

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Elementary Course of Christian Philosophy. by

Review by: Josiah Royce

Source: *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Apr., 1895), pp. 398-399

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2375296>

Accessed: 09-09-2018 16:42 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*The University of Chicago Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *International Journal of Ethics*

ELEMENTARY COURSE OF CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY. Based on the Principles of the Best Scholastic Authors. Adapted from the French of Brother Louis, of Poissy. By the Brothers of the Christian Schools. New York: P. O'Shea, 45 Warren Street, 1893. Pp. xxx., 539.

This text-book of Catholic Philosophy is, as might be supposed, almost throughout an exposition of the Thomistic doctrine. Whatever material in the book is not pretty directly derived from St. Thomas, consists of references to modern philosophy and to recent scientific and theological issues, of a few historical notes, and of a certain amount drawn from the general stores which form the common treasury of all scholastic writers. The American translators have added here and there to their French original, which the present reviewer has not seen. The work of both translator and original author appears to be done, so far as the present writer ventures to judge, with a characteristic submissiveness and modesty, but with a technical skill that is certainly enviable. The manner of statement, the tone of the discussion, are agreeably influenced by the spirit of the master himself, of whom Cajetan, the commentator of the "Summa," happily declared that his was that fashion of writing *ubi nulla judicem turbet invidia*. In short, this text-book is not one of controversy, but of exposition, and of positive teaching in the spirit of St. Thomas. It will hardly make converts; it cannot make enemies; it is worthy of a place on every student's shelf, so far as one may feel the need of a compendious reference-book of the principal theses of the Thomistic philosophy.

The extensive array of ecclesiastical approbations, including a laudatory letter from the Pope to the French author, can interest us who stand without but moderately. What attracts us most is the completeness and minuteness of this bird's-eye view of the universe as St. Thomas conceived it. This synthesis (one of the most ingenious in the history of thought) of so many strangely-united elements,—of Neo-Platonic mysticism (as introduced into later theology through "Dionysius" and through others), of the principal Aristotelian conceptions, and of the distinctively orthodox theology of the church,—this wonderful organism which St. Thomas developed, and which has shown such marvellous vitality, is presented to us here in what seems to be an absolutely faithful and an extraordinarily complete miniature. Catholic text-books have very generally the advantages, very often also the defects, of

books written under authority, and with a large tradition behind them. Where such books are polemical, in the usual sense, they only weary us. St. Thomas himself, with his method of impartially presenting all views before deciding, is far above mere polemic, and, even if one is no scholar in mediæval thought, one reads his Latin with a constant delight in his ingenuity, his kindliness, and his many-sidedness. It is one of the principal good deeds of the present Pope that, in changing the current of theological discussion in his church, he has relieved us of a great deal of painful controversial literature by setting the thinkers of his faith at work in the spirit of a profound philosopher who, among other things, was quite as much a gentleman as he was a saint, and who was also quite as fond of thinking, just for thought's own dear sake, as he was of victoriously confounding the infidels. The Catholic philosophizing of a recent generation often wrangled with us, complained of us, and was bitterly controversial. The Catholic thinking of the moment remembers the angelic doctor, who might or might not be convincing, but who always kept his temper, and loved truth precisely as did Aristotle, because it was beautiful to look upon. To think in this fashion is certain to advance the cause of mutual understanding.

Of course, the present book is but an introduction to the Thomistic doctrine, and we must confess that the ethical division seems to us, from the point of view of a scientific criticism, the least impressive and satisfactory portion of the work. Nevertheless, viewed in its limitations, this text-book is still admirable, in so far as it is not, like some other scholastic summaries, a statement of the letter of the master, but reads as something conceived in his spirit. The guarded and more or less distant references to current scientific topics, such as hypnotism, or to the problem of the origin of species, might well have been omitted. After all, it is useless to call upon the angelic doctor concerning matters that were not to be comprehended in his terms. Our authors are very reserved, as it is. Would not entire silence have been better here?

JOSIAH ROYCE.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

AGAINST DOGMA AND FREE WILL, AND FOR WEISMANNISM. By H. Croft Hiller. Second Edition. London: Williams & Norgate, 1893. Pp. xvi., 300.

This volume is one of those intemperate and dogmatic applications of scientific theories which excuse and explain the reluctance