

Reviews

THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF SAINT AUGUSTINE, by Etienne Gilson; translated by L. E. Lynch; Gollancz; 42s.

St Augustine's 'philosophy' is Christian in quite a radical sense. He lived in an age when our concepts of 'philosophy' and 'theology' had not yet been distinguished; this had indeed scarcely been accomplished until almost the time of St Thomas. For Augustine, as for his contemporaries, 'philosophy' meant the love and pursuit of wisdom. After his conversion to Christianity, Augustine came to think of faith in the Word of God as the indispensable beginning of this quest. Faith opened the way for man to pursue the truth, and without it there could be no true philosophy. Faith, though itself a mere blind beginning, was thought of as the necessary setting and condition of the growth of understanding in the mind. Philosophy had no home outside the realm of faith.

M. Gilson's *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustine*, of which the second (1943) edition is now offered us in an English translation, was not, of course, intended to serve as an introduction to all aspects of the study of Saint Augustine. It was, as the title of the English version suggests, an introduction to those themes of his reflection which, to us, in retrospect, would appear to belong most to the realm of 'philosophy' as understood in modern times. M. Gilson's magisterial exposition of these themes has been an essential aid to any student of Augustine's thought. For Augustine's own presentation of his reflection is, in sharp contrast to the medieval *summae*, wholly unsystematic. Much of it is shaped by the immediate needs of controversy, or by the form of the biblical commentary, not to mention the multifarious demands of his correspondents and congregations; his thinking and writing are cast in the moulds of the late antique literary and oratorical traditions; and above all, they bear the stamp of his own intellectual and spiritual struggles. To distil from so complex a body of writings a coherent account of a 'philosophy' and to present this with the clarity and scholarship of M. Gilson's study is a very considerable achievement. The publishers have rendered a signal service in placing it at the disposal of an English-reading public, and doing so at a very reasonable price.

The translation is prefaced by a slightly querulous foreword in which M. Gilson defends the value of studying St Augustine; a defence one would have thought scarcely necessary even on the far side of the Atlantic. The English translation reads well, and where I have compared it with the original, seems accurate. The bibliography has been brought up-to-date, but this gain is off-set by the abolition of the original division by topics. The notes have been relegated to the end of the book; they are essential to an intelligent reading of the work, and the book is hardly likely to be read by anyone who might be put off by

footnotes. The publishers' irresponsibility in placing them at the end (in a section which, adding insult to injury, they entitle 'Appendix') makes the use of the book very much more difficult than it need be. If many English readers will prefer to use the book in the original French, the blame will not lie with the translator.

R. A. MARKUS

THOUGHT, GOD, AND THE COMMON MAN, by Philip Villiers Pistorius; Bowes and Bowes; 25s.

Professor Pistorius of the University of Pretoria has been led by his interest in the irrational factors which affect behaviour to write a work of epistemology dealing especially with the relations between logic and value. His book contains the following philosophical theses which I have stated as far as possible in his own words and followed by references to the pages on which they appear.

The nature of the human mind is best investigated by introspection (19,66). A human being is a volitional animal with a rational apparatus (26); that is to say, he consists of an inner core or unknown x in whom volition is vested (25,68), plus a logical faculty, which includes sense-organs, which is the absolute servant of the unknown x (40,75). The unknown x selects data and chooses values for the logical faculty, which functions purely mechanically (23,25,35). Free will is exercised by means of a causal chain which runs from the unknown x through the logical faculty to the physical organs of behaviour (115). A man's body is part of his environment, not part of himself (75). The logical faculty is 'a mysterious clearing house, where the incorporeal judgment of the volitional subject is translated into physical action' (77).

Knowledge is a process (17). What a man knows may be false (*passim*). We can know only what we can visualize; concepts are mental images (13,86). Logic is an empirical science, conditioned by experience and corrigible by experience; it differs from person to person (*passim*).

Value is a relation between facts and a volitional subject (44). For those who accept religion the highest good is a categorical imperative based on a relation between man and the divine (64). God is a logic-transcending person, a suppositional knower to whom the essence of reality precedes its existence (65,71,118). Though the unknown x is in mediumless contact with God, divine revelation, because exempt from logic, is unprovable and incommunicable; dogma is a 'pseudo-logical knowledge-content masquerading in the guise of logic-transcending universality' resulting from the attempt to visualize the ontological essence of God (98,113). God's existence cannot be proved, but whether He exists or not does not greatly matter, for there is a widespread belief to that effect, and 'the axiological impact of a knowledge-content is not dependent on the ontological reality of that knowledge-content but on the subjective certainty that it is real' (112). The only essential element in the concept of God is the