

AESTHETICS AND CRITICISM. By Harold Osborne. (Routledge and Kegan Paul; 28s.)

Mr Osborne has written a comprehensive and informative study of various theories of art. He considers various forms of Hedonism, Realism and Transcendentalism and tries to make clear what such theories imply, whether they are acceptable as complete explanations of what it is for an artefact to be honorifically entitled a work of art. There is little that is new in his treatment but it is useful to have many points of view and their relationships to one another considered in one volume. Against this one must set the fact that the author lacks or appears to lack the philosophical equipment necessary to deal with so many complex issues. Often he seems quite unaware of recent modifications of the views he is attacking and despite a reference to Carnap and Wittgenstein (of the 'Tractatus' and 'Logical Syntax of Language' period) he seems not to have assimilated much of what has been happening in the last two decades in philosophy. One has the impression sometimes of a man using a hacksaw to cut through silk.

To take one or two examples—he just assumes that the expression 'work of art' can only be applied to a diversity of artefacts if there is one definite set of properties, characteristics or attributes (he uses these terms interchangeably) which is possessed by all these artefacts. This allows him to argue, whenever a theory is presented as offering a definition of a work of art, either that it excludes certain artefacts which are commonly supposed to be works of art or that it might be applied to artefacts which no one would want to call works of art. He notices that 'there exists no definition which is not open to similar refutation from the writings of criticism, no comprehensible definition which has been consistently applied by anyone.' This curious fact does not make him suspicious about the propriety of looking for definitions in such a case. It merely occasions from him an exhortation to be more careful and to try harder.

But Mr Osborne might object that his view involves not that there is one true definition but only that each critic must decide in his own mind what he is going to call a work of art and be consistent in his application of the expression. At times this does seem to be his view but the whole force of the middle sections of the book (those concerned with criticizing definitions of a work of art) suggest that this is not so. Indeed the author never seems to have made up his mind which view he holds. On page 43 he says that no definition 'is intrinsically right or intrinsically wrong; for all that such definitions do is to propose certain habits of language, and linguistic usages are not right or wrong but simply more or less customary, more or less useful and convenient.' But on the previous page he argues that it is 'common *knowledge* that

all artefacts are works of art' (my italics, and so throughout), and a little later that it is 'the first duty of every critic to make a selection from the products of literature, painting, music, sculpture, etc., of those which are art and those which only *pretend* to be so, or it may be do not even pretend. Every critic does this and differs from the layman only in that the critic usually holds that what he personally prefers is art, whereas the layman is more prone to *admit* that there are some things which may be art although they displease him or he finds them tedious.' But if the view expressed on page 43 is correct it would make no sense to admit that something *might* be a work of art. If it is up to anyone to decide how he is going to use the words, if he can't be right or wrong, then such doubts can have no place. One has only to decide whether the artefact has the required characteristics for the matter to be settled.

It is not difficult to see why the author wants to have it both ways. He wants to say on the one hand merely 'This is all that the dispute between rival theories amounts to, a decision to use words differently in the light of some preferred characteristics. What they ought to do is to decide to use these words in one way and then go on to apply them consistently with a clear knowledge of what this piece of legislation entails.' And on the other hand he wants to criticize these theories as inadequate, he wants to say that they fail to yield a true and definitive account of what it is for something to be a work of art. Thus he argues that certain realist theories are concerned with what are *really* non-aesthetic qualities of a work of art. But how can this be so if it is up to the critic to *say* what he is going to call the aesthetic qualities of a work of art?

This ambiguity of treatment vitiates much of Mr Osborne's *criticism* but it does allow for a fairly full and often exact *description* of a particular theory. It is here that I find the book most valuable, for whatever one thinks of his criticism, his concern to discover what a particular theory entails does make his book a valuable contribution to the understanding of such theories. Where the book moves into critical and speculative philosophizing one can only continue to lament the fact that so much admirable exegesis is not combined with a more positive and commanding philosophical insight. Had this been so there is no doubt that Mr Osborne's book would have been a most important contribution to the philosophy of art.

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INTERPRETING PAUL'S GOSPEL. By A. M. Hunter. (S.C.M. Press; 10s. 6d.)

To say that a new sense of the 'need for religion' has arisen since the war is already a commonplace. Religious writers and speakers have