

level of the book very seriously, and consequently I don't think it affects its value as an indication of how we are to understand the Bible.

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WAYS OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE, by Louis Arnaud Reid; George Allen and Unwin, 40s.

Twelve years ago Professor Ryle pointed out the affinity between classical epistemology and Protestantism. Discussing 'introspective awareness' in *The Concept of Mind* he wrote: 'When the epistemologists' concept of consciousness first became popular, it seems to have been in part a transformed application of the Protestant notion of conscience'. The Protestants, Ryle remarked, anxious to claim that a man could know the moral state of his soul and the wishes of God without the aid of confessors and scholars, spoke of the God-given 'light' of private conscience. Similarly, he suggested, Descartes, committed to showing how the contents of the world of mind could be ascertained without the help of sense perception, called in 'consciousness' to play in the mental world the part played by light in the mechanical world. (*The Concept of Mind*, p. 159).

The insight is profound, and worth developing. Classical epistemology, from Descartes to Ayer, bases itself on the private experiences of the individual, as Protestantism rested upon the inwardness of the believer alone before God. The part which is played in Cartesianism by the doubter's *cogito ergo sum* was played in Lutheranism by the sinner's intimate conviction of his justification by God. For the young Newman no less than for Descartes and Berkeley the sole indubitable principles are the existence and attributes of oneself and one's creator. The body and its organs are of as little account in the theorising of the British Empiricists as they were in the worship of the English Puritans. Classical epistemology is as little interested in the way in which meaning and knowledge are communicated from one human being to another as the early Protestants were in the process of tradition whereby the concepts and truths of religion are handed down from one generation to the next. The institution of language and the membership of a human society with its rules and customs seemed to classical epistemologists to have little to do with the problem of knowledge; just as to many Protestants the sacraments and laws of a visible church seemed of little moment to the quality of a believer's experience of salvation.

In the last few years classical epistemology has been decisively assailed; and the insights which overthrew it show an unexpected correspondence with the Catholic doctrines which were challenged by Protestantism. It has been realised that even the most private experiences can be described only in a public and shareable language, and that such descriptions must be capable of being checked by outsiders; just as the Church has always insisted that religious experience derives its quality from, and must be tested by, the context of communicable religious belief and observable practice in which it occurs. It

has been shown that knowledge is not some mysteriously self-validating state of mind, just as the Council of Trent defined that faith was not an infallible assurance of one's own justification. 'Do you know?' like 'Are you saved?' is a question which each man is not necessarily best able to answer for himself. Epistemologists have come to place the concepts of *teaching* and *learning* in the forefront of their enquiries; somewhat as Catholic theologians thought of the faith as something handed on by tradition rather than as testified to from one's inner life. Above all it has been seen that questions concerning the meaning of words and the justification of beliefs cannot be settled without a consideration of the role of language as a social institution and a part of the natural history of mankind; rather as, for a Catholic, neither the sense nor the status of a particular tenet of religion can be ascertained without reference to the part which it has played in the life and history of the supernatural community which is the Church.

Professor Reid's book stands squarely in the tradition of 'Protestant' epistemology. Its purpose is to present, over a wide field, a theory of knowledge which will serve as a justification for the religious and ethical beliefs characteristic of a liberal Protestant. Not surprisingly, it illustrates particularly well the way in which a certain approach to epistemology rides easily with a certain approach to theology.

Though his main concerns are religious, the author addresses himself to philosophers and claims to be 'not unaware of current controversy and idiom' in philosophy. The arguments of Wittgenstein, Ryle, Austin and others, however, seem to have passed him by. The first sentences usher us into the world of Descartes and Hume: 'Whenever we are in any degree conscious, we are aware, and aware of something. What it feels like to be aware, everyone knows, though he may never have put the question to himself'. *A propos* of dogma we are told: 'Significant religious and theological thinking . . . must come pretty directly from "warm" experience of compelling impingement and must constantly be checked by return to experience, if it is to remain important'. For Professor Reid, there is no way of discovering the existence and nature of God independently of 'the impingement of the presence of God' in private experience. Whether he is writing of art, of religion, of ethics or of friendship the author is consistently faithful to the empiricism of which his title gives promise. In the interests of empiricist epistemology the word 'knowledge' is systematically misused, so that it covers anything from hearing a tune to believing that the sun goes round the earth. Against such a background it is not surprising that the case which Professor Reid makes for the reasonableness of his religious beliefs fails to convince. Its failure is not to any lack of patient thought or acute observation: rather, it is the tragic and predictable result of writing within a philosophical tradition which is, and has been shown to be, barren.

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