

MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY. By Frederick C. Copleston. (Home Study Books: Methuen; 7s. 6d.)

The considerable body of work published by Fr Copleston since the war has won him an outstanding place among Catholic historians of philosophy writing in English today. With his remarkably wide range, his lively curiosity, scholarly modesty and perfect manners, he seems to have all the gifts required. If his accounts of medieval thought lack the brilliance of Gilson's, that is not to be wondered at; Gilson's power to track ideas to their root in an author's mind is perhaps unequalled. Besides, Fr Copleston, unlike the Frenchman, speaks primarily to the easily puzzled British public; he must temper the winds of doctrine to Anglo-Saxon skins; and this he does with unflinching, at times, almost apologetic, solicitude. So it is in this little book, designed to bring the whole craggy range of medieval thought within sight of the widest possible public.

A résumé of the author's big *History of Philosophy* (vol. II), with the addition of chapters on the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it has of course real merits. The later chapters especially, on Scotus and Ockham, not only make sense, to one who knows precious little about those extraordinary minds, but do so with remarkable readability. Indeed, one has the impression that Fr Copleston is really more at home in the fourteenth than in the earlier centuries, that his bent is to problems of epistemology and logic. Abelard, incidentally, also gets a noticeably careful attention. The self-critical side of medieval thought is presented, I should say, more sharply and seriously than its metaphysical achievements; hence a relative nonchalance in the treatment of the thirteenth century, from which St Thomas in particular suffers. And here I beg leave to be partisan. From a reading of the chapter on St Thomas a beginner might well be left wondering at his enormous reputation. Of course the salient points in thomism are touched on; the originality of its stress on the distinction between existence and essence is noticed; but the chapter on the whole seems rather piecemeal and nerveless and therefore not very clear. We are shown a series of doctrines and arguments rather than a unified and organic position. No serious effort appears to relate the Saint's characteristic apprehension of *esse* to his conclusions about God, or about the relation between divine and secondary causality or the psycho-physical unity of man. In a brief review of such a book as this it is hardly possible, if one finds fault, to avoid seeming unfair; one has to record an impression without supporting it in detail. My impression, anyhow, is that what is said of St Thomas' teaching on the matters alluded to is perfunctory and superficial. To mention only one point, the thomist solution of the problem, so urgent in the thirteenth century, of the unity of human nature is

represented as (a) a mere acceptance of 'the Aristotelian doctrine that the soul is the form of the body', together with (b) arguments to show that the soul is, none the less, immortal. The reason *why*, for St Thomas, the rational soul is the substantial form of each man as a whole is not explained; it is just 'Aristotelian'. So too the richly subtle analysis of the process of human knowledge and the function of *intellectus agens*—called misleadingly, without further explanation, the 'active intellect'—passes almost unnoticed. Van Steenberghe's judgment, 'la solution que saint Thomas apporte au problème de la nature de l'homme dépasse toutes les tentatives antérieures enregistrées par l'histoire', may (though it would be upheld by Gilson and Forest) err by excess; Fr Copleston errs, I fancy, in the other way.

A Dominican may be excused for being touchy where St Thomas is concerned; and it is St Thomas who comes off worst in this otherwise valuable and in parts, especially the latter parts, excellent little work. I wonder, in conclusion, whether a paragraph on Petrarch's irritable reaction against Scholasticism—technically inexpert though it was—might not have rounded off the picture. KENELM FOSTER, O.P.

MODERN COSMOLOGY AND THE CHRISTIAN IDEA OF GOD. By E. A. Milne. (Clarendon Press; 2 IS.)

These lectures, written shortly before Professor Milne's death, give a less technical account of his mathematical researches in cosmology. He was convinced that physics should aim at becoming a deductive science, no longer discovering its laws by induction from empirical observation. Instead of a direct appeal to experience, this merely serves as guide in laying down a set of axioms, which define the precise subject-matter under discussion. Theorems are derived as logical consequences of these axioms, and observation may then test the extent to which such theorems are realised in nature, its approximation to a Platonic ideal. This programme has so far been carried out only for geometry: Milne's work represents a remarkable attempt to give cosmology the same status by postulating additional axioms about the passage of time.

His calculations are based on certain general conditions, such as the imposition of rational time-keeping throughout the universe, which are believed to follow from the assumption that the work of a rational being is under consideration: 'Investigators who leave out God, the *raison d'être* of the universe, find themselves lamentably handicapped in dealing with cosmological questions'. There is a lively justification of 'scientific heresy' before this use of the data of revelation; but the theologian as well as the scientist may be somewhat disconcerted, for the power of the creator is limited with remarkable precision, and little enough mystery left to 'the eternal silence of these infinite spaces'.