

others, that Vico's design was carried through with perfect orthodoxy and considerable success. The point is noted here, though I lack space to prove it, because it is not admitted by the present translators. Their own view, that Vico's philosophy was 'eminently secular if not heretical' (p. 45) they state without proof and without mentioning the commemorative volume published by the University of the Sacred Heart (Milan, 1925), in which it is faced and, very probably, refuted.

Of course Vico was not a scholastic; he was quite unaffected by St Thomas. Given the circumstances of his life he could not help being a free-lance; even if he had wished to follow a 'school' there was no vital scholasticism for him to follow. His lovely and original mind was stimulated, in metaphysics, chiefly by Plato; but confused by a restless mental fertility he found it desperately hard to bring his thought into order. The writing of his masterpiece was the term of a life-long intellectual travail endured in poverty and largely in solitude. Yet if Vico was a great *autodidactus*, he was unlike many self-taught men in being at once self-critical and profoundly social (at least in his thinking). In deliberate opposition to Descartes he took as his starting-point, not the mind's self-perception but universal human nature, or the human race 'making itself' through history and thus representing on earth an idea of God. He begins with society, not with the self; with Law, not with the *cogito*. And Law for him was the reflection of Providence. It is characteristic that he dismisses a certain ethical system as 'suitable only for those who live in solitude'.

No doubt Flint is right: 'Vico was not a great metaphysician'. He tried to set up his own theory of knowledge against Descartes', but his true genius lay in the field of human institutions and fabrications, in a sympathetic understanding of the genesis of art and poetry. His famous metaphysical intuition, *verum esse ipsum factum* ('the known is what the knower makes') probably calls for keener minds than his to rescue it from the idealists who claim him as Kant's precursor.

It is good to see this *animo ingenuo* becoming better known; he is personally so admirable. Less a man of the world, less quick-witted, less *musical* than Dante, he reminds one a little of the poet; and the resemblance extends even to their ideas. It is a pity that his present translators are not more sympathetic to Vico's religion. They have spared no pains, however, over the translation; it can be trusted.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

RE-READING THE DIVINE COMEDY. By E. R. Vincent. Annual Italian Lecture of the British Academy, 1945. (Cumberlege; 2s. 6d)

One sentence of this lecture is memorable; the rest never quite comes to life. The sentence I mean contains this: 'Wherever Dante treats directly of love in any of its manifestations . . . we have the impression of a bright light beside which the colourless respectability of many worthy commentators seems as inappropriate as the sensual mysticism of D. G. Rosetti'. A 'bright light'; yes, that is good.

But the rest is disappointing. Professor Vincent is concerned to state the 'actual interest' of the Divine Comedy, and he finds this in a rather vaguely conceived ethico-political doctrine which he is at pains to distinguish from the poetry 'as art for its own sake' and from the 'theology' of the poem. This doctrine, he thinks, is what Dante was chiefly concerned to convey to the ordinary unlearned *lettor* for whom he wrote and what a similar reader can get from him today. The emphasis on the ordinary reader is valid; the Dantean idea of art is well stated; the tough scientific realism of the poet's vision is pointed out, as well as his strong emphasis on human individuality, an emphasis rightly linked with the part played by free will in Dante's moral theory. Yet I cannot feel that Professor Vincent has entered far enough into Dante's mind, has learnt to give Dante's terms anything like the full meaning they bear in his work. Impossible to demonstrate this here; enough to say that Dante's notions of truth and virtue, drawn from the *philosophia perennis*, are, as he conceives them, in vital continuity with that philosophy, just as his glorious language is vitally continuous with his glorious intelligence. Once this is realised it seems almost meaningless to speak of 'truth' as 'still shining through the discarded scaffolding of his logic', of 'virtue' as 'still intact behind his scholasticism'. Perhaps the trouble with this, as with so many interpretations of Dante, is that it pays too little attention to what he thought about God. It is easy to say that 'The Divine Comedy . . . is the record of Dante's understanding of man'; the wiser reader will pay particular attention to his (less obvious) statements about God.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

POLITICAL ETHICS

STATES AND MORALS. By T. D. Weldon (John Murray; 9s.)

ELECTION AND REPRESENTATION. By James Hogan. (Cork University Press; 15s.)

Mr T. D. Weldon's book contains a useful review of the different types of states to be found among civilized human beings. He divides these states into the organic and the machine state, the former being, roughly speaking, totalitarian in principle, the latter democratic. This nomenclature is a little startling, but as Mr Weldon has fully explained his use of these terms, one cannot quarrel with him for that. His analysis of the relations between community and individual in the two types of state is excellent and he is mainly concerned with elucidating the moral basis of this problem. But when he begins to speak of morals he is in immediate trouble, for he is unable to find any valid definition of human nature or any metaphysical basis for morals. In order to simplify his thesis he denies the name of morals to ordinary human intercourse and confines it almost exclusively to the rights and wrongs of a man's relationship to his state. Having absolved himself from the necessity of finding a system of morals which will cover all the actions of a man's life, and after making a brief reference to the 'As If' theory of moral behaviour, he proceeds