

[1961. Review of *Persons in Relation*, by John MacMurray. *Christianity Today* 22 Dec.]

I THINK? I DO?

Persons in Relation, by John Macmurray (Harper, 1961, 235 pp., \$5), is reviewed by Gordon H. Clark, Professor of Philosophy, Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Macmurray's Gifford Lectures of 1954 have been extravagantly praised as the subject of discussion for the next 100 years. Perhaps, however, less enthusiasm and more discrimination would be better.

Granted the author's powerful case against understanding persons as organisms, and society as organic; granted his rejection of "social evolution" in favor of "history"; granted his most interesting points of distinction between a human infant and a baby animal; can one therefore conclude that human beings are distinguished from animals, not by thinking, but by doing? Shall *I think* be replaced by *I do*? A *Facio* without a prior *Cogito*?

The advantage Macmurray sees in *I do* over *I think* lies in the avoidance of solipsism. Now, solipsism may indeed be a *reduction ad absurdum* of any thesis which implies it (p. 17), but does this quite justify the author in prohibiting the question, *How* do we know that there are other persons (p. 77)? This criticism seems pertinent because the author admits that the "original knowledge of the Other, as the correlate of my own activity, is indiscriminated."

By emphasizing *I do* above *I think*, the author is able to conclude that "The validity of theological doctrine, for instance, cannot be determined merely by asking whether it is true. ... Its validity depends also upon the valuation with which it is integrated in action" (pp. 173-174). Valuation, however, is aesthetic, and religion aesthetics is primary — doctrine is secondary and negative.

Admittedly Macmurray qualifies this anti-intellectualism. In distinguishing physical happenings and animal action from human doing, he is forced to take account of thinking and knowing. The *I do* "necessarily includes the *I think*. ... Though presupposes knowledge and knowledge presupposes action and exists only in action." (p. 209). Would it not seem, however, that knowledge presupposes thought and can occur without action? Of course, not without intellectual action, but without physical doing? There seems to be ambiguity in the words doing and action.

In general, the stress on the Other which includes oneself, with the conclusion that “The question whether the world is personal *is* the question whether God exists,” either implies pantheism (which the author denies, p. 223), or a pluralistic world of finite selves. It is hard to discover any aid to Christianity in the argument.

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