

the distinction between abstract reasoning and the reasoning which operates within tradition. He should realize that while it is important to acknowledge and to value "the wisdom of the ages," it also is imperative to remember that tradition—like personal judgments—must constantly be reexamined in the light of new evidence and common experience. True, there should be a presumption in favor of traditional ways of viewing and doing things, that is, a tradition should be considered valid until proved otherwise. But there also needs to be an awareness that there are bad as well as good traditions. Here right reason is required; for reason—tempered by moral authority and historical perspective—can help us distinguish between healthy and unhealthy traditions.

Second, the libertarian—like the traditionalist—puts undue emphasis on certain values to the neglect of other no less important values. By denigrating tradition and prescription, his abstract reasoning functions in a vacuum. He needs to recognize that there is no real antagonism between reason and tradition. We should embrace both—reasoning functioning within tradition. As Frank Meyer put it:

[We want neither] ideological *hubris* abstractly creating utopian blueprints, ignoring the accumulated wisdom of mankind, nor blind dependence upon that wisdom to answer automatically the questions posed to our generation and demanding our own expenditure of our own mind and spirit.

Frank Meyer's essay, it should be pointed out, is one of many luminous and superb essays republished in Mr. Witonski's anthology. *The Wisdom of Conservatism* is the definitive anthology of conservative thought. It has an immense reference value, and should be purchased by every public library.

Reviewed by HAVEN BRADFORD GOW

## God and the Philosopher

**God and the Knowledge of Reality**, by Thomas Molnar, *New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973. 237 pp. \$10.00.*

THE MAIN OBJECTIVES of this book are twofold: to sound a warning that the philosophical enterprise is seriously ill and to urge the adoption of "genuine moderate realism" as a means of restoring philosophy to health. Professor Molnar's approach to these objectives is unique and in some respects more compelling than the specific antidote he prescribes. Philosophy is seen as a stepchild of theology ("the long tradition encompassing thinkers, mystics and esoteric magicians") that would attempt to remove itself from its proper home at the risk of wandering lost and forlorn in a desert of subjectivist confusion and moral skepticism. "The philosophical enterprise can never definitively exclude from its scope the domain of the God-problem."

The God-problem, according to Molnar, is the adoption by philosophers and religious thinkers of any one of three distinct attitudes toward God. The first stance (called position A) is to regard God as inaccessible. The second (called position B) is to regard him as immanent. The third (called position C and preferred by Molnar) is to regard God as transcendent and personal. The first two, either separately or together, have been in ascendancy throughout history and dominate philosophical thought today. Put simply, they are nothing more "than an attempt to escape from position C," since in regarding God (or Being) as inaccessible or immanent man promotes himself to a position of divine majesty, consistent with man's "search for a perfect, that is *unmediated*, form of knowledge." Men have traditionally rejected position C "where the knowing self is understood to be limited while the object of knowledge is presented as guaranteed by a transcendent creator. The dissociation of subject and

object exasperates many thinkers who see in it a limitation, a diminution of man, and a barrier set up against a reconstructed reality with its epistemological, moral, and political derivations."

Much of the book is a fascinating and engrossing scenario of the history of the philosopher's "magical quest" for absolute knowledge and ideal community—and his continued frustration due to inevitable failure. What philosophers must realize is the "intellectual *hubris*" involved in this quest and the need for acceptance of position C which, since it regards God as transcendent and yet personal, posits a reality that is independent of man and yet knowable by him—within limits. As Molnar puts it, "only position C offers an ontology and an epistemology harmonizing with our actual experience, namely, that man is a full being within limitations and that he possesses full (reliable, valid) knowledge, also within limitations." This is the position which Molnar characterizes as genuine, moderate realism and proffers as the only plausible response to the query: "what are the conditions of rehabilitating the philosophical discourse that has reached an impasse with the absolutization of knowledge and self and with the consequent absolutization of the community?"

Molnar states the problem forcibly near the end of his presentation when he says:

In position A, the removal of God from man's scope renders the world fragile, evil, divided, illusory, and ultimately meaningless because unknowable. In position B, the immanentization of God in man's soul similarly reduces the extramental world to a state of imperfection, porousness, division, and vanity—facing a self that, as a maturing being on the way to divine status, will carry the world along to an ontologically perfected status. The outcome will be neither the same self nor the same world. What I call position C represents the equilibrium. God's transcendence blocks the self's absolutization and com-

pels it to face its inherent limitations, which the constitution of being daily demonstrates as anchored in reality, and God's personalness guarantees the reality of the world and the self, the knowledge and the meaning.

While there is considerable room for agreement with Professor Molnar that philosophy is in deep trouble, there is a distinct possibility that he has committed a *petitio principii* by defending position C, or moderate realism, after defining knowledge as "based on the distinct existence of a subject and an object." To say this is not to deny the originality or the importance of Molnar's conception of philosophy as chiefly concerned with the "God-problem," together with his most interesting characterization of the various philosophical movements within the framework of positions A and B. One very nice example of this is his characterization of one such view as "a variety of position A, today, as often in the past, very popular because it excludes, together with the personal God of religion, metaphysics too because it presents these centuries with a seemingly sober guarantee for scientific investigations." This point is elaborated by a detailed examination of "the Kantian [view]—and much of modern speculation down to Wittgenstein," which regards reality as a subjective creation and morality as fundamentally situational, and which comprises in his book an important foil with which Molnar engages to establish his position.

Molnar insists that Kant's attempts to ground his ontology on the knowing subject fail, for all practical purposes, because "individuals possess intelligence and moral sense to varying degrees." If Molnar is to avoid the possibility of the *petitio principii* mentioned above, he must show how his view—moderate realism—avoids the pitfalls that he insists confounded Kant. That is to say, if we are to accept his definition of knowledge as necessarily presupposing the distinct existence of a subject and an object, we must do so because all other epis-

temologies fail—in principle—as a result of their grounding on inadequate ontologies. What the followers of Kant have done with Kant's ontology, however, does not prove that his ontology is inadequate; only that it has been inadequately understood. Neither will it suffice to argue that Kant's position reduces itself to subjectivism simply because Kant grounds his ontology on the nature of the knowing subject, since it is on man's common, rational nature that Kant bases his epistemology and his moral philosophy. The variability of subjects is incidental. Molnar must show how grounding epistemology on position C allows it to avoid the subjectivism he finds attendant upon the Kantian view which he sees as grounded on position A. This he seeks to do when he says, "If God is conceived as radically different from man but not distant, and as accessible and knowable to him but not identical with him, then creation will be understood as being of a limited nature but in confident contact with the creator who guarantees it and *presents* it when lending it existence." Thus, it would seem that Molnar avoids the problems alluded to above by a modern day leap of faith, reminiscent of Augustine's dictum that "it is necessary to believe in order to know."

On the level of our knowledge of the real world, however, moderate realism would seem to have many of the same problems as the Kantian position: subjective perception varies and claims must be settled by an appeal to a common world—be it called a real world or a world of possible experience. Molnar's stance that the world is in principle knowable—but not absolutely—does not seem to differ widely, on an epistemological level, from the view that it is ultimately unknowable. The key seems to

be the answer to the question: what difference does it make as far as the avoidance of a "subjectivistic epistemology" is concerned to argue that reality is unknowable in fact or unknowable in principle? Molnar's concern is to "prevent man from climbing the ontological ladder and transmuting himself into a higher being with higher knowledge." This was precisely Kant's concern in writing a *critique* of pure reason, and Molnar must be wary lest his theistic guarantee be taken as license to claim complete knowledge and position C collapse back into positions A or B. In point of fact, one of the major shortcomings of Molnar's argument, it seems to me, is the lack of specificity in his notion of a theistic guarantee and, indeed, with the question of the precise relation of God to our knowledge of the real world. Until this point is clarified, the chief difference between Molnar's position and that of Kant seems to be one of attitude based on an ontology that, on the one hand, posits an independent real world, guaranteed by God, and, on the other hand, one that is grounded on man's rationality as such. In either case there are limits to knowledge since in neither case is reality grasped in its totality. But Molnar's moderate realism taken together with his theism would seem to provide grounds for optimism since it does not attempt to state *a priori* what the limits of human knowledge are, whereas the Kantian *Ding an sich* may well promote pessimism because it does precisely that. Each in its way provides "the beginning of wisdom," but in our age and given the present state of the philosophical enterprise it may well be advisable to share Professor Molnar's mood of optimism—and his faith.

Reviewed by HUGH MERCER CURTLER

## *De Gaulle at Close Hand*

**Diaries 1944-1954: The Other de Gaulle**, by Claude Mauriac, *New York: The John Day Company, Inc., 1973.* 378 pp. \$12.95.

THE RELUCTANT but compulsive diarist is hardly a rarity in the annals of history. Very frequently he has the obvious urge to preserve his name and reputation, or else he simply wants to keep a detailed record of his career. In at least a few circumstances, though, the diarist is motivated by the desire to preserve the name and reputation of another person. Claude Mauriac is a good example of this kind of writer. Son of the famous novelist, François Mauriac, he is primarily a literary critic, having done studies of such notable personalities as Malraux and Cocteau. Yet for a number of years he was the secretary and confidant of Charles de Gaulle. In that role, as he himself would honestly put the matter, he fell under the spell of the great man. Somewhat like Boswell writing about Johnson, Mauriac writes about de Gaulle. In some instances he is determined to prevent even trivia in the career of his idol from falling into oblivion. He is flattered that de Gaulle called him by his first name and admits that when he was actually in de Gaulle's presence, any doubts or reservations that he might have had would vanish at once. Convinced indeed that de Gaulle was the one great voice and resource of the nation, especially in times of trouble, he once sums up his feelings thus: "What elation I felt at being in such close contact with a great man! What pride in being one of his chosen men! How willingly I accept all the risks! How easy to decide not to let what disappoints me in him keep me on the sidelines!"

Regrettably, Mauriac's enthusiasm does not always inspire him to write with an attractive and lucid style, and most especial-

ly it has not inspired him with the importance of arranging for a good English translation. The present translation is often clumsy or inaccurate. A couple of samples among many that might be cited: a room that has simply been stripped of its furnishings is described as "devastated," and in another situation involving an impressive public ritual Mauriac is made to say: "Emotion kept Jules Roy and myself silent." Because Mauriac's book is no peripheral source but rather an indispensable one for the study of Gaullism, it is not too much to say that a new and intelligent translation is a simple necessity.

Strange to tell, the title of Mauriac's book is very accurately translated as *The Other De Gaulle*, but the title is, nonetheless, a poor one, for the book as a whole makes it clear that the title should have been something like *De Gaulle the Same Only More So* or perhaps *The Same de Gaulle from a Different Angle*. The de Gaulle known to most people is the formal, the almost pontifical de Gaulle, the grand figure who comes forth in personal memoirs or public pronouncements. The de Gaulle of Mauriac's pages is the informal de Gaulle who has seldom been seen and who often speaks impulsively off the top of his head about the issues of the day. People who expect the two de Gaulles, formal and informal, to be strikingly different will be in for a surprise. A surprise is also in store for people who expect that Mauriac's account of the informal de Gaulle will settle the argument between de Gaulle's admirers and his critics. It is an account, however important, that will provide plenty of supporting evidence for both sides. Those who see in de Gaulle the heroic visionary will continue to do so. Those who see in him the outmoded authoritarian will not change their minds.

Shortly after World War II, when Mauriac asked de Gaulle whether he would be willing to accept membership in the famous French Academy, de Gaulle replied negatively with this observation: "It's impossible after having represented France, after