

Metaphysics and Religious Language. By Frank B. Dilley. Columbia University Press, 1964, pp. 173. \$4.00.

It may still be no larger than a man's hand, but the cloud on the philosophical horizon is unmistakably metaphysics—chastened, to be sure, but still recognizably itself: "The discipline concerned with discovering the ideas which are indispensable to the analysis of everything that happens." Frank B. Dilley defends metaphysics with all the skill and subtlety of linguistic philosophy, undaunted by its negative conclusions, and happily free from the pedestrian, hair-splitting style of so many of its practitioners. He demonstrates that metaphysics is not only a legitimate enterprise, but also a necessary one, and shows what others have often been content merely to claim: that even the detractors of metaphysics make tacit metaphysical assumptions of their own.

By the same logic, he also discomfits those theologians who deny any connection between theology and philosophy. Logical implications exist, whether or not a given theologian is prepared to acknowledge it. Deftly and succinctly, Dilley tracks down the implicit metaphysical premises of fideist [sic] theologians. Though not concerned in the present book to defend any given system, he sympathizes with theism as a plausible metaphysical hypothesis, and hints at future plans to defend it. Judging from the competence of the present book, theism will find in the author a redoubtable champion.

The book's main aim is to establish ground rules for metaphysical thinking. It makes substantial contributions to the development of metaphysical method, particularly in its treatment of symbolism, paradox, transcendence, and criteria of proof. This emphasis on method is the only sure defense against the imperialistic claims of traditional metaphysics.

In his determination to avoid dogmatism, however, the author occasionally flirts with relativism. But relativism, though it promises tolerance and fair play, leads inevitably to the reverse. For if there is no objective criterion of truth, then one is left without a fulcrum for self-criticism—which is to say, one has become arbitrary. At times, the author acknowledges this, reluctantly admitting that no system may be criticized from outside; the only possible criticism is a kind of tidying-up from within.

The main thrust of the book, however, is by no means so inconclusive. The author does in fact develop an objective method and apply it effectively against various alternative positions. What he really commends, and ably exemplifies, is a frame of mind which refuses to prejudge any position, and which is constantly willing to subject his own position to review. The book is an admirable exercise in this kind of thinking. Its effect is to enlarge considerably the hopeful cloud on the horizon.

E. La. B. CHERBONNIER