

## VI.—NEW BOOKS.

*Ethics: Descriptive and Explanatory.* By S. E. MEZES, Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy, University of Texas. New York and London: Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1901. Pp. xxi., 435. Price 10s. 6d. net.

IN this book, Prof. Mezes claims to give a scientific account of morality, without prejudice to the metaphysic of ethics. His aim is to investigate ethical phenomena purely on the basis of experience, refraining even from giving an estimate of their value. Yet, experience is to be widely interpreted, embracing the past as well as the present, and paying due regard to uncivilised, as to civilised races. The methods also are various; introspection alone not being sufficient. Help is to be sought from every available source, and more especially from the study of origins.

After two chapters of an introductory character, the work is divided into two parts—the first devoted to consideration of subjective morality (extending from chapter iii. to chapter viii.), and the second to consideration of objective morality (chapters ix. to xv.). By subjective morality is understood what rightness means to the agent himself; and so part i. is occupied with a discussion (a) of voluntary action, and (b) of the individual conscience (its nature, its cause, its origin, and its development). By objective morality, on the other hand, is designated "the body of actions vouched for as moral by the standard or wise conscience"; and the topics treated under part ii. are the cardinal virtues (here set down as five) and welfare.

The concluding chapter (xvi.) of the treatise sums up the subject, and makes a few remarks on the value of morality. A tolerably full Index completes the volume.

As will be seen from this brief outline, the writer's object is a decidedly limited one. By restricting it so, he not only gets rid of the metaphysical issues, but also feels justified in ignoring many of the puzzling questions in psychology. His rôle is simply that of a describer, explaining as he goes along by giving an account of how the various ethical principles and conceptions have come to be. And, in unfolding his subject, he has the merit of adhering consistently to the plan laid down. He is also, for the most part, thorough in his handling; the topics as they appear being expanded with elaboration, and sometimes with an exhaustiveness that borders on prolixity. The work cannot be said to be in any remarkable degree original; but it is executed with care and patience, and written in a style that is clear, though not always free from faults in grammar or from an un-English use of words and phrases. It is characterised, further, by good psychological analyses, and by sound common sense, which frequently takes a practical turn. This last characteristic is most prominent in the handling of the virtues.

As good an example as any of Prof. Mezes's powers are the chapters on

Conscience, under subjective morality, treating of the adult conscience, the psychic cause of conscience, the birth and growth of conscience in the child and in the race. Although reproducing in part, as needs must be, the investigations of others, they are marked by real insight, and show at its best the virtue of the genetic method in the handling of ethica.

Less satisfactory is his handling of voluntary action. Too many questions are passed by, being referred to the text-books on psychology; and also the analysis of Will is inadequate. Had Prof. Mezes gone back to Aristotle, he would have been guided to a completer presentation of volition. At any rate, he would have been impressed with the necessity of taking Will in connexion with Desire and of giving some explicit exposition of the latter.

So, too, his position that only voluntary actions are moral phenomena is a very obvious one; but it is not so obvious that "neither emotional states, intellectual states, nor fixed habits are moral phenomena". True enough, emotional states in themselves are not moral phenomena, but they become so when they are brought within the range of self-control; for, then we contract a responsibility regarding them, inasmuch as their intensity is, in part at least, regulated by the degree of attention we accord them. In like manner, intellectual states are regulated by attention, and thus come under the will and may have a moral aspect; and, as to fixed habits, these, in so far as fixed, are removed from the ordinary control of the will, but, as a habit is formed voluntarily, it may seriously be questioned whether any habit is ever so absolutely fixed as to be excluded, under every conceivable set of circumstances, from the will's influence.

In his section on objective morality, the author is concerned with the question of the ultimate end, which he makes out to be sentient welfare or "the common good of all co-operating sentient beings"; and the greater part of the exposition consists in a detailed handling of the cardinal virtues. These are maintained to be five in number, viz., courage and temperance (involving the will), benevolence (attaching to feeling), justice and wisdom (which are specifically intellectual). This list, the author holds, "is at once adequate and compact, covering the whole field of morality, but covering no portion of the field twice". It can hardly be said that his own treatment bears out this estimate. That there is overlapping among the five virtues becomes very apparent as the exposition proceeds; and it is difficult to persuade oneself that there are not also grave omissions. Take Humility, for instance: where is its place in the classification? Doubtless, by a Procrustean process it might be possible to fit it to one or other of the five forms, but not satisfactorily. Humility is neither courage nor temperance, although, under certain circumstances, it may assimilate itself to either. It is not benevolence, although in certain aspects it faces that way; nor can you, except in a special context, designate it justice or wisdom. It is a quality of character quite distinct, and, in civilised communities, prompts to actions that minister to social welfare. That, according to Prof. Mezes's own test, gives it a right to a separate place in the treatment of objective morality.

So, too, with Truthfulness—which is here unmentioned. Not only is this one of the most important social virtues with a quality of its own, but it also presents peculiar difficulties needing to be carefully elucidated, and it lends itself in a very special manner to the historical mode of treatment that Mr. Mezes delights in.

The characterisation of the five virtues selected for consideration

becomes very much, in the hands of the author, distinct character-sketches of the virtuous man in his five-fold aspect—the courageous man, the temperate man, the benevolent man, the just man, the wise man. These are, in the main, successful; but the sketch of the wise man is slight and not sufficiently vital to be effective.

WILLIAM L. DAVIDSON.

*The Adversaries of the Sceptic, or the Specious Present: a New Inquiry into Human Knowledge.* By ALFRED HODDER, Ph.D. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, Limited; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1901. Pp. iii., \$20. Price 6s.

The sceptic is Dr. Hodder. His adversaries are Mr. Bradley and Prof. Royce. He poses as "the defender of the Specious Present as the starting-point of thought against the defenders of mere postulates," professing a "scepticism" that is a "solipsism of the Specious Present". His position, however, is neither sceptical nor solipsistic in a 'constructive' sense. He does not 'positively deny'. He does not assert 'I am really All'. In fact, he talks black and thinks drab—perhaps a not unpardonable device on the part of one whose literary object is evidently to shock. Yet Dr. Hodder would not shock us out of our senses so much as back to them. "Naïve realism," in regard to metaphysics and ethics alike, is the moral of this eminently readable, though shockingly misprinted, book—the 'doubtful' moral, let us hasten to add, lest we fail to do full justice to the principles of its author.

Dr. Hodder's "logic" is a "psychologic," and claims to be based on indubitable "fact". So much we are told; but otherwise little trouble is taken to keep foundation and superstructure distinct in the interest of the reader. The latter is left to divine as best he can what that ultimate "fact" is which the sceptic is prepared to swallow, or rather which willy-nilly swallows him. The indications, however, point to its being the following—that there is a "real" basis of vivid "presentative" elements intuitively given in any experience, however momentary, which basis of itself distinguishes itself from any "representations" it may seem to support, such as those of a past or future. We are informed that we are standing in one of those circular panoramas which have their foreground built up of solid things and the background painted in. "Introspection," it is asserted, will always enable us to detect where three dimensions give place to two, where presentness—the here and now as it is in itself—shades off into the "make-believe" of presentness. The "mode of existence," the "essential stuff" of present reality and present make-believe of its own accord proclaims itself different.

What follows? As against 'absolutism' in metaphysics it is supposed to follow that there can be no 'necessary' postulates, presuppositions, implications, of thought in virtue of any activity it may seem to display. 'I judge, therefore a standard of judgment is,' cannot but be inconclusive, since I do not know myself as judging "of" and "about" in any sense and to any purpose with that perfect presentative sense of assurance wherewith I know, that is, am "acquainted with," the here and now in the intuition *cogitatur ergo est* (as Leibnitz would have put it). Nor is the 'voluntarist' view of postulates held to be much, if at all, sounder than the absolutism it seeks to displace. The constructions of representative thought at their least invalid are no outcome of a 'will to believe'. Within the problematic region of the representative those collocations of symbolised experience which present themselves "unforced" distinguish themselves by a sort of reality of make-believe from those which 'we' call into being by the aid of "imagination".