

## REVIEWS

ON BEING HUMAN: ST. THOMAS AND MR. ALDOUS HUXLEY.  
By Gerald Vann, O.P. Essays in Order, No. 12. (Sheed  
& Ward; 2/6 net.)

One of the best *Essays in Order*. Fr. Vann presents Thomism as the true humanism, a philosophy 'opposed to all those who despise the flesh for the sake of the spirit; equally opposed to those who despise the spirit for the sake of the flesh.' The book is too closely written to make analysis easy, but one may take as a central passage this :

' [In Thomism] truth, beauty are given their due on every plane; matter and spirit co-ordinated and subordinated . . . The works which God has made are certainly not to be loved or worshipped as absolute perfection; the love we give them, the perfection we see in them, is relative to the infinite love we owe and the infinite perfection we see in God . . . Creatures are a means to be used in attaining the true end of man, which is God Himself. But they are not mere means. They are end-means. They have their own inherent goodness, their own loveableness.'

Fr. Vann develops and illustrates this thesis, applies it to life, solves particular difficulties, and compares the Thomistic humanism with the humanism of Greek, Renaissance and modern culture. The whole is admirable, and my few comments will probably be irrelevant. (1) Mr. Aldous Huxley seems to be treated as a Personage; but no doubt some discussion of modern humanism is opportune, and as a representative writer Mr. Huxley may be important. (2) I always feel a little uncomfortable about the Aristotelean Mean. I am quite sure that a well-trained Scholastic would vindicate it on all points, to the confusion of doubters; but would Aristotle himself have accepted the application? In art, for instance, would he not have considered Aeschylus or archaic sculpture to be instances of Excess? But a truthful history of Greek taste is, as they say, yet to be written. (3) Fr. Vann would have found interesting materials for his thesis in the Oriental cultures, though their discussion doubtless would need a much larger book. But they deserve consideration: the Heian civilization of Japan, with so keen a sense of the vanity of the world but with so deep a sensibility to beauty in art and nature; the *Bhagavad-Gita*, with its doctrine of divine immanence ('I am the mortification of the mortified; I am the splendour of the splendid'); the theological roots of the convention in the *Arabian Nights* whereby when the author has said that a person is beautiful he adds at once, 'Praised be the Author of all perfection.'

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