

X.—NEW BOOKS

Spinoza. By STUART HAMPSHIRE. Penguin Books, 1951. 2s. 6d.
[Received and mislaid by me in 1952—Ed.]

It is a pleasure to welcome this book both for its own sake and as the first in a new Pelican series.

Mr. Hampshire expounds Spinoza's philosophy in six chapters, adding a short bibliographical preface and an Appendix on the philosopher's life. The treatment is throughout business-like and the style, which occasionally rises to a grave eloquence, is simple. The well-known cruxes are not avoided but they are not fussed over, and the reader is in every case given something he can take hold of. The main argument is concentrated on the contents of the *Ethics* but there is a discerning chapter on the Politics and Religion of the other writings, and the whole is knit together by an excellent summary which underlines the purposiveness of Spinoza's thought: "A rational government requires enlightened and tolerant citizens, just as free men require an enlightened and tolerant government. This is the proposition which the *Theological-Political Treatise* was intended to prove; it is shown as the direct consequence of Spinoza's metaphysical conception of a person as a finite mode of Nature, necessarily seeking his own preservation, and potentially free and happy in so far as he can acquire rational understanding of Nature and of himself" (p. 208).

One great difficulty in the modern study of Spinoza is clearly his vocabulary, and Mr. Hampshire is admirably patient in translating it into our idiom. But he insists throughout that the interest in Spinoza is not historical only. He shows indeed that the moulds of thought which Spinoza framed are adequate to some of the new and often explosive material poured out by science, both "physical" and "mental", from his day to ours. Thus Mr. Hampshire gives an illuminating account of Spinoza's doctrine of Nature in terms of the theory of science (pp. 47 ff.), and of the *conatus* as "exactly the concept which biologists have often demanded as essential to the understanding of organic and living systems" (p. 78). His comparison between Spinoza and Freud (pp. 141-144) is particularly felicitous.

But Spinoza is not only a minor adumbrator of the lines of scientific advance. He is also, alas (*erravit cum Platone*, pp. 12 and 226), the very type of traditional philosopher, and he represents an extreme example of the "extravagant extension of pure reason in its furthest ambition" (p. 226). Here Mr. Hampshire sounds the alarm and bids the student take care, for in his view the questions to which such philosophies as that of Spinoza are offered as the answers are improper since they are without meaning.

That is as may be, but it is a comfort to be told (p. 223) that Spinoza dealt with problems "which in all periods have proposed themselves to reflective people as genuine perplexities", although one wonders whether Mr. Hampshire is right in adding: "the force of the perplexity in each case being that we cannot yet see how they could possibly be answered, by any experimental method". Is it really true that "in each case we are prepared to be convinced, by a careful analysis, that the question asked involves some confusion of thought and of language" (p. 224)? "In

each case”? I doubt it; and if we are not “convinced”, what then? What a curious reversion to the Cartesian rationalism which Mr. Hampshire in its historical setting, so rightly rejects! Mr. Hampshire himself is praiseworthy clear; but perhaps (as Professor Price observed long ago) Clarity is not Enough. There may after all be a place for speculative metaphysics.

The Pelican Philosophy Series of which Mr. Hampshire's *Spinoza* is the first to appear is to include volumes on *Peirce and Pragmatism* (W. B. Gallie), *Butler's Moral Philosophy* (Austin Duncan-Jones), *J. S. Mill* (Karl Britton) and *Locke* (D. J. O'Connor). One can only congratulate the Editor, Professor A. J. Ayer, on his enterprise in discovering some new topics in a well-tilled field, and express the hope that the future volumes of the series published under his direction will maintain the high standard set by the first.

LEON ROTH.

Kant's Ethical Theory. A Commentary on the Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten. By SIR DAVID ROSS. Oxford University Press, 1954 (Geoffrey Cumberlege). Pp. 96. Price 5s.

THE many students, whose acquaintance with philosophical works is and will remain meagre, but who takes courses in Ethics will welcome a simple commentary on Kant's *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*; as, indeed, will those who have to conduct such courses. Sir David Ross offers what is described in the advertisement as “a simple commentary on Kant's book (in which use is, naturally, made of certain of his other works), and a criticism of some of its features”. This, certainly, is just what is needed but the result is disappointing, and perhaps this is inevitable.

Kant's book is extremely obscure; he uses familiar words in somewhat unfamiliar ways, and often claims to be dealing with one problem when in fact he is dealing with two or three. It is, therefore, impossible to write sympathetically about Kant's ethics without very careful study of what he means when he uses a word like ‘inclination’ or ‘end’, and without disentangling the various problems and to some extent reformulating them. Some knowledge of Kant's other critical writings is also necessary, and if, as in this case, this cannot be assumed, explicit reference to them has to be made. In addition, to understand Sir David's commentary, one needs to have read *The Right and the Good*. To those who are armed in these ways it will be interesting to see what the intuitionist reaction to Kant is; but the beginner, for whom, I am taking it, this book is intended, is not armed and is incapable of this kind of interest. Sir David Ross refers to Kant's other works, suggests the restatement of some problems, criticizes and even offers alternative solutions. This is not, however, done systematically or in any detail and the criticism often has a terseness which must leave any reader unfamiliar with philosophical criticism wondering why Sir David thinks Kant a great philosopher. Yet the requirement of simplicity would seem to lead inevitably to this kind of fault. I cannot think that the brief references to, e.g. the *Critique of Pure Reason*, will be intelligible to the uninitiated. Also, the simplification is in certain respects positively harmful. One result, for example, is that Sir David appears to take words and problems at their face value, as it were. He tends to speak as if words had eternal and immutable