

## R E V I E W S

GOD, MAN AND THE ABSOLUTE. By F. H. Cleobury, Ph.D. (Hutchinson; 15s.)

Absolute idealism was not itself a very reasonable doctrine, and most of us feel no regrets that it has ceased to be a fashionable one. Hence it is with an unfavourable prejudice that we tend to open a book which professes to be 'a reconsideration and defence of the outmoded Oxford Idealism'. All the more, therefore, should it be emphasised that Dr Cleobury's volume is a genuine piece of philosophical thinking and does not deserve to be ignored.

Some other stumbling blocks may be mentioned at once. The author states that his theological point of view is that of 'liberal Christianity'. This seems to mean, in practice, only that he seeks a purely philosophical religion and is not much interested in specifically Christian doctrines. There is a final chapter on 'Christian theism and the philosophy of the Absolute', but it deals only with the goodness of God, sin and immortality. While it is regrettable, for the writer's sake, that he should not be responsive to the specifically Christian, it is nevertheless possible to appreciate his philosophical contribution without being disturbed by his theological deficiencies. The book is composed in long unbroken chapters which offer no assistance to the eye in distinguishing the stages of the argument, but the style is, on the whole, clear and concise.

Dr Cleobury writes as a philosopher should, with an awareness of the context of his thought and a determination to face all the difficulties. Thus we see him gradually modifying his initial idealist position until it becomes much nearer to other philosophical systems and more recognisably like a view of the real world in which we live. That is, perhaps, where the central interest of the book resides. It begins with the customary idealist declaration of intention to use a logic which is strictly neither inductive nor deductive but one of coherence. If only experience is real, it is said, coherence must replace correspondence as the criterion of truth. But, since experienced fact is more real than just fact, reality must ultimately take the form of experience.

To this it may be observed that the proof that only mind is real cannot itself depend upon a logic of coherence; hence, even if everything else could be worked out in terms of such a logic, this would still be a departmental and not completely universal logic. As for the proof, it is indeed a valid argument that Absolute Being must take the form of mind, but it is not an argument that nothing else can exist. And, although everything that exists must be known by the Absolute or God, there may still be facts which are in themselves just facts and not centres of consciousness. While a logic of coherence may be, so to say, a divine logic, it is not an adequate logic for a finite mind in contact with other finite minds and with material things.

At this point Dr Cleobury would, no doubt, refer us to his second

chapter on 'finite separateness and absolute unity'. This has the merit of making the logical foundations of absolute idealism unusually clear, although the mistakes in them are not, of course, acknowledged to be such. It is rightly stated that existence, even when it is a grammatical predicate, cannot be a logical predicate; it is a logical subject and, indeed, the ultimate logical subject. With this is closely connected the apprehension of the essentially individual character of existence, but the objectionable further step taken by the absolute idealist is to assert that existence or reality can ultimately be only one individual thing. This, once again, coheres with the confusion between abstract and concrete identity. Similarity can, of course, be described as identity in difference, but the absolute idealists, here following a tendency which goes back to Plato, want to say that it is a partial concrete identity, so that the red of the pillar-box is really the same as the red of the penny stamp. In this way absolute reality becomes the systematic unity of universal concepts predicated of and experienced by a single individual existence; finite minds and the objects of experience become partial appearances of this unique reality. In answer we must object that abstract similarity is wholly irreducible to partial concrete identity. The identity is an identity for thought; the facts are such that they present a partial and abstract identity to the mind, but in themselves they are concretely different. Existence is not a single individual but a field of individuality in which different individual existents manifest different combinations of abstractable characters.

When speaking of finite minds and objects, however, Dr Cleobury shows so lively an awareness of the difficulties in his theory and makes so many concessions that we should not look upon him as an irreconcilable adversary. Similarly, he holds out against Bradley that there can be 'appearance', in the absolute idealist sense of the word, without error. He is resolute that philosophy should do justice to the conviction that our voluntary decisions could have been other than they were; even if his analysis of this question is not altogether satisfactory, it must be confessed that answers based up a more adequate metaphysic are not without obscurity. All these detailed discussions of his may be followed with profit by one who does not share his fundamental presuppositions, for a desire to meet the facts is a point of contact among all genuine philosophers, and it is instructive to observe what effects the logic of facts has upon a thinker of a different school.

In the end we are inclined to ask Dr Cleobury whether his discussions of detail, and the concessions to which they have led him, have left his presuppositions unscathed. No metaphysic dissipates all obscurities, but might not a different metaphysic have given him less difficulties to overcome? Could he not have exercised his philosophical acumen more fruitfully in a setting which was not ostensibly pantheistic? Whatever his reaction to this suggestion may be, we can sincerely greet the expression of an honest and persistent piece of philosophical thinking.

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