *Hegel: The Man, His Vision and Work* soon will be published in Bern, Switzerland.

*Interplay of Opposites*, of which the preceding article is the introduction, was issued in 1956. Mueller considers the intro-

duction to have special meaning because it (1) explains his approach to his subject, and (2) it is made up of actual questions asked him through the years by University students and faculty.

“*Interplay of Opposites* is not what Dr. Mueller . . . calls a ‘one-sided metaphysics such as materialism or spiritualism, empiricism or rationalism,’” wrote reviewer Henderson Leake. “Its roomy metaphysics assumes that the Absolute is composed of all ‘real worlds of experience’; and any ‘real’ is complete only when both its positive and negative phases are present . . .

“The book is characterized by the universality or omnipresence of Dialectic in many concrete illustrations, and its modern point of view.

“Mueller’s thought is not dependent upon thoughts of other great thinkers, but firmly anchored to them. *Interplay of Opposites* must be considered a valuable contribution to the literature of philosophy.”