

we can achieve absolute, ultimate knowledge.

He does not confine himself strictly to giving an account of existentialist writings and, in two chapters in particular, on 'morality – relative or absolute' and the 'irrational in science and religion', opens up the discussion on wider philosophical issues. On morality he concludes, 'if we admit experience as evidence, . . . it is belief in an absolute morality which agrees with the facts'. Again, discussing the irrational and the part it plays in philosophy of science and in religion, he concludes that Existentialism has

valuable contributions to make to philosophy as a whole. With them, philosophy 'could once again justify its claim to be one of the most important endeavours of the human mind'.

In style and content the book is not at the highest level of academic writing but to many it will doubtless be all the more welcome for that. It offers a good deal of information on subjects not easily accessible and along with the information come criticisms both percipient and constructive.

John Symon

DOUBT'S BOUNDLESS SEA. Skepticism and Faith in the Renaissance by Don Cameron Allen. *John Hopkins Press and Oxford University Press, 48s.*

The Middle Ages were little oppressed by doubt, and only in the Renaissance did unbelief become the object of scrutiny and denunciation. Nor is this surprising, for the same rationalism that nourished systematic theology in turn produced the quantitative empiricism which stripped nature of its divine *vestigia*. In this setting Professor Allen surveys the sea of doubt from renaissance Padua to restoration London. Few outright atheists appear for the chief concern is with the rejection of rational theology, not of faith itself. Pomponazzi is therefore described as a pioneer of fideism, a fair conclusion though there are grounds for accepting his submission of reason to faith as more than a 'rhetorical genuflection'. Cardano and Vanini are also analysed to reveal why Italy seemed to Gius. Patin a land of 'pox, poisoning and atheism', but when the French 'atheists' appear the inclusion of Montaigne exposes the true connotation of 'atheism' in the copious literature of renaissance invective. Security is dear to the human mind and a slight corrosion of accepted patterns can easily suggest their total overthrow. This, combined with the narrowing of spiritual perspectives attendant on a dismembered Christendom, doubtless explains the morbid sensitivity of the orthodox. The temptation to identify practical immorality with

speculative heterodoxy was overwhelming: already, in return, some free-thinkers attacked religion as the invention of princes or the rich.

Against the threats of such scepticism rational theology prepared its great assault and this is fully if breathlessly described by Professor Allen. Pride of place goes to the Platonist Henry More though Cudworth, the greatest of the Cambridge men, deserves more spacious treatment than he gets. Ironically the broad doctrinal front of this appeal to harmony and design was equally suited to the pure air of Deism and in the final chapter we see the rake Earl of Rochester hovering between the deist Blount and Bishop Burnet.

The theme is a significant one and draws together a number of thinkers usually seen in comparative isolation. Inevitably there is a threat of monotony in such a quantity of summarized material but it is held back by a slightly anxious humour. The erudite footnotes are all that one expects from the Johns Hopkins school and the bibliography with its wealth of reference to minor authors – those true mirrors of an age – gives the contours of an area that merits further exploration. The book itself is set out very handsomely, but then it might well be at the price.

Dominic Baker-Smith

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