

## BLACKFRIARS

The present writer reviewed *Return to Philosophy*. He did not find it whet his appetite. Perhaps these remarks may be taken as an *amende honorable*.

QUENTIN JOHNSTON, O.P.

THE NECESSITY OF BELIEF. By Eric Gill. (Faber & Faber; 7/6.)

In this book Eric Gill has massed together the substance of most of his previous writings round a central problem posed, at once historically and "out of space and time," in the words, borrowed from Wells, of the common man, "What's it all blooming well for?" It is not, as the rather unfortunately pompous title suggests, a detailed theological enquiry, but something for the ordinary reader a great deal more attractive. It is the effort of Eric Gill, himself a man and a responsible workman, to voice the enquiry of all men whose humanity is trapped in the iron cage of our industrialism, and of all workmen whose responsibility is becoming more and more a legal fiction and almost even a theological fiction, into the ultimate meanings beneath our industrial chaos and the elements of order this chaos involves even if only by frustrating them.

It is from this point of view, as voicing and assisting the enquiry of the ordinary man, that the book must be judged, and as such it is amazingly good. Belief, and with it the whole basis of philosophy in "common sense," is set free from the crippling hesitancy called "humility" by men of science. Belief "is dependent upon rationality rather than reasoning. For reason and rationality, though related, are not the same thing. Rationality is a quality; reasoning is a process. . . . So belief, though it goes beyond the process of reasoning, is not therefore irrational" (p. 17). Clarity is admirable in these early pages. As the argument advances from the realm of pure essences to take up a matter in itself less luminous, the concrete historical situation in which we find ourselves, the author's method changes with startling effect. The mind of the enquirer is couched beneath grasses on the summit of this hummock of a world; sees the stars through minutes visibly move, breaking adrift from the tufted grass-tops; experiences reflexively and almost sensibly in a moment of intuition the wheeling of the crooked earth under the stars. "A voice says to me: 'Heal's have come, to deliver a great log of wood.' These things . . . remind me that I, the being I imagined alone, still, timeless and spaceless, is a human being. . . . It is I who sees those stars." And the reality of substance beneath act is "brought alive" in the reader's mind with poetic vividness. Man is saved from his subhuman abasement before merely material immensity. "It is I who am important, because there is no such thing as importance except in relation to persons—to beings who know and will and love." And so, again, from a

## REVIEWS

brilliant picture (reminiscent of James Joyce) of baffled enquiry progressing through the apparently hopeless muddle of a "day in Town", we come to this, "There is no more incongruity between the rushing, tearing, wallowing, bestial universe and the Cross of Calvary than there is between lovers and the bed they lie on."

Later, in an examination of the problem of evil the Cross is missing. I wonder why?

The book is a vindication of substance beneath appearance, of being beneath change, of eternal values in the flux of process and undestroyed by it. Treatment of the four causes towards the end is a little angular and smells too obviously of Aristotle, but for the rest we have the rare experience of a Thomism vigorous and authentic, though it has lost all odour of the schools and emits rather that of the public bar—saving always that it is *Gill* through and through with all his puckishness and poetry.

BERNARD KELLY.

HUME'S THEORY OF THE UNDERSTANDING. By Ralph W. Church.  
(Allen & Unwin; 7/6.)

This is a difficult book to read, possibly owing to sparse punctuation, and it is a difficult one to summarize. This difficulty is increased by what seems to be the too general sense given by the author to the terms "philosophy" (for philosophy is surely a rational affair) and "total Scepticism" (the inverted commas are mine). To assess the value of Mr. Church's effort to vindicate Hume's positive theory and to indicate how groundless is the charge of total Scepticism—I quote his own words—I do not think I can do better than recall what Hume, no mean critic, says of his philosophical attempt to deal with this problem. And I stress the term philosophical because Mr. Church sets out to destroy the notion that Hume's "philosophy is negative merely." In the appendix to his *Treatise of Human Nature* Hume gives the consequences that follow from his premisses:

If perceptions are distinct existences they form a *whole* only by being connected together. But no connexions among distinct existences are ever discoverable by human understanding. We can only "feel" [comma's mine] a connexion or determination of the thought to pass from one to another. It follows therefore that the thought alone "finds" personal identity when reflecting on the train of past perceptions that "compose" a mind, the ideas of them are "felt" to be connected together and "naturally" introduce each other. Most philosophers seem inclined to think that personal identity arises from consciousness and consciousness is nothing but a reflected thought or perception. The present philosophy has so far a promising aspect.