

[1941. *Review of Tennant's Philosophical Theology, by Delton Lewis Scudder. Westminster Theological Journal.*]

Delton Lewis Scudder: *Tennant's Philosophical Theology*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1940. xiv, 278. \$3.00.

Appropriately and to the extent of eighty-seven pages, the first chapter of this criticism is a summary of Tennant's position drawn from all his published works. In his various writings Tennant has tried to show that what he calls theism is reasonable. Convinced that theology precedes religious experience and that natural religion precedes revealed religion, Tennant argues that man's sole, original, underived contact with actuality is sense perception. Rejecting a logical analysis of knowledge in favor of genetic psychology, he traces a continuous development of knowledge from a child's perception, through common sense, to scientific knowledge in which hypothesis, thought-construction, and faith have played a large part; along the way and without a break this development reached the belief in other selves and in causality by means of analogy, and the same type of analogy ultimately leads to the belief in God. After one has adopted a theistic position, one may read God into religious experience, but religious experience apart from its integration into a theistic system is characterized by such variety and vagueness that it is useless in justifying the existence of God.

In the second chapter Scudder severely scrutinizes Tennant's psycho-genetic description of the progress from perception to selves, science, and God. In the third chapter he rejects Tennant's strictures on the value of religious experience; and in the concluding chapter, accepting with Tennant the empirical method in theology, he defends the value of specifically religious experience.

The author's first and perhaps most basic criticism of Tennant with respect to his psycho-genetic method is that if one starts from created objects and persons, one cannot by analogy transcend the limitations of creatures (pp. 89 f., 102-105). Further, an hypothesis to explain secular facts, as God would be if we arrive at him through science minus religious experience, never furnishes a basis for the deduction of other non-secular, moral facts (p. 92). With purely secular data one cannot rise to God, although, given God in experience, one can then learn more of God from a study of the world (p. 98). In other words, Hume's criticisms hold in full force

against Tennant's position. Tennant's failure is also seen in the philosophical undergirding of his theology. Neither the knowledge of causality (pp. 106 ff.) nor the knowledge of other selves (pp. 113 ff.) can be justified by his analogical, psycho-genetic method. Scudder argues at length that we know other selves directly. He also charges Tennant with using hoped-for results, such as personal immortality and the ultimate value of morality, in proving the goodness of God; whereas these results depend on first justifying the belief in a good God (pp. 134-139).

In defending religious experience as a legitimate basis in the construction of a theology, Scudder leans heavily on arguments to show that we are directly aware of other selves. If this is true, *sensa* are not our sole, underived contact with reality. Then, as the author pertinently adds, why should not *numina* also be immediately perceived? (p. 144). Confusion and variety in religious experience do not disprove the existence of the religious object, but are due in part to differences among minds, and in part to the complexity of the object. Some people object that religious experience is mystical and incommunicable. But no more so than other experience. Communication consists chiefly in making it possible for another to exercise his capacities in such a way as to achieve an experience of an object. Religious communication is essentially the same and equally possible (pp. 163 f.). Religious experience is a contact with the real and is therefore epistemologically immediate. Tennant holds that these experiences are so subject to error that theism must be proved first and independently of them; but while his arguments are a check on naive scientists who think that natural law rules out God, one should not avoid meeting naturalistic psychologists on their own ground. And theism is a better explanation for the phenomena of religious experience than naturalism.

Vergilius Ferm's review of this book, in *Philosophic Abstracts*, Fall 1940, asserts that Tennant, not Scudder, has the better of the argument because Scudder begs the question by using a narrow definition of religious experience instead of Tennant's broad definition. But if Tennant rejects all religious experience while Scudder shows that a specific, narrow kind is necessary, then, at least, Scudder is not guilty of *petitio principii*. Ferm and others may not agree with the contents of the arguments, but, as philosophic arguments go, they contain no gross blunders. In fact, the present reviewer is inclined to believe that Scudder has the better of it.

Instead of continuing with a formal outline on the concluding chapter, it might prove at once more interesting and more indicative of the flavor of the book to select for remark from all the chapters some of Scudder's striking points.

Although Scudder seems to have the better of it with Tennant, it is striking that, while he recognizes that Tennant has not escaped Hume, he does not recognize that he has not escaped Hume. If Hume has shown the limits of empirical argument as such, it will not do simply to enlarge the experience. If Tennant cannot transcend finite experience, neither can Scudder. To be sure, Scudder asserts that we perceive directly something called God, but there is no evidence that this vaguely discerned χ is the Creator. It may be simply Nature, for pantheism is avoided only by identifying it with the belief that all objects are equally representative of the innermost heart of the universe (p. 151). Since Scudder apparently holds that not all objects are equally so representative, he believes that he has escaped pantheism.

In another place in order to defend religious experience from a too vicious charge of vagueness, Scudder, quoting Inge, asserts that " 'men of acknowledged and pre-eminent saintliness agree very closely in what they tell us about God' " (p. 168). Do they agree that Christ shall come in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? Or was not Paul a man of acknowledged and preeminent saintliness? And was Jesus? Scudder ought to (though presumably he does not) follow through with this line of thought because he uses patriotism as an analogy to religion. In fact, patriotism is as great or greater than religion, for "no experience results in a greater desire to give and to work creatively for a higher good than the experience of a country's love and need focused upon the individual" (p. 146). The analogy consists in the fact that a man loves his country and the country loves him. It loves him because it registers his birth (what mother-love!), and insures him against unemployment and old age. Similarly the universe may love a man. And this is religion, for "religion is the reciprocal love of man and the world (universe)-as-a-whole for each other" (p. 146). But does not the country hate some men by encouraging violence and sit-down strikes against them, by taxing them out of business, and by censoring the radio? The universe too seems to have a grudge against some individuals. We may note parenthetically that on this view Jesus got his urge to do good from realizing that the universe loved him (p. 147). (Certainly his country did not.)

There is another point that needs to be mentioned. Both Scudder and Tennant hold that theism is more probable than mechanism. But neither of them seems to give any clear account of what is meant by probability. In fact, Scudder is at his philosophic, if not religious, worst in arguing against mechanism. Or rather, there is little argument; it is mostly assertion. If goodness,

beauty, ugliness, and error *cannot* be explained on a mechanistic basis (p. 222), both the mechanist and the Christian would like to hear how he knows it. In the same argument he also refers to signs of indeterminacy in nature as if they were empirical facts inconsistent with mechanistic uniformity (p. 228). Chester T. Ruddick, in *The Monist*, July 1932, "On the Contingency of Natural Law", has shown that the recently popular indeterminism in physics is purely a matter of choice on the part of the scientist and is not forced by the empirical data. Scudder also asserts that "awareness" is irreducible, but he does not examine the attempts at reduction (p. 227). He further confuses the scientific postulate that every particular event must be explained with the postulate that everything as a whole must be explained (p. 229). Non-theistic interpretations are conceptually possible, he says, but they are not plausible or probable *to a theist (sic)* (p. 232). And yet he criticises Tennant for not converting his unbelieving acquaintances.

His *ex cathedra* method of dealing with mechanism is followed also in discussing some of the basic tenets of Christianity. "Christian leaders have always maintained two incompatible positions: human freedom and human bondage broken by acts of grace. No reconciliation of these opposites is completely possible" (p. 253). The reviewer is tempted to refer to his own "Determinism and Responsibility" in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, January 1932. But of course the reviewer is not a Christian leader. Was Calvin?

Perhaps more fundamental than all this is what the reviewer believes to be the common defect of both Scudder and Tennant, *viz.*, the empirical method. The psycho-genetic method should be replaced by the logical analysis of knowledge; the arguments of Knudson (particularly) and of Griffiths may stand in need of improvement, but Scudder's serious attempt at argument fails to shake the reviewer's faith in the *a priori* position (pp. 191-204).

It will be seen that the investigations of both Tennant and Scudder carry one into all the problems of philosophy. And for this reason Scudder yielded to the temptation to go beyond the scope of his title. In the second chapter, quotations from various authors are used as if in the multitude of witnesses the validity of an argument could be established. This tendency to quote increases until the final discussion of Santayana has the most tenuous connection with the main purpose of the book. Scudder may be pardoned for succumbing to this temptation, for, though it is a technical fault, the quotations are interesting and will prove informative of the present theological situation to religious readers who are not professional philosophers.

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