

TRUTH IN THE CONTEMPORARY CRISIS. Vol. XVIII. Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association : 1942. (Washington; \$2.00).

In this symposium a valiant attempt is made to face the problems raised by a philosophical discussion of the nature of Truth and its relevance to the present crisis. No doubt the discussion is uneven, but there is nevertheless much closely reasoned argumentation.

The dominant note of the papers is an impassioned protest against the 'pragmatism' underlying Goethe's dictum: 'In the beginning was action,' which is taken as typical of the 'modern' viewpoint. Dr. von Hildebrand, for instance, in his paper on 'The Dethronement of Truth' points out that for many thinkers Truth as the supreme judge has been upset by 'purely subjective measures'; and he contends that Nazism, with its 'right is what is useful to the German people,' is the final fruit of pragmatic relativism. Be that as it may, he certainly reaches the heart of the problem from a philosophic point of view when he contrasts the traditional metaphysics of the 'philosophia perennis' with the outlook associated with Kant's Copernican revolution. For since Kant, as has been well said, the centre of philosophic interest has passed from the notion of substance to that of subject; and it is the task of the modern 'scholastic' to inaugurate a more strict metaphysical analysis of the latter notion. to explore the relations between modern epistemological theory and the philosophy of being, and, above all, to give an ontological framework to the concept, or experience, of 'person.'

These, as yet largely unexplored, fields of discussion underly most of the papers, but they rarely come to the surface. The important point is that the problems are, at least implicitly, brought home to the reader.

Perhaps the most valuable paper is that of L. J. Eslick on 'The Current Conception of Truth.' In it a contrast is made between American pragmatism and the Aristotelian-Thomistic theory of truth developed in the 'context of the major doctrines of being, substance, causal efficacy, essence, abstraction and intelligible matter.' Here again we are led back to the major problem. Is there a real adequation between the mind and the objective thing, a conformity of being and intellect, or are intelligibility and order purely mental impositions on an unknown 'x' or categories having no relation to the extramental. One of the focal points of any discussion of this problem is, as Dr. Eslick points out, that raised by the notion of abstraction, and one could take the following quotation as the starting point of a more extensive analysis of this problem. 'Abstractions are not empty . . . they are really derived from the actual world, they give us truth about that world. . . . It is a relative truth only in the sense that it is relative to the real world, as derived by abstraction from it, and as having proper existence only in the abstracting human mind.' Might we, however, suggest that more emphasis

should be placed on the creative action of the mind in understanding—its making of the object intelligible.

Lest it should be thought that the contributors to the symposium are rationalists of the deepest dye, attention should be paid to R. J. McCaul's paper on 'Truth and Propaganda,' with its plea for the development of the practically-practical sciences in a living context involving social prudence, and J. W. Stafford's paper on 'The Psychology of Bias and Prejudice.' This paper treats of questions too long ignored by Catholic writers, and some of the so-called traditional conflicts within the scholastic fold might well be re-examined in the light of knowledge concerning stereotypes built up upon prejudiced judgments or of the pathological major premise involved in pre-existing attitudes. Why, for instance, do Dominicans and Jesuits fall so neatly into opposing camps on certain questions?

Throughout the whole symposium there is a real current of philosophic wonder, and the desire to relate their principles to the flux of the hour is everywhere evident. The American Catholic Philosophers are no mere theorists *bombinantes in vacuo* in an abstract world of their own invention, but as true metaphysicians they are not afraid of diving down into the real.

Might we suggest, however, that more careful treatment should have been given to what St. Thomas calls knowledge by connaturality, and that certain obscurities might have been avoided if more explicit attention had been paid to St. Thomas' first question in the *De Veritate*?

IAN HISLOP, O.P.

THE FREE WILL CONTROVERSY. By M. Davidson, D.Sc., F.R.A.S.
(Watts; 7s. 6d.)

This book purports to give an outline history of the teaching of the outstanding theological and philosophical systems of western civilisation on the question of the freedom of the will. The first chapter, 'Babylonian Astrology,' and the last two, 'The Problem in the Light of Recent Development in Physics' betray the sure touch of an expert dealing with his own subject. The rest of the book describes the teaching of Jewish and Christian theology and of the philosophies of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Hume, Kant, Mill and Haeckel on the same question.

Writing of Prof. Ernst Haeckel, Dr. Davidson expresses his opinion that this great philosopher 'would have been well advised if it had been suggested that his writings should have been confined to the realm of Biology. When he has made incursions into other departments he has sometimes betrayed an arrogant spirit and a lack of good taste, and some of his critics have been equally unfortunate in their examination of his views.' Lest I be judged 'equally unfortunate' in proffering his own advice to Dr. Davidson, let me acknowledge that the learned author, though like to