

Harmonizing Theories

THE WAYS OF KNOWING, or THE METHODS OF PHILOSOPHY. By WILLIAM PERRELL MONTAGUE. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925.

Reviewed by RALPH M. EATON
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THE layman in philosophy easily loses himself in the mazes of conflicting doctrine and is left hopelessly torn between mysticism, scepticism, pragmatism, rationalism, realism, and a dozen others, unless he has the good fortune to stumble on a book such as Mr. Montague's "The Ways of Knowing," which marshalls all the schools into a well-ordered philosophical army. The dominating spirit of this book is tolerance and reconciliation. Mr. Montague finds a place for all the warring points of view he discusses; he deprecates only their excesses; and his own philosophy is a kind of eclectic common sense, standing out against a background of Platonism.

In opening "The Ways of Knowing" one is tempted to turn at once to the dialogue at the end, "The Knower and the Known," for here the meat of Mr. Montague's solution to the problem of knowledge is to be found. The question is one which has claimed a major part of the attention of philosophers since the time of Descartes—whether the objects about us have an existence and character apart from a mind that knows them. The author characterizes this problem of epistemology as "a speck of dust in the eye." We have mistaken the speck of dust for a real world. When we understand with the realist that "the fact that a thing is known has no direct bearing on its nature," we can go on to a pursuit of philosophy's primary interest, which is "in the ways of things, rather than in the ways of knowing them." Mr. Montague makes an heroic effort to fell the many-headed monster of epistemology that thought may pass on to greater things, and this very effort carries him forward to a world-view, though he would probably choose to give it a more modest name.



This view is essentially Platonic. It is the belief that reality is not exhausted by the actual objects we see about us in space and time. There is a more inclusive realm, the realm of what might be but is not; and it is toward this ideal world that thought is addressed. Characters of romance like Don Quixote or Mr. Punch dwell there; they are real beings discovered in the realm of the ideal by their authors, and not merely created out of whole cloth. This type of being, which is *subsistence* rather than *existence*, belongs also to the abstract curves and triangles and arithmetical equations of the mathematician, as well as to all the objects of dreams and illusions. Like birds which skim joyfully in an upper region, these ideal essences continually dip into the spatio-temporal flow of actuality to give it color and character; but their real being is a thing apart. Mr. Montague believes that whatever can be thought of is independent of the mind that thinks it. If you begin by putting even the stuff of dreams into the mind, you end with the subjectivist by reducing the whole world to your own present mental state; and this is intolerable. And yet on the other hand you can not hold with the naive realist that all the things you can think of, all the dream-objects and illusory objects, are parts of the actual world. You must therefore accept this realm of objective essences which are not actualized in space and time, but which are nevertheless grasped, and not created, in the act of thought.

If this theory solves the problem of knowledge, it does so at the cost of raising tremendous metaphysical difficulties. The heads of the epistemological monster are severed only to sprout again. One can not see how or why the ideal entities of thought get caught in the spatio-temporal flux. All one can say is that they do get caught. For some mysterious reason which is of their very nature, the free, skimming birds of possibility take their plunge into the actual. And we begin to wonder if their very life is not bound up with that of the actual. Literature, for example, is typical of man's outward reach toward the ideal; but literature must grow out of life. Life is big with literature. In the same way the ideal is everywhere knit together with the existent, and has no being apart unless it be in abstraction. It must somehow be essential to the ideal to grow out of the actual, no less than it

is essential to the actual to grow toward the ideal. The metaphysical difficulty of the original Platonism remains unsolved in Mr. Montague's thought.

A sketch of "The Ways of Knowing" so brief that it can give no impression of the care for detail, for accuracy of statement and fulness of analysis, which informs the whole. The first large section of the volume deals with the ways of attaining knowledge, that is, with logic in a very wide sense of this term. The best method in philosophy is an *intente cordiale* of six major ways of reaching truth; no theory can claim to monopolize the truth. Knowledge comes through authority, intuition, reason, experience, and practice, while scepticism, which "is itself a method of logic only in the sense that anarchism is a theory of government or atheism a kind of theology," enters as a "necessary prophylactic" for all methods, leading to tolerance and open-mindedness. It is in rationalism, tempered by a proper regard for the facts of sense experience, that the writer discovers the method most congenial to his own temperament; but here as everywhere he deplores extremes, and joins hands with both the *a priori*ists and the *experimentalists*. "Just as an animal organism needs two sets of organs, one set for acquiring food, and the other for digesting and assimilating it, so it is with the organism of science. The empiricists acquire the food of science, the rationalists digest and assimilate it." Though pragmatism, with its emphasis on the future and on the survival value of beliefs, is less congenial to Mr. Montague, the exposition of this philosophy is one of the best parts of the book.

What is one to say in general of this all-reconciling philosophy of "The Ways of Knowing?" It is the attitude of the fair-minded man. Yet, at the gain of sanity and clarity, it loses that intoxication with an idea which is characteristic of the great philosophers. Men like James, Bergson, Hume, and Spinoza may be wrong, but they are wrong on a tremendous and stirring scale. They have the merit of pushing their ideas to the breaking-point, so that their errors are a source of creation.

The Religion of Science

THE NEW AGE OF FAITH. By JOHN LANGDON-DAVIES. New York: The Viking Press. 1925. \$2.50.

Reviewed by RALPH DEMOS
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PLATO maintained that philosophers should be kings. The trouble with society to-day is that philosophers are *not* kings—that the philosophers, i. e., the scholars, keep themselves aloof from public life; and as a result we are faced with a social condition in which there is a divorce between the learned man and the man in the street, that is to say, the man in the automobile, the hotel lobby, or the movie house. The "New Age of Faith" is the age of science, in which science has replaced religion, has become a religion itself. Yet the public drifts without intellectual guidance, because the scientists are either indifferent or cannot express themselves in such a way as to be generally intelligible. What we need are popularizers, interpreters of the scientific truth to the public. Such a popularizer in the socially important sense of the word is Mr. Langdon-Davies; he is clear, simple, vivid, and above all sound. A good scientific interpreter is especially needed now that so many pseudo-scientists have sprung up who, preaching prejudice in the guise of science, have achieved such popular vogue of late. It is these pseudo-scientists, as he calls them, that our author sets out to expose—the "Race Fiends" like Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, and the "Heredity Fiends," among whom he singles out Mr. Wiggam.

The scientific doctrine on which he centers his attention is that of evolution. There are two factors in evolution—heredity and environment—and according as we emphasize the first or the second we become pessimists or optimists. In the earlier stages of the theory, people were optimists, proclaiming the inevitable and infinite progress of man through the indefinite improvement in the environment. More recently there has been a reaction; people have been more impressed with heredity as the dominant factor, and we have been made to feel that all our progress in civilization has been of little importance. The stock, the race, has remained stationary even deteriorated. So now there is a reaction from optimism to pessimism. But hope never sleeps

very long and we have a new crop of social reformers, eugenicists and race-discriminationists, who condemn the old-fashioned Christian virtues of mercy to the weak and tolerance of everybody, and raise instead the banner of ruthless discrimination. Their god is the Nordic Stock, their devil is the Negro Race, their gospel is the gospel according to St. Madison Grant, their one aim is how to keep out of the Garden of Eden of the Nordics and the geniuses, the serpent of the Mediterraneans and the Asiatics and the morons. But Mr. Langdon-Davies is a fundamentalist and he will have none of this modernistic religion. He points out how race is a factor impossible to isolate in any nation, that it is practically a fiction, like our old friend from physics, the ether. A nation like the Greeks or the English has been produced from the mixture of ever so many stocks, in the same way as the American nation is being produced to-day. What one should realize is that racial stock, if it exists, is the passive factor, it is mere material out of which the environment—the energies of man and of society—can mould organisms of great diversity. The important thing is not what you have, in the way of hereditary equipment, but what you make out of what you have.

After all, why object to the Christian virtues of kindness to the weak-minded and the weak-bodied, as implying an arrogant interference with the cause of evolution? These feelings have evolved naturally, they are part of the evolutionary scheme, just as much as the feelings of the tigers and the behavior of the plants; in fact, it is the eugenicists who, in their attack upon these feelings, set themselves in opposition to the evolutionary process. Every species, as it evolves, contributes its own share to the general scheme; otherwise its appearance would have no importance; and the contribution of the human species is precisely these humane feelings. The view which represents the environment as fixed, as something to take or to leave, to which man must adapt himself as best he can, through the merciless process of natural selection, is as wrong as it is naïve. Man as Prometheus, as the inventor, and the conqueror of his environment, is duplicated in all the earlier ages, though on a smaller scale. The environment evolves no less than the race, and man is for excellent precedents in setting out to mould it. Here lies man's hope—in focusing his energies on the improvement and the recreation of the environment so that it may provide the best possible stimulus for his capacities. As Mr. Langdon-Davies eloquently says in the concluding paragraph of the book:

There is only one chance of avoiding the supreme danger to the human race: that danger is the same for man as for all other living organisms, namely, the danger of not being able to conquer the difficulties of the environment, of failing in the struggle for survival; and since the antagonist in the struggle is the environment, and since man through Prometheus controls and alters it, man can disarm and weaken his enemy by his own magic and thereby free himself and reign supreme. Not by generation but by creation, not by controlling the living being but by controlling the world into which it is born, will the scientific statesman of the future avoid the rocks and steer his ship into the temporary haven which is the best he can ever expect in the incessant flux of time and change.

This Jolly Old World

THIS IS THE LIFE! By WALT McDougall. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1926. \$4.

Reviewed by ELMER DAVIS

HERE is a book that lives up to its title. Toward the end of his autobiography Mr. McDougall observes, "I do not know why we are here nor where we go from here"; but he evidently agrees with Samuel Butler that since we are here, our first duty is to try to get some fun out of it. Unless he is romancing as gaily as the writers for *True Stories*, he has; and his readers will get a good deal of fun out of reading about it.

In journalistic history Walt McDougall will live as the first of the regular daily newspaper cartoonists (this statement, as the financial advertisements say, being made on information and belief and not guaranteed). The paragraph which that distinction may earn him in some ultimate dictionary of national biography will say that he was born in Newark in 1858, engaged in various occupations in early life, knew many famous men, became a free-lance cartoonist for New York weeklies in the early eighties, started his daily cartoons for the *World* in 1884, went over to Hearst in the later nineties, came back

to the *World*, spent some years on the Philadelphia *North American*, engaged later in syndicate work, then became a game protector in Florida, and finally an amateur horticulturist in Connecticut.

It is a record more diversified than most but the merit of the book lies outside the chronicle of happenings and the expected fund of good stories. It lies in the spirit of the author. He has always had a good time and doesn't care who knows it, and he tries to help his readers have a good time too—this in an age where the most highly admired books, and the most widely circulated, are those which try to infect the author's customers with his own acute acidosis. Joy books are rare and they have a scarcity value.

A further virtue of Mr. McDougall's is that he doesn't give a damn for anybody. This shines out the more strongly because his story is inevitably, in large part, a story of newspapers and newspapermen. Most books of that sort are written either by executives, or by earnest young men who hope to become executives if they display sufficient adeptness in office politics. Accordingly, journalistic history comes pretty near being a subdivision of hagiology. But McDougall's chronicle will never be included in any volume of the *acta sanctorum*. He says what he thinks, regardless, a quality all the more laudable since his career is principally identified with the newspaper which above all others has erected the worship of the genius of Rome and Augustus into a state religion, the *New York World*.

Don Seitz's book about Pulitzer was probably as free from pious reserve as any official biography can ever be, but none the less it was official and its character is written on every page. Read it with McDougall as a commentary and it is like putting lemon juice on invisible ink. Seitz states the facts, or as many of them as discretion permits; McDougall whittles the statement to a point.



The bulk of Mr. McDougall's book is devoted to New York in the eighties and nineties, and to the gay companions of that epoch when our town was still small enough for a good mixer to know everybody. One reads about the gallant spirits and the merry life—and presently recalls, with a jolt, that this is the age whose shame has been described by Robert Herrick in doleful novels, whose stiff and varnished innocence has been depicted by Edith Wharton, whose low mortal ideals and parochial culture have become a commonplace of American social history. Read McDougall, and it sounds like the Golden Age.

This reviewer did not have the felicity to be alive during much of that period, or to be taking notice during any of it; but he suspects that his own glands are not so well balanced, his liver and kidneys not so copperlined, that he would have found it quite as aureate as did our happy author. One who knows McDougall only from his book may even suspect that any age in which he lived would have been golden enough, for him. Doubtless, like everything else, it looks better in retrospect. None the less he has been or says he has been, a happy man, and recognizes his obligation to set down the secret of success. You will find it in bits, here and there; and if it won't fit everybody the author may at least say in extenuation that it has fitted him, that just as four hours' sleep and abstinence from cigarettes made Edison, so this regimen made McDougall:

The one quite common error of sacrificing health and strength for money or a boss I have not committed, for I have lost no opportunity for play as I went along instead of waiting until I had leisure for it; and because I played diligently I am still virile and joyous and so much ahead of the game. . . . I have observed that the more senile of my old comrades are those who have clung like barnacles to one job, and that the ones who have been fired the oftenest are the most resilient. . . . All employers love the humble toiler who imagines his job is the only one on earth, just as they dread and suspect him who sits lightly on the perch, knowing that his wings will carry them anywhere.

There is the prescription, ladies and gentlemen; take it or leave it. For the rest, McDougall is as bad a parsnagnafer as any other autobiographer; whether he rolls his own or signs a tailor-made one by Burton J. Hendrick; but at least he takes the curse off by splashing it on with a thickness that can deceive no one except social historians—as when he credits tornados with waiting till he gets to town, and ascribes the post-war popularity of prize fighting to cartoons in the *World* in the early nineties. Once Americans could generally do this sort of thing, and appreciate it; but our age will probably take these statements seriously as it takes everything else.

The BOWLING GREEN

A Brief Case

JOHN MACY seems to me to have done the almost undoable. He has written a sketch of the world's literature from the beginning down to our own day—from the *chansons de geste* to Edgar Guest, one might say, though that would be wrong—which is swift, scholarly, informal, and has the true thrill. This is the kind of job that has to be done over and over again, for each generation: sorting over the baggage of the past to see exactly how much of it we absolutely need to carry in our own brief-case. But I don't suppose it has ever been done with more genuine piety and charm. Mr. Macy's brief-case ("The Story of the World's Literature," Boni & Liveright: 592 pp., \$5.00) costs the reader less than one cent a page and gives him enough to ponder for a year. For three months now I have been dipping into it, reading a few pages in bed at midnight, and delighting in the skill and courage with which Macy has tackled this impossible task. He has been so successful because he never thought of it as a task. It is not like many books of that sort, just a manual. It is a cordial: it has the heart of literature beating in it. Jack Macy was the right man to do this book because he understands the continuity of literature: a kind of chain-letter coming down the ages from the unguessable hearts of long ago who had their torments also and hankered to share them: like that mythical "American army-officer" who starts all the chain-letters. If you want to know the kind of book this really is, it makes one take a small slip of paper and write down the things you swear you simply must read or re-read—such as "The Arabian Nights," "The Golden Ass," Caesar's "Gallic War," Virgil, Malory, Voltaire, Don Quixote, and the "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table."



It is a thoroughly humane book, with no unworthy compromise with the scoffish tendency of the age. Jack climbs the beanstalk of scholarship into fairyland, but he does not set out to kill all the Giants. He finds, as we all do, that for the most part the people we have been told were great, really are great. Cicero is not a dull writer just because we were forced to read him immaturely; Burton and Thomas Fuller are just as entrancing as Lamb said they were. The conversational simplicity of Mr. Macy's method, with his lively humor, his shrewd asides, his deep feeling for the profound and tragic emotions, never slips into lack of dignity. He quotes Pascal's great *mot*—"When one sees the natural style one is astonished and delighted; for one expected to find an author and one finds a man." That is what one finds in this book. How fine a sagacity in his remarks by the way—

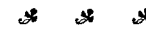
We who lie on this side of the great romantic period are inclined to discover all the gold and jewels of Donne and his successors and to think that Pope's well moulded metal is not so precious. This is a mistake from the point of view of criticism, from the point of view of pure amateurish enjoyment. Every poet, every artist should be appreciated, judged, treasured by the best that he did in his kind, no matter what other artists before him or near him or after him may have done. And of excellent specimens of two different kinds who shall say, who need say which is the better?

The book is delightful precisely because it is written from the standpoint of "pure amateurish enjoyment." "I have been bothered all my life," he tells us, "to determine which are major and which are minor poets." "We need not be abashed by great reputations, and Pamela is little better than what we should now call pretty good moving-picture stuff." "Dr. Johnson's verse is negligible." "It seems to me that Stevenson for all his praise of youth, his gay courage, his scrupulous devotion to art, and his immense popularity, was a reactionary, an old-fashioned man, and that while he was polishing his sentences the fine new thing was being done by another artist who also polished his sentences but had stouter metal to polish, George Gissing. I will stake my reputation on that judgment." It is not necessary to agree with all Mr. Macy's comments: to take merely one instance, the Dr. Johnson who wrote the Prologue for the Drury Lane opening, and the poem

about the death of Dr. Levett, does not seem to me a negligible versifier. But I have not found a single judgment in the six hundred pages that is not applaudable or relishable because one can understand why Mr. Macy feels that way.



There is a fine courage in Mr. Macy's method: he deliberately sets aside what must often have been a strong temptation to linger over his special favorites. He never relaxes the austerity of his intention: to show us the great river of human writing as a constant flowing stream, not as a succession of items. As he said long ago, in his fine little book on American Literature, "novels are suckled at the breasts of elder novels." And in the good talkative brevity of his tale he strikes off many a spark. Of Meredith, for instance: "He requires for full understanding a reader who can match his brains against the author's, and for that matter so do Shakespeare and every other man of genius." "Let us reiterate one principle on which this brief survey of literature is based—namely, that any intelligent person can read anything ever put on paper without the slightest moral damage. And unintelligent, humorless people are safe because they will not read literature or will not understand what they try to read." There are wonders in the human mind, as Marlowe's great lines remind us, "which into words no virtue can digest," and Macy's summary is hearteningly aware of this. He knows, as so few of the boilers-down of literary history seem to have known, how small a proportion of the world's literature has ever actually got itself written. It surrounds, like a sunset glow, the poor actual shreds and tatters of men's hearts that lie for us, so neatly parallel, on the printed page. Something of this aura, this golden trouble, this feeling of hunger and anger and ecstasy, he has touched into life. He knows that all art is "begotten by Despair upon impossibility."



The other day, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and 45th Street, I overheard one man say to another a familiar phrase that is pleasantly expressive of much contemporary psychology, "I got a terrific kick out of it," I heard him say; that was all; I have no notion of the nature of the impact. It is true that just now especially human nature seems to be eager for whatever can give it this desirable flutter behind the ribs, this warmth on the cheekbones. For those who have learned the great secret that in communion with the vanished hearts of literature lies perhaps the greatest and most delicately durable "kick" of all, Mr. Macy's book will be a happiness. I can imagine that some experienced scholars of world-literature will point to flaws of proportion, to omissions, or sketchiness; but the author himself admits these. The truly important thing is what a too severe scholar might even miss, the subtle dignity of this very colloquial and conversational book. It has the dignity of passion: the dignity of dealing with literature as it deserves, as the living expression of human joy and suffering. It is written in what can only be called a profoundly religious spirit; for these great lives who wrestled for us to say their weirs are the most sacred saints we have. A woman told me that when she saw the words "O rare Ben Johnson" on the stone in Westminster Abbey (it is spelled there with an h, I think) her eyes were wet. That was the true spirit of religion. That is the religion that Mr. Macy understands. His book is full of it; it ends with the word Amen; and, however absurd it may seem to the cynical, the feeling that it often implants in the reader is the humble prayer that he too, even in his littleness and perplexity, might somehow strive to add something to this noble story of men's hearts. So it is not only a brief-case, but a breviary.



This haphazard comment on Mr. Macy's book would be even more incomplete if one did not add a word as to the unusual drawings by Onorio Ruotolo, which are uneven in excellence, but at their best are superb. Mr. Ruotolo has remarkable power and imagination; some of the portraits, while perhaps making too direct a bid for one's sentiment, are extraordinarily impressive. I call your attention, for instance, to those of Dante, Tolstoy, and Poe.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY