

BLACKFRIARS

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RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

THE UNFINISHED UNIVERSE. By T. S. Gregory. (Faber & Faber; 8/6.)

The opposition of the Church and the world is an opposition of two concepts of man's nature, and therefore of two concepts of society, of the Universe, of God. Such is Mr. Gregory's argument; and his analyses of humanism and stoicism, Christian belief and syncretism, gnosticism and modernism, and the genesis of the modern theory of toleration all seem to fit the facts with amazing exactitude. He is at his best, perhaps, where he shows that the Hebrew and Catholic doctrine of Providence and the Church holds an explanation of the time sequence and the casual relation of human acts, which Greek doctrine, either in its philosophy or drama, did not and could not give. In one sentence he crystallizes the two viewpoints. "Man does not stand off from life to ask the *reason* why: he stands involved in life and asks the *purpose* why."

Yet, despite the penetration of Mr. Gregory's analyses and the impressive range of his reading, one is not altogether satisfied with his account of Greek thought. He shows—and it is a piece of work worthy of the highest praise—how the doctrine of the self-sufficiency of man, the treatment of religion as an explanation or projection of man's desires, the exaltation of the city state at the expense of tradition, the opposition of the spirit to the body, and the government of all things by Fate, do form a complete picture. But this picture was drawn at the end of the second century with that arch-prig Marcus Aurelius, or, perhaps, more exactly with Julian in the fourth century; and we ask ourselves, was it even implicitly present in Greek thought? One writer here, another there, suggests what later becomes an element of the picture; but might not that element be used to form another picture? Can we, indeed, as Mr. Gregory asserts, identify Greek thought with the "idealistic and magical account of the universe" and Jewish thought with the "realistic and religious account"? Or, at least, can we assume a necessary opposition between the two? Mr. Gregory shows in a magnificent passage that the Council of Chalcedon reconciled Greek thought to itself; therefore Greek thought could not have been so fundamentally opposed to the "realistic and religious." The final picture drawn by those who claimed to be the heirs of Greece, the stoics and pantheists of the third century and the nature-worshippers of the eighteenth

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century, was certainly and fundamentally opposed. But why visit the sins of the children on their fathers?

The Greek "magician" did not err in regarding only a part of reality and consciously putting the rest aside—provided he did not forget the limitation. Like Aristotle he might, indeed, rise to a natural knowledge of God; real, not idealistic, because he stretched out in his study to reality. He cannot be damned by the later philosophers who forgot the limitation and concluded that they knew all there was to know of God. The stoics were heirs of Greece, but so also were Justin and Clement of Alexandria, who remembered the limitation and accepted the Christian revelation.

Moreover, if the "religious" cosmology was preserved in Israel it was preserved by no means pure and perfect. The Pharisees with their tribal interpretation of God's revelation and providence and their obscurantist adherence to custom had become in truth blind leaders of the blind. So the Word was made Flesh not merely to ratify the "religious" view and demand the submission of the "magical." Christ fulfilled the prophecies, and fulfilling made them clear. He destroyed the perversions of divine revelation which the "religious" view had introduced; he also made it possible for the "magical" mind of the Greek to enter directly into his mystical body. He sent his Apostle to the Gentiles to use the altar of the Unknown God as the preparation for announcing his Lordship of all. Greek thought, which grasped the rationality of human nature and therefore strove to make *nomos* and *physis* one, was fulfilled in Christ no less than were the Hebrew prophecies. Mr. Gregory says that patriarchal authority was the basis of Benedictine monasticism, whereas, in fact, it was *nomos*, the Law, the Rule.

But it is in his estimate of the Renaissance that one finds most to criticize. (And here it may be noted that he gives but little evidence for his views, while in dealing with Greek philosophy and eighteenth century thought he documents his accounts very thoroughly.) Like Nicholas Berdyaev he regards the Renaissance with a jaundiced eye and blames it not only for Luther and Calvin but for Hobbes and Rousseau and the whole modern development. But this theory of necessity in historical evolution needs proof. The gorgeous delight in nature which characterized the Renaissance was not the same thing as the eighteenth century doctrine of nature, and if Mr. Gregory can see in Leonardo da Vinci a Protestant and humanist one can set up against him Michelangelo: "Painting and sculpture will lose their charm for the soul turned to that Divine Love which opened its arms upon the Cross to welcome us." The man who said that was as Christian and Catholic as St. Benedict, and far more typical of the Renaissance

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than Machiavelli. Michelangelo, Contarini, Erasmus and More were men of that age. Machiavelli did not come into his own until the eighteenth century, and then precisely because his ideas suited the eighteenth century.

Again one has a sense of an imposed picture in Mr. Gregory's account of English history. There is no evidence, except in nineteenth century writers, for saying that the English were always anti-Catholic because insular and living on the fringe of European civilization. In the eighth, tenth and twelfth centuries England was, perhaps, the most cultured state in the West, and as often as another country Catholic in life and outlook.

But Mr. Gregory has written a book which in the main is so good, so learned and so thoughtful that to find fault with it at all seems churlish. He packs into a sentence as much thought as most writers spread over a page, and if his language is sometimes dim he rarely fails to make his meaning clear. As an observer of modern cant he is acute. "A man who sincerely desires to be rid of the slums does not cultivate the sincerity of his desire but sets about getting rid of the slums. A cult of absolute honesty is *prima facie* evidence that its initiates are dishonest."

This is a really important book.

LAURENCE OLIVER.

A PHILOSOPHY OF FORM. By E. I. Watkin. (Sheed & Ward, 16/-.)

No thesis more urgently cries for advocates in the world of to-day than the thesis of this book. The disorder of politics, economics, art, religion, has a single root cause, the lack of contemplation. This is not the same as lack of religion in the everyday sense of piety: it is often the most pious people who think least. The root cause can be traced in philosophy to the abolition of metaphysic which began with the decadent scholastics and passed from them through Descartes to the later centuries. Disorder means lack of synthesis, but lack of synthesis in turn must be due to lack of thought, for synthesis, unity, is the object of thought. Such a book as this, then, cannot be, from that point of view, too strongly recommended.

Comprising as it does the main delineaments of a philosophy, it is only to be expected that one cannot find oneself in complete agreement with every detail of the author's argument. He professes his allegiance to the *philosophia perennis*, but he will not follow exclusively any one philosopher—originality and freedom from echoing of authorities are one of the greatneses of this book.

In treating of hylomorphism, Mr. Watkin follows Scotus in