

***The Human Animal.* By Weston LaBarre. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954. Pp. xv + 371, with index. \$6.00.**

Professor LaBarre's book is certainly highly controversial and thought-provoking. In the introduction (p. xii) the author states his position very clearly, in the following words:

This book tries to take a consistently naturalistic view of man, uniting the biological discoveries of physical anthropology with the ethnological discoveries of cultural anthropology. I shall attempt to do this, in addition, in terms consistent with the findings of the most sophisticated and practical psychology available in contemporary times, the psycho-analytical psychology of Freud.

Throughout the book he is indeed consistent in his attempt, and each chapter is an application of Freudian philosophy to diversified data gathered by observation. Although no direct references whatsoever are given whereby one could attempt to evaluate the conclusions presented, this reviewer has no quarrel with the author in his statements of factual information. Common sense strongly inclines one to accept without questioning simple affirmations bearing upon natural phenomena, v. g., the existence of the axolotl, the sexual habits of apes, traditional tribal customs among primitive groups, etc. One should take it for granted that in such matters a writer is not so easily blinded that he will make false assertions *ut in pluribus*, even though slight inaccuracies are practically unavoidable. Neither should the reader, or the reviewer, raise any doubts concerning the author's professional honesty.

LaBarre is quite logical in seeking a *holistic* view of nature, as he says in the introduction: "Our knowledge of the parts has now reached a stage when we can begin to seek a *holistic* understanding of larger wholes" (p. lx). Unfortunately the Freudian philosophy that the author chose is inadequate for such a task. The positions taken by the author are essentially materialistic and imply a complete denial of all non-sensible reality, so that spiritual beings becomes mere words. As a result, there is no point in trying to comment upon particular issues, for a critical evaluation of this book would require a thorough analysis of materialism, and that is impossible in a book review. Materialism, as understood by LaBarre, is a thing of the past.

It should not be construed that materialism is unacceptable because the Church rejects it, as if the Church condemned a system through

arbitrary decisions or to protect traditional opinions. The only way to truth is to be found in an unbiased study of reality. The philosopher should approach reality with an open mind and accept the conclusions. He should not view reality through a preconceived set of ideas. LaBarre should reflect at length upon his own philosophical notions and he might find that his views are not so dogmatically sure as he might be inclined to think.

LaBarre shows a very uncritical mind, and his book contains many statements which are truly unscientific. The following are some of the more obvious examples:

1) His brief comments upon the Aristotelian notions of substance and attribution miss the point completely. He is certainly not familiar with the works of Aristotle (p. 206).

2) His appreciations of Scriptural and theological notions are simply fantastic and grotesque. LaBarre is certainly not a theologian. He has no idea of Revelation, nor of theology, and one wonders whether he is not just trying to travesty Christian dogma. His explanations of the Trinity (p. 296); original sin (p. 294); the fall of the angels (p. 69-70) are simply ridiculous. He should at least have taken the trouble to understand what he intended to reject.

3) The statement that "no morality is an absolute, the safely proven, the caught bird with salt on its tail" is definitely a false principle. He does not even try to prove his statement and expects the reader to accept it without raising any objections.

4) He rejects a teleological concept of the cosmos (p. 28) as being a "fantasy, a fiction" (p. 28, 29), while he holds, without proving it of course, that plants *know* (p. 30). Obviously the term *know* takes on a completely new meaning; if not, I would be very much interested in finding how plants *know*.

There is something disquieting in this book. It has much in common with other books of a semi-popular nature that can not stand the stress of criticism when they are presented as really scientific. They are more readily accepted by the ordinary reader who is not precisely interested in philosophical principles but rather in acquiring general information. Nevertheless, it is unfair to the reader to mislead him into thinking that the materialistic view presented by Freud (or any other philosophy for that matter) is so evident that one should not even go to the trouble

of presenting both sides of the picture. Such books are works of propaganda; they are not scientific nor objective.

The Catholic weekly *America* presented a very critical editorial regarding this book (November 6, 1954, p. 148). A few weeks later LaBarre replied in a letter to the editor (December 4, 1954, p. 288) in which he says: "I have one more favor to ask of you. Can you advise me as to how I might be placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*? Does one have to apply? Or will you fellows take care of that yourselves?" Such nasty remarks are uncalled for and LaBarre has shown a lack of professional courtesy in writing them.

I would like to add that Professor LaBarre's book will not be placed on the Index, even if he filed a formal application to that effect. The Church places on the Index works which have a lasting value and I am inclined to think that by the time the decree from the Holy Office would be ready for publication *The Human Animal* will no longer be circulating. Books of this type would have been popular fifty years ago, when *science* was supposed to solve all the problems of the modern world. Now they are out of style and are not taken seriously. I hope that LaBarre will re-assess his philosophical concepts and search for the truth which is within his reach.

LUCIEN DUFALT, O. M. I.

Oblate College
Natick, Mass.

***Morals and Medicine.* By Joseph Fletcher. Princeton University Press, 1954. Pp. xx + 243, with index. \$4.50.**

Morals and Medicine grew out of the Lowell Lectures, given by the author at Harvard in 1949. In this volume the Rev. Dr. Joseph F. Fletcher, professor of pastoral theology and Christian ethics at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, treats some controverted moral issues of the day, in the light, according to Dr. Karl A. Menninger's foreword, of "our Judaeo-Christian culture." Five problems are allotted a chapter each, with an introductory discussion of human rights in life, health and death and a concluding chapter on personality, nature and human nature.

On the first problem of truth-telling Dr. Fletcher is forthright. He condemns medical lies and "placebos," and insists patients should know the truth about their condition—since the facts belong to them,