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THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

LE PROBLEME DU MAL D'APRES SAINT AUGUSTIN. By Régis Jolivet. (Beauchesne; 12 frs.)

This is a reprint of the author's contribution to the *Archives de Philosophie* for 1929, and as that publication is not readily accessible, indeed out of print by now, the reprint is welcome. Readers of the *Confessions* know how St. Augustine describes his preoccupation with the question of the nature and origin of evil. But many, failing to realize that that immortal treatise was written some thirteen years after his conversion, are apt to think that the Saint was speaking of a mental conflict which he only then experienced. Yet it is no exaggeration to say that the problem dominated his philosophical and his theological thought throughout his life and that his solution of it serves as the key to Augustinianism and Thomism. Philosophically it cut at the roots of Manichæanism, theologically at the roots of Pelagianism. "What," he asks, "is 'evil'?" And he answers "*privatio boni*" (*Enchiridion*, xi, 3), just as he insists that "there is no sorrow where there is no life." But then what is its origin? Is it from God? Yet how can corruption—for that is what evil really is—come from the Incorruptible? "Do not go and say: 'God would not make corruptible natures!' For inasmuch as they are 'natures' God made them; but in so far as they are corruptible it was not God who made them." This sounds dreadful! But Augustine goes on to explain: "When you hear talk of 'nature' refer that to God; when you hear talk of 'corruption' refer that to the 'nothing' (whence it came and whither it is tending), yet always with this proviso that while the said 'corruptions' do not proceed from God the Artificer they yet come under His directing power for the harmony of the universe and the merits of souls" (*Contra Epistolam Manichæi*).

We cannot here deal with the whole question of St. Augustine's attitude on the subject, but a conspectus of the problems he had to face may be of use. To begin with, he never shows any hesitation regarding the nature and origin of evil and sin. In his earliest works, *De Libero Arbitrio* and *De Diversis ad Simplicianum*, as well as in his latest, *Contra Julianum, Opus imperfectum*, on which he was occupied when death overtook him, he is clear and decided. One difference there is, however. In his earlier works he writes as a philosopher combating the Manichæans and dealing with evil in the physical world; in his later he is the theologian

fighting against Pelagianism and therefore dealing with sin, moral evil. Physical evil is "non-natural," is "corruption" "*privatio boni debiti*"; it is not a "substance" and Augustine is much amused at the Manichæan who said that no one who had been bitten by a scorpion would question that that evil was something substantial! But the real problem lies in the moral order. What is "sin" and whence comes it? Only the free will can cause it. But whence came the first bad will? Augustine's answer is intriguing: "*defectus potius fuit quidam ab opere Dei ad sua opera, quam opus ullum*" (*De Civitate Dei*, XIV, xi, 1). Is God then responsible for our sins—for He created us and He could have made us incapable of sinning? Augustine is content to answer: "Simply because He so willed it!" (*De Continentia*, 16). And when the Pelagians retorted that that was unjust he answers as he had done to the Manichæans: "*vitiorum nostrorum non est auctor Deus, sed tamen ordinator est,*" and he gives the quaint illustration: "when we sing we make pauses at certain definite brief intervals, and though such pauses may be styled real 'privations of voice' (just as evil is always '*privatio boni*'), yet they are duly arranged for by people who know how to sing, and they do add a certain sweetness to the whole melody" (*De Genesi ad litteram, Liber imperfectus*, 25).

At this point, however, Augustine has to face the gravest difficulty of all. For while he insists on the fundamental inequality of all things in nature, pointing out that life is full of things we like and things we do not like—"Who," he asks, "would not prefer to have food in the house and no mice, plenty of money and no fleas?"—yet all these things make for the beauty of the Universe. It is the same with sin and sinners: God "uses" the misdeeds of the latter. Naturally enough the Pelagians retorted: "Then you are making sin and evil a necessary part of the Universe!—and in so doing you are destroying freedom!" But this the Saint repudiates with emphasis: "Man is so constituted that his capacity for sinning has its roots in a necessity, and his actual sin is due to that capacity. But that capacity he would not have were he of one nature with God. Yet even that fact does not make him sin; he was only able to sin because made out of nothing" (*Contra Julianum, opus imperfectum*, v, 60). In other words we are by the very fact of our creation out of nothing "defectible"—not defective—natures, or as Augustine expresses it when arguing with Fortunatus the Manichee: "He who made us can in no sense be corruptible, while the things He made can in no sense be equal to Him who made them" (*Contra Fortunatum*, i, 12).

To return to Dr. Jolivet's volume. It has two outstanding qualities: clarity and—on the whole—brevity. Further, it has.

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the great merit of giving us the Latin text in footnotes. But the references leave much to be desired; they are often incomplete, and it seems a pity to refer to the Benedictine edition of 1836 and not to *Migne* which is so much more accessible. In the Appendix, pp. 131-162, will be found a study of St. Augustine's debt to Plotinus.¹ This is peculiarly interesting as showing how completely St. Augustine had succeeded in shaking off his Platonic ideas, becoming more and more Aristotelian year by year, a fact too often lost sight of. Only an Aristotelian could write "*moveri pati est; movere facere.*" Indeed so marked a feature of his thought did this become that Julian dubbed him "Aristoteles Poenus" and "Poenus disputator," sneers which did not sound well on the lips of one who himself boasted of his "Aristotelian dialectics."

HUGH POPE, O.P.

GOD AND THE MODERN MIND. By Hubert S. Box, B.D., Ph.D.
(S.P.C.K.; 10/-)

"I am not so presumptuous," writes Dr. Box in his *Preface*, "as to maintain that Thomism alone possesses the truth and that all other philosophies are wholly false. Such an assertion would indeed be both intolerantly and intolerably arrogant. As Cardinal Mercier said, '*Nous ne sommes pas seuls en possession de la vérité, et la vérité que nous possédons n'est pas la vérité entière.*' We need to bear in mind Professor Taylor's warning that 'too much Neo-Scholastic writing tends to be mere denunciation, and denunciation never "refutes" anyone'. . . . There have always been those who are so stubbornly conservative of what is past that they relentlessly oppose whatever is modern. It is just this anti-modern attitude of the palæo-scholastics that has evoked the unfriendliness of many contemporary thinkers towards Thomism." To find these words at the opening of a book by a Thomist augurs well indeed for the sequel. The anti-modern attitude is more than bad manners or bad policy: it is bad Thomism. And one cannot but express one's gratitude that this profound study of the relation of the Thomist theodicy to that of modern and contemporary thinkers should thus explicitly uphold the central Thomist principle of synthesis.

True, when this has been said one is tempted to go on to suggest that it might have received yet fuller practical expression than it has. The wealth of quotations from modern thinkers shows indeed only too clearly how radically divergent are their views from those of St. Thomas; yet often, one feels, disagreement, however violent, with conclusions does not preclude hope of some measure

¹ See on this point a most interesting article in the *Journal of Theological Studies* for January of this year by Paul Henry, S.J.