

REVIEWS

CHRISTIAN ETHICS. By Dietrich von Hildebrand. (Thames and Hudson; 35s.)

Professor Hildebrand's treatise is a considerable contribution to the literature of moral philosophy available in English, even if it has to be admitted that the English reads very much like a not particularly adequate translation from the German. However, the reader's constant awareness of the German origins and antecedents of the work has its relevance; it will help to remind him that the work, in spite of all Professor Hildebrand's independence of mind, does derive from a tradition of speculation which may be called phenomenological, and which Professor Hildebrand himself, together with Max Scheler, helped to form in the 'twenties and 'thirties in Germany.

The speculative effort of this tradition may be described, in terms which are foreign to it but nearer to those current in English philosophy, as an attempt consistently to employ an object-language in the analysis of experience. Where, as is the case with the present work, it is moral experience which is being analysed, the primitive term (or, if it is preferred, intuition) is *value*: moral experience is conceived of primarily as a subjective relation to a value-object. This basic conception of the nature of moral experience has its advantages as well as, inevitably, its disadvantages. Its chief advantage is that it permits of an unembarrassed wholeness of response to, a focussing upon, those illuminations and epiphanies which do in fact enter constitutively into our moral growth, but which escape notice unless attention is explicitly directed to them. The importance of Professor Hildebrand's book is that it does direct an explicit and sensitive attention to these moral illuminations; and in the moral barrenness of current English moral philosophy (shown most clearly perhaps in the triviality of the examples used as illustrations), it is a genuine enlargement of the mind to follow a philosophical discussion in which moral growth and worth are treated seriously and delicately. Again, it is this basic conception which makes it possible for Professor Hildebrand to write, without at least manifest self-contradiction, a *Christian Ethics* which is not a moral theology; for the qualification is intended merely as a means of adding Christian 'value-objects' (such as those seen in the life of a saint) to those available from other, non-Christian sources (such as those revealed in the Socratic dialogues).

But this last point must raise a question in the reader's mind, which is not, I think, fully answered by Professor Hildebrand; indeed, it is

difficult to see how, granted his basic conception, it ever could be. To speak of 'moral blindness', as he does in this connection, is surely itself to insist once more upon a subject-object relationship which may be proper to sense-perception but hardly to the apprehension of value. Value is no more (and no less) 'objective' than it is 'subjective'. It is properly speaking *transcendental*, i.e. manifest in a subject-object relationship but not itself the object in this relationship, whether, as in metaphysical goodness, this relationship is the universal *complacentia* of God's will in all that is; or, as in moral goodness, it is the consent of the human will to an intelligible situation which includes as an essential constituent the agent himself, orientated by his very spontaneity towards beatitude.

It is impossible in the course of these brief remarks to do more than hint at the abundance contained in this book of four hundred and seventy pages, and to suggest profitable lines of discussion. Whatever other reserves one may wish to make, it may at least be said without qualification that Professor Hildebrand's treatise is, by reason of its scope and depth, the most important work of its kind available to the English reader who has not explicitly rejected Christian and human values.

CORNELIUS ERNST, O.P.

NATURAL RELIGION AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY. By Victor Murray. (Nisbet; 14s.)

One way of bridging the gulf between religion and psychology is to make psychology itself a religion. It would be ungenerous to say that this is what Professor Murray consciously sets out to do. But it is difficult to avoid this kind of pan-religionism (or, if you prefer, mystical pan-psychologism), when it is taken for granted that 'despite the etymological derivation of the word . . . theology is a human science concerned with people, with what they have said or felt or concluded or recorded'. And it is even easier when one is reacting strongly against a theology that teaches the total depravity of human nature and justification by extrinsic imputation. The author acknowledges his indebtedness to Jung's psychology, but Catholic Jungians will wish that Professor Murray had adopted Freud or Adler. Dr Jung is made to appear more 'religious' than ever, and a chapter on the strength and weakness of Jung as an exponent of Christianity upbraids him for his concept of 'psychological truth' and his disinterest (*qua* psychologist he deserves to be praised for this) in the objective criteria of religious dogma. For one who professes to be influenced by Jungian psychology, it is surprising that Professor Murray had not found the time to catch up in his reading with *God and the Unconscious*.