

BLACKFRIARS

PHILOSOPHY

ART AS EXPERIENCE. By John Dewey. (George Allen & Unwin; 16/-).

Art as Experience is a handsome volume of fourteen chapters, well indexed, finely printed on excellent paper, and decorated with some good photographic reproductions. It had its origin in ten lectures on the Philosophy of Art given at Harvard.

Artists are not usually overinterested in theory and so perhaps Professor Dewey's book will appeal most to those who are looking for something philosophically interesting rather than for a book on Art. It is very interesting to see how well Professor Dewey's ideas on this subject fall into the framework of his Instrumentalism, the conception of knowledge as 'instrumental to the enrichment of immediate experience through the control over action that it exercises.'

For the greater part of the book may be characterized as an attempt to define experience in such a way that a pure experience is an aesthetic or artistic experience; only the last three chapters are explicitly concerned with the importance of this for philosophy, for criticism, and for civilization. An organism is enriched, its vitality heightened, whenever its struggle with its environment is brought to a successful issue, and it is the equilibrium of conflicting energies thus reached, when each has run its course, that constitutes the wholeness of an integral experience. Thus the author is able to maintain that Art is in continuity with everyday life, if the artist is the one who selects and controls so as to build up his experience into integral wholes, with no interest beyond this integrity. Beauty becomes 'the response to that which to reflection is the consummated movement of matter integrated through its inner relations into a single qualitative whole,' and aesthetic perception the perception of the quality of this whole.

The usual aspects, matter, form, object, etc., are distinguished but the theory requires a nuanced conception of them. It is insisted throughout that Art must not be isolated from ordinary life, the organism from its surroundings, nor must mental functions that are continuous be compartmentalized; and Professor Dewey suggests his own description of aesthetic experience as a touchstone for philosophies. Have they any room for it? He considers it the highest achievement of man's intelligence. To this it may be replied that his genetic description or definition of experience seems perfectly coherent with his philosophical position and was to be expected from it; but that it points to an experience which one who has not shared it can only regard in the same way as he would the balbutient utterances of the mystics, as something that earthbound con-

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cepts seem incapable of explaining, and that as an *ultimate* explanation it suffers from the same disabilities as any other attempt to make an evolutionary theory ultimate.

QUENTIN JOHNSTON, O.P.

ASPECTS OF DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM. By H. Levy, John Macmurray, Ralph Fox, R. Page Arnot, J. D. Bernal, E. F. Carritt. (Watts; 5/-)

MARXISM. By J. Middleton Murry, John Macmurray, N. A. Holdaway, G. D. H. Cole. (Chapman & Hall; 5/-)

Dialectical Materialism is probably the most discussed philosophy of the day, though much of its popularity and vitality is due to the fact that its fundamental conception of the unity of thought and action forbids its adherents to regard it as a topic of mere academic discussion. For that reason alone it has its lessons for us. A Thomist may criticize this confusion of the *intellectus speculativus* and *practicus* (without, however, denying the practical social repercussions of *Οεωρία*), but he may devoutly wish that Christians likewise would awaken to the fact that a non-practical, academic Christianity is not Christianity at all.

The 'philosophy of Communism' has not yet received the attention from Catholic thinkers which its popularity demands. These two symposia will be found helpful to the student in search for material for some constructive criticism. Not that either could claim to be representative of the 'orthodox' Marxism of the Moscow Holy Office—the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute. Most of the contributors would seem to be of Mr. Cole's opinion that 'an "orthodox" Marxist may be learned in the Marxian scriptures: the one thing he cannot be is a follower of Karl Marx.' Indeed, the first volume, consisting of lectures delivered to the Society for Cultural Relations, contains contributions which are often highly critical and sometimes antagonistic to Marxism, while the second, a series of lectures given under the auspices of *The Adelphi*, is mostly the work of men who glory in being Marxist 'heretics.'

But both volumes contain, besides criticism, illuminating positive expositions of the implications and applications of Marxist Dialectic. Special mention may be made of Mr. Bernal's general outline and Mr. Holdaway's tightly packed essay on Marxist economics. Professor Macmurray, who contributes to both collections, is, of course, brilliant. His shattering criticism of some features of official Marxism in the first volume aroused more anger than understanding criticism in the subsequent comments of Messrs. Fox and Arnot, though Mr. Carritt, in his interesting lecture, shows up some of its weaknesses. Professor