

*Theism and Cosmology*, being the First Series of a Course of Gifford Lectures on Metaphysics and Theism given in the University of Glasgow in 1939. By JOHN LAIRD. London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1940. Pp. 325. 10s. 6d.

Most Gifford Lectures fall into one or other of two classes. Some are systematic treatises in which an eminent philosopher sums up the results of a life-time of reflexion in an elaborate system of general philosophy. Perhaps the greatest instance of this class is Alexander's *Space, Time, and Deity*. Others are semi-popular expositions of some branch of natural science by a technical expert, enlivened by the bright but somewhat naive ideas on philosophical or theological topics which strike distinguished scientists while shaving. It is needless, and would be invidious, to give examples. Many, e.g. James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, fall into neither of these classes; but very few indeed are discussions by competent authorities of precisely what Lord Gifford wanted to have discussed. Professor Laird's lectures fall into this very small class. He opens them with the statement, ". . . I intend to talk about the subject I was asked to talk about, viz. natural theology", and he faithfully fulfils his promise. The merits of this self-imposed restriction are obvious, but there are serious drawbacks to be set against them. After the attacks of Hume and Kant the standard arguments of natural theology have been permanent invalids, and the upshot of Professor Laird's re-discussion is to show that there is little hope of their recovery. To most of us the prognosis would have seemed so unfavourable that we should have hesitated to ask a distinguished specialist to spend his time in reviewing the symptoms on the off-chance that he might be able to reverse the verdict or suggest a cure. However, the specialist has undertaken the case of his own accord, has lavished all his skill on it, and has honestly earned his fee. As might be expected, his report does not make very exhilarating reading.

The gist of the first chapter, "Concerning Natural Theology," is as follows. Natural theology is concerned with "whether and what we can learn about God *in the natural way*". Natural knowledge consists of (i) sense-perception, extra-somatic and intra-somatic; introspection; and the kind of non-inferential cognition of other embodied minds which Professor Laird calls "mind-reading"; (ii) the ordinary processes of demonstrative and problematic inference; and (iii) any synoptic cognition which comes under the head of scientific insight or imagination. Professor Laird sees no reason to think that we have any other sources of knowledge than these. In particular he is sceptical of claims by Hegelians to a special kind of logic appropriate to the subject of speculative philosophy; and he is doubtful whether religious experience, in so far as it is cognitive, involves any kind of cognition not enumerated above. Lastly, he asserts that it is not self-evident that the objects of natural knowledge

must be confined to the parts of nature, their qualities, and their inter-relations.

The second chapter is occupied with the definition and delimitation of philosophical theism. A "theist" is defined as one who holds that there is a God, or that there are gods, in any of the forms in which such beliefs may be held. In order that theism may count as "philosophical" three conditions must be fulfilled. God or the gods must exercise power *on a cosmic scale and to a marked degree*. The divine power must constitute a *unity*, though this does not exclude polytheism. And deity must be regarded as *ultimate*, in the sense of not having its source or its explanation in anything else. In connexion with the second of these conditions Professor Laird discusses pantheism, and draws a distinction between a distributive and totalitarian form of that doctrine. In elucidating the third condition he discusses the marginal cases of a limited God, a God conceived as developing in time, and the Alexandrian notion of deity as an emergent quality. This discussion is followed by a sympathetic account of the tenets of deism, *i.e.* the doctrine that we can legitimately infer the existence of an intelligent author of nature, but have no ground for ascribing to him conative-emotional or moral characteristics. Professor Laird ends the chapter by pointing out that in the present volume he confines himself mainly to "the deistical part of cosmological theism", and proceeds on the temporary assumption that the *prima facie* dualism of mind and matter need not be replaced by any form of Mentalism. This limitation will be removed, and this temporary assumption and its consequences for theism will be examined, in the second course of lectures.

In the third chapter Professor Laird deals with the Cosmological Argument. The general form of this argument is: So-and-so exists and is not self-sufficient; therefore something else which is self-sufficient must exist as its supplement and correlate. It has at least the merit of starting with an existential premiss. In this premiss "so-and-so" might be either "something or other" or "a certain finite particular" or "nature as a whole". Now this leads to a dilemma which is one of Professor Laird's main criticisms on the argument. If "so-and-so" be anything less than nature as a whole, it will no doubt lack self-sufficiency, but it is very doubtful whether its supplementary correlate will need to be divine. If, on the other hand, "so-and-so" is nature as a whole, then it is by no means obvious (i) that the phrase applies to anything, or (ii) that, if it does, nature as a whole lacks self-sufficiency.

Professor Laird is inclined to think that the phrase "nature as a whole" is indefensible unless interpreted so cautiously that what it denotes cannot possibly bear the weight of the Cosmological Argument. The rest of the chapter is devoted to distinguishing various senses in which the world might be said to lack self-sufficiency, in asking what kind of supplement each kind of lack of self-sufficiency

would require, and in considering whether the world does in fact lack self-sufficiency in any of these respects. The results are entirely unfavourable to the Cosmological Argument.

Chapter iv is concerned with the notion of Creation. Professor Laird distinguishes three possible types of cosmogonic theory: (i) That the world is brought into being, but not out of anything; (ii) that it is made by the arranging of some pre-existing material; and (iii) that it is "some sort of output of divine substance". The first of these is the creation theory, and the third is the emanation theory. Though himself sympathetic to the emanation theory, Professor Laird devotes the rest of the chapter to the creation theory. He first considers whether there are any special activities within the world which can throw light on the notion of cosmic creation. After considering artistic production and biological procreation, he concludes that no light can be expected in this direction. He then develops a theory, affiliated to Whitehead, in which the state of the world at the present is the creature of its immediately past state and the creator of the state which will immediately follow it. The theory may be summed up in two quotations. ". . . The theory of creative process must hold that anything that is said to persist persists as a flame persists." And again: "Present actuality . . . does of itself what, according to Descartes, God had continually to do for the world, i.e. renew its existence". He recognises and insists that, since this theory is perfectly general, it must apply to the persistence of God himself if he be temporal; and that, if he be not temporal, then all talk of his having started the world on its temporal course is unintelligible.

The fifth chapter is concerned with time and eternity and their relations to theism. Professor Laird argues that the appearance of change *anywhere* involves the reality of change *somewhere*; that the continual transition which each of us experiences throughout his waking-life and his dreams is something absolute; and that it is nonsensical to suggest that what does not yet exist relatively to one standard of reference may already exist relatively to another. Arguments against the reality of time and change *must* therefore be mistaken. In his discussion of the notion of eternity Professor Laird recognises three senses of the word. One is sempiternity, which essentially involves time and duration. One is the apparent arrest of temporality in an experience which seems to contain no sense of becoming, whether variegated or monotonous. It seems certain that such an experience must be delusive in its temporal aspect, since it must be admitted to begin at a certain time, to last for so long, and then to cease. The third sense of eternity is the timelessness of truths and other abstract entities. This cannot be applied to existents.

In discussing the bearings of change and eternity on Theism Professor Laird starts from two propositions which he considers to be self-evident. The total ground of any change must itself include

a change. And there is no intelligible sense in which a temporal existent and a non-temporal existent could form parts of a single system. He concludes that, since the world certainly endures and changes, God must also endure and change if the world depends on him. All permanence, including that of God, must be permanence in succession. This may consist in the fact that processes of becoming have so far manifested certain constant patterns. To say that so-and-so *will* endure is to conjecture that there will be events which will hook on to that event which is the present state of so-and-so in the same determinate way in which that has hooked on to certain earlier events to constitute the history of a persistent but changing thing.

From this view of becoming and persistence Professor Laird argues (i) that inferential pre-diction has an entirely different status from inferential post-diction; and (ii) that it is impossible for anyone, even for God, to have non-inferential knowledge of future events comparable to memory-knowledge of past events. I think that there is a good deal to be said in criticism of these remarks, but the matter is far too complicated for discussion in a review.

The sixth chapter, on "Ubiquity", begins by pointing out that there are not the same objections to holding that space is illusory as there are to holding the corresponding view about time and change. This is followed by a fairly lengthy account of the phenomenology of the extensive aspect of nature, both from an ontological and an epistemological standpoint. The rest of the chapter contains the application of these notions to the question whether God is in any sense spatial. The upshot of a long and learned discussion may be summed up in Professor Laird's own words. "Let us say, then, that God is probably everywhere if he is anywhere, and that if he be nowhere at all, in all relevant senses, cosmology has nothing to do with theology." By all means let us say this and have done with the matter.

We return to more interesting topics in Chapter vii on "Omnipotence". At an early stage Professor Laird concludes that "it may rightly be doubted whether the conception of omnipotence as an agency *capable de tout* is really of serious import in a philosophic enquiry". He therefore devotes the rest of the chapter to divine "omnificence", i.e. the doctrine that all that is in fact done is done by God. The course of the argument is roughly as follows: (i) A distinction is drawn between "first" and "second" causes, and the question is reduced to whether the former are the only true causes. (ii) The notion of causation is then discussed, and three main views about its nature are distinguished, viz. the theory of invariant sequence, the theory of activity, and the theory that causal connexion is of the nature of logical entailment. (iii) Each of these interpretations is then applied in turn to the notion of first and second causes. (a) On the pure uniformity view no such distinction could be sustained. Moreover, no sequence which was unique could be known

or rationally conjectured to be an instance of invariable sequence. Therefore, "a first cause of the world, in the uniformitarian sense of cause, could never be established". (b) On the purely activist theory a distinction could be drawn between first and second causes if and only if it were legitimate to hold that some acts are purely spontaneous and derive nothing from any previous cause. (c) On the pure entailment theory the question would be whether there is a distinction among causes like that between self-evident principles and other propositions which can be known only by deduction from them. Professor Laird thinks that there are strong reasons for rejecting this suggestion. (iv) He next considers whether, on any of the three views of causation, there is any reason to believe in the existence of a single omniscient first cause. From what has gone before it follows that only the activity and the entailment view need to be seriously considered here. The most important point that is made in connexion with the activity view is that our volitions are only cause-factors and are not total causes of our voluntary movements, and that there is not the least reason to hold that the other cause-factors which supplement them are anyone's volitions. After a good deal of discussion of the entailment theory, which it is not easy to summarise, Professor Laird concludes that "there is no clear, uninterrupted road from cause . . . to omniscience in any of the three principal senses of cause". (v) Finally, he considers whether a judicious combination of the three views will accomplish what each of them separately has failed to do. He concludes that it will not.

The eighth chapter, on "Teleology", is a preparation for the ninth, which is about the "Argument from Design". The essential points which Professor Laird makes about teleology are the following: (i) There are systems within nature in which we can observe a pattern of change or of growth, which is preparatory for a specific future state, and which tends to achieve some benefit for the system, if we include self-maintenance and development under the head of "benefit". All such systems may be called "teleological". (ii) In certain such systems an essential cause-factor in bringing about the teleological change is an idea of the benefit to be obtained and an attraction exercised by this idea. Here we can speak of "ideal teleology". (iii) Though there are limiting cases of ideal teleology where the efficient ideas are very dim and vague, there are plenty of other cases where there is no reason to believe that the teleological change is in any way due to an idea of the end to be attained. (iv) Systems having a teleological pattern occur in inorganic matter as well as in organisms and in persons. It is a serious mistake to try to account for the ostensibly unideal teleology which occurs in crystals and in organisms by postulating a process of psychological causation by ideas, which is not known to operate anywhere but in the deliberate actions of persons.

As Professor Laird remarks in a footnote at the end of chapter ix, a better name for the Argument from Design would be the argument

to a designer from the facts of teleology. Professor Laird distinguishes between "particulate" teleology, i.e. the occurrence of teleological systems, such as watches and organisms, within the world, and "ecumenical" teleology, i.e. the alleged fact that the world as a whole is, in some respects at any rate, a teleological system.

There is no doubt that there are teleological systems within the world. But *prima facie* most of them are not planned systems, and there is no good reason to hold that they must be planned because they are teleological. Suppose, however, that we insist on taking that view of them. We must remember that the only planners about whom we have any direct knowledge are minds embodied in organisms, and that they carry out their designs by the use of their organisms. Suppose, then, that we insist that the organisms within the world are really machines designed by God. If the analogy is to be intelligible, we shall have to ascribe an organism to God and to assume that he carries out his designs by means of it. But now we have on our hands at least one organism, viz. God's, which cannot be regarded as a product of design.

Whether the world as a whole is a teleological system is doubtful; and, if it be so, there is no good reason to regard it as an instance of a planned teleological system. It would be more plausible to call it divine, because teleological, than to regard it as the deliberate product of a divine agent.

After a considerable amount of detailed discussion Professor Laird concludes as follows. ". . . The Argument from Design seems to me to be quite fantastically weak, and theists, in my opinion, would be wise if they abandoned it. . . . If there had been no confusion between teleology and planned teleology I cannot believe that the Argument . . . would have found many adherents."

The last chapter, entitled "Examination of Cosmological Theism", is in the main a recapitulation of the results of earlier chapters. It also contains some remarks about recent physical speculations on the origin and destiny of the stellar universe. I may end this review with two quotations which seem adequately to express the conclusion at which Professor Laird has arrived by the end of his first course of lectures: ". . . Theistic cosmologists should concentrate . . ., not on the indefensible prepossession<sup>1</sup> that the deformity in the cosmic pattern must have been *imposed*, . . . but upon the godlike character of that pattern itself". And again: "The deformity of the world . . . seems to be the most natural conclusion for a realistic limited cosmology to aim at. . . ." I do not think that he has given any reason to believe that this modest aim can be attained; and, so far as I can see, he makes no claim to have done so. It remains to be seen whether anything more positive can be reached from the wider basis on which the argument in the second course is to be built.

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<sup>1</sup> Can this be a misprint for *proposition*?