

explicit teaching it lays bare a preoccupation with certain practical problems encountered in actual living, and the poet's immense effort to clarify his personal attitude towards the three 'authorities' which under God and for God's sake claimed and won his passionate loyalty: Aristotle (that is, Philosophy, and principally Ethics); the Emperor (that is, Politics); and the Pope (that is, Catholic Christianity). Three mutually corrective, but also mutually exclusive authorities whose inter-relation, in Dante's mind, involves precisely no subordination of any one of them, in its own sphere, to either of the others. Only God may command in the domain proper to each; and only in God are they all reconciled. This is less a philosopher's or theologian's 'system' than the 'map of life' of an intellectual warrior intent upon knowing exactly where he stands. He borrows, of course, and with immense gratitude, from 'good brother Thomas', but his position is simply his own. It might indeed be more exact to speak of Dante's 'position' than of his 'philosophy'; and certainly 'position' is the better word for what M. Gilson has tried to define. Hence it is misleading to alter his original title, *Dante et la Philosophie*, to 'Dante the Philosopher'. In fact M. Gilson hardly touches two main conceptions in the poet's 'philosophy': the contrast between creation and secondary causality, and the human mind's innate tendency to transcend the limits of the sensible world. The latter point is particularly delicate and is perhaps a little blurred by M. Gilson's emphasis on an aspect that stands in contrast to it; an emphasis required, however, by this admirable book's entire thesis.

The translation is sometimes inexact or at least insensitive. And nine times (on pp. 68, 92, 108, 146, 164, 166, 167, 188 and 242) it seems to me definitely wrong.

KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

THE MODERN APPROACH TO DESCARTES' PROBLEM. The Herbert Spencer Lecture in the University of Oxford, 1948. By Sir Edmund Whittaker, F.R.S. (Nelson, 1948; 1s. 6d.)

This lecture sketches, with Sir Edmund Whittaker's usual clarity and felicity of expression an outline of the relation of the mathematical and physical sciences to philosophy as seen by a mathematician. The hopes and ideals of Descartes, Leibnitz and Whitehead for the eventual mathematicisation of philosophy are related, the author maintaining the optimism of those thinkers while giving some indication of their lack of success. 'The situation today is not dissimilar to that which confronted Descartes; on the one hand there is philosophy, lacking unanimity, and dissociated from the growth of positive knowledge; and on the other hand there is a vigorous group of physical and mathematical sciences, bringing forth new triumphs continually.' This fact taken in connection with the immense advances made in 'mathematical' logic during the last hundred years might well provoke an inquiry into the grounds of these ideals. The most significant statement on this score in

the lecture is: 'the postulates on which *Principia Mathematica* is founded may perhaps invite further investigation from the metaphysical standpoint'. From that point of view it is not unlikely that Russell and Whitehead's work will eventually be seen to be an ontology rather than a logic, and so an unlooked-for verification of the traditional scholastic thesis that the foundations of the sciences can only be securely laid by metaphysics. Experience and reason alike show that 'as Descartes himself realised in later life, to attain his universal scientific philosophy without borrowing any data from empirical sources was inherently impossible'; it follows that either mathematics is irreducible to logic or that it cannot take the dominant place in philosophy which is here claimed for it. The half-dozen pages in which it is attempted 'to build up a rational framework into which we can fit our experience of the inanimate external world; and as its foundation a doctrine of space' contain some interesting suggestions but presuppose a vast amount of metaphysics which could not possibly be described as mathematical.

Ivo THOMAS, O.P.

EXISTENTIALISM. By Paul Foulquié. (Dennis Dobson; 7s. 6d.)

'Existentialism has brought into clear relief those ideas which are not, after all, although rather forgotten, anything but facts of common-sense.'

'But the assimilation of what is true in existentialism can only be done by a long process of reflection, of a kind that can only be disturbed by public debates and tub-thumping. Therefore it is desirable, for authentic existentialism, that the sudden fashion into which it has risen should pass.'

Perhaps the above quotation is the most valuable contribution to studies on existentialism that has been made for some time; equally praiseworthy is M. Foulquié's calling attention to the thought of Lavelle, the successor of Bergson and Leroy at the College de France. Otherwise the book contains nothing that is new, not even the statement that 'as a matter of fact St Thomas has not completely eliminated all traces of Augustinism' (sic!).

DONALD NICHOLL

MEDIEVAL MAN AND HIS NOTIONS. By Frederick Harrison. (John Murray; 7s. 6d.)

This little book provides a fascinating 'lucky-dip' for the general reader intelligently interested in the past; but its author is perhaps over-bold in claiming, as he does, that it will furnish him with 'a clear-cut picture' of medieval man, his way of life, ideas and beliefs. As a scholar of Canon Harrison's own cloth has written: 'The spirit of the Middle Ages is impatient of capture, insusceptible of analysis, though many have essayed the task'. This collection of illustrations, drawn at random from a wide range of sources spread over a period of some seven centuries, can hardly be