

REVIEWS

SLAVERY AND FREEDOM. By Nicolas Berdyaev. (Geoffrey Bles, 25s.).

Berdyaev first appeared before the English public as a social thinker aware of the Christian depth of social problems. Yet as a peculiarly embarrassing thinker. Classed by theologians as a social, by sociologists as a religious writer, admired by both in the sphere which was not their competence, suspected by both in the sphere which was, he went his own way in the field of letters towards (the words are from the present book) 'a personalist transvaluation of values.'

It is a big thing to claim, even in principle and as a goal, this transvaluation of value. The phrase is Nietzsche's who, precisely as a philosopher, is brilliant in promise but rather banal in achievement. The principle of Berdyaev's transvaluation is expressed (p. 249): 'The fundamental antithesis is not between spirit and matter, but between freedom and slavery.' And he concludes his preface with the words 'This is a philosophical book and it presupposes spiritual reform.'

To understand, as Berdyaev gives his readers to understand, that he knows what he is doing in applying to the very foundation of metaphysics the criterion of spiritual freedom certainly takes one's breath away. 'The supremacy of being over freedom, the supremacy of being over spirit is always a philosophical presupposition,' he says (p. 79), and again (p. 80) 'The being of ontology is a naturalistically conceived being, it is nature, it is substance, but not an entity, not personality, not spirit, not freedom. The hierarchy of being from God down to a beetle is a crushing order of things and abstractions. It is crushing and enslaving and there is no room for personality in it either as an ideal order or as a real order. Personality is outside all being. Everything personal, truly existential and effectively real has no general expression; its principle is dissimilarity.'

If *being* is something which stands in opposition to personality and to existence as a supreme category of generalisation and of similarity, then Berdyaev is fully justified in attacking it as an enslavement of the mind to a mere technique of logic. The same is true if 'esse' is the mere positing of 'ens' (and that is a pitfall to the overconfident in the Thomist tradition). But if we understand aright the subordination of 'ens' to 'esse,' and if we thus have behind us not the aberration but the truth of the metaphysical tradition, then it becomes quite evident that the 'being' Berdyaev is fighting against is only an Aunt Sally, an effigy for throwing at.

The fountain head of slavery in man is objectivization, he says (p. 179). This is another and similar overstatement of which the

upshot is to create another Aunt Sally. 'Objectivization,' though the word occurs frequently throughout the book and always with opprobrium, is never defined with sufficient precision to enable one to say 'this precisely is what is meant.' Perhaps to say precisely what is meant is hardly the object of the book. Perhaps it was a mistake from the beginning to call it a book of philosophy. As philosophy it cancels itself out. It is a book of spiritual revolt.

For Berdyaev the universe exists within personality and not personality within the universe. Every subordination of personality to 'nature,' to 'law,' to universal order, is denounced as enslavement. The freedom which is inherent in personality transcends and surpasses every form of necessity. Thus 'God can act only upon freedom, in freedom and through freedom. He does not act upon necessity, in necessity and through necessity. He does not act in the laws of nature or in the laws of the state.' And this is so because necessity, nature, the state belong to the external realm of objectivization and 'Everything which is objectivized and is objective is from the deepest point of view, illusory.'

Modern philosophy is like a man who has jumped out of his skin and cannot either get back in or grow another quickly and completely enough to cover his sensitiveness. At the moment he is very angry with the skin he has jumped out of. In the circumstances it is hardly helpful to read a philosophical defence of skin wearing against the detractors of skins, and it would be hardly serious to defend Christian metaphysics against every exponent of existential philosophy who chooses to attack it. It is more pertinent and more serious to ask what is the significance of a point of view like that of Berdyaev.

In the first place Berdyaev has diagnosed a 'treason of the clerks,' whether or no he has stated it intelligibly for his overstatements prove nothing by seeming to prove too much. The identification of being (*esse*) with the state of being a thing (*res*); the conception of existence in terms of things rather than of things in terms of existence, with a consequent cut and dried petrefaction of the whole metaphysical field, has occurred in places more hallowed than Oxford or Paris and more central to the heart of Christendom.

In the second place Berdyaev typifies the condition of the present day 'intellectual' in his estrangement from his own physical nature and from the practical world of every day life. For what is called 'objectivization' belongs pre-eminently to the common mental processes by which we sustain our practical life from day to day. Berdyaev has spiritual depth. His brilliant intuitions move at a level accessible to very few men now writing. But he has no physical depth. His spiritual parentage may reach back to the Gnostics by way of the white citadel of Provence but not, not certainly, to the psalms or to the pastoral prophets of the Old Testament.

Thus he makes the modernist and Manichean dissociation of sexual

union from childbearing, and seeks to establish for it an independent meaning by arguments which render sexual union, precisely as such, irrelevant. The attempt to attain in terms of spiritual experience a new form of transcendent sexuality is a mark of the new Albigentianism as it was of the old, and it is a further point of significance to note how many of the traits of Albigentianism are being resumed under the aegis of existential philosophy. Of this nature is Berdyaev's dualism, expressed in terms rendered almost inevitable by the problems of the existential philosophy itself.

The philosophical presupposition of unity, of hierarchy, of system and order he denounces as an enslaving presumption of the mind. Of the merely systematizing trend in philosophy his denunciation may be just. But even philosophy has a deeper source of unity in the spirit of wisdom in which all things are kin. Berdyaev's dualism is ultimately a rejection of this spirit.

BERNARD KELLY.

LIBERTY VERSUS EQUALITY. By Muriel Jaeger. (Nelson; 3s.)

We are witnessing in the world to-day a practical demonstration that the principles of the French Revolution are somehow incompatible. The Liberty of the Revolution was that of J. S. Mill, freedom to do what you like provided only it did not harm anyone else. Equality was just as negative an ideal. However much it was a protest against the snobbishness and degradation of the order it had supplanted, in spirit it was a collective envy, a resentment against superiority.

One of the chapters of this book which is full of interesting detail shows the Russian attempt to solve the difficulty by saving Equality at the expense of Liberty. Contrasted with this is the attempt of the New Zealand Labour Government of 1936, since this experiment was made on the old British lines of individual enterprise with democracy and all the civil liberties—a moderate reduction of Liberty for a somewhat closer approximation to Equality.

Liberty and Equality are only incompatible ideals when these terms are defined inadequately. Mill's definition of Liberty is simply a definition of Liberty of choice to the exclusion of Liberty of Spontaneity, whereas this first kind of liberty is only given to enable us to achieve the second. Civil Liberty is but a poor thing if it is merely Liberty of choice. Similarly, an arithmetical idea of Equality must give way to an Equality of proportion, which is the Equality achieved by distributive justice. In a footnote, the author remarks that a discussion on freedom would involve metaphysical implications outside the range of her book. But as long as metaphysics remain outside the range of any book on Liberty, there will be confusion worse confounded.

DANIEL WOOLGAR, O.P.