

THE MIRROR OF PHILOSOPHERS. By Martin Versfeld. (Sheed and Ward; 21s.)

'The publishers have objected that what public I may have will be diminished by my method of presentation.' They have reason, I am afraid, but perhaps the author missed the point if he restricted their objections to his stringing together old articles and addresses just as he gave them. It is the puns, the word-plays, the allusions sustained on and on and racked for a further significance that give the trouble, and the pity is that they abound most towards the beginning and the end of the book, so they will be probably what most readers meet first. But Mr Versfeld has other logic than this, even though in a gay moment in his introduction he denies it. Like the Bible this is a book which is best begun some way on: the essay entitled 'Agreements and Disagreements among Philosophers' is the most positive and the most interesting, where the dominant theme is stated which gives the book what unity it has, that it is cardinal for the philosopher to realize he is a 'being-in-situation', and that only his awareness and acceptance of this in reflection gives him the opening to objectivity: the fact *that* we think determines *what* we may think. Mr Versfeld realizes this has been said before, but he says it well. Many directions in philosophy are thus immediately given, and even if denied remain implied; so most of this book is an examination of varying thoroughness to test for this consistency in Kierkegaard, Hegel, Descartes, Comte, Hobbes, Hume, Nietzsche, Sartre, and Chestov. The shorter and incidental essays are more jolly and give the author more play for his style. The clue is his own admission that he flatters himself as Chesterton's *alter ego*: it may be allowed as flattery. In any case, times and needs have changed, as the author ought to be one of the first to see, and by paying heed to himself he might have distanced himself rather more from himself so that autobiographical information would be less prominent. Still, as a philosopher Mr Versfeld is good; he reveres St Thomas and understands him really well; more than the pity that, unlike him, he doesn't 'play it cool'.

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