

THE LABYRINTH OF LANGUAGE, by M. Black. *Pall Mall Press, 30s.*

The purpose of this book, writes the author (pp. 18-19), is 'to extract, from what is already known and what can plausibly be guessed about language, some productive *concepts* and controversial *issues*. In short, to develop a tentative linguistic perspective, a way of looking at men, their activities, and their relations to each other and to the universe as they perceive it, *sub specie linguae*.' Professor Black gets his perspective by blending certain of the principles and procedures of modern Linguistics with various ideas extracted from the philosophical literature about language. As far as I am aware, this is the first time the disciplines of Linguistics and Philosophy have been brought face to face in an introductory way; and the result here is an extremely illu-

minating book. The linguist will benefit from the concise introduction to philosophers' views about language, and will surely become more aware of the broader implications of his subject; the philosopher will benefit from the terminological precision and awareness of language complexity, which is the keynote of modern linguistics; and the general reader, who knows little of linguistic philosophy, and less of linguistics, will find in this book an extremely lucid exposition of the tangled issues underlying the field as a whole. The relevance of the book to religious studies should be obvious from the topics covered in the various chapters. There is an introductory chapter dealing with such general characteristics of human language as its perception, acquisition, and transmission,

and the central distinctions between language and speech, and between historical and non-historical study. The second chapter, 'language as a patterned system', provides a very clear explanation of the linguistically central (for most scholars) concepts of phonemes, morphemes, and grammar. Further chapters cover the philosophy of grammar, language and thought (where there is a particularly fruitful blend of philosophical, linguistic, and logical ideas), the uses of language, linguistic abuse (e.g. ambiguity, vagueness) and reform, and the meanings of meaning. There is a helpful bibliography.

As one might expect from Professor Black's earlier work, the exposition is characterized by some nicely clarifying analogies and models, which are much needed as far as the presentation of the more abstract linguistic concepts is concerned. Also, language is viewed, as it ought to be, within the context of communication as a whole. The few linguistic criticisms which I have are relatively unimportant in terms of the book's overall aim, but they might be worth mentioning, particularly if someone begins to read more widely in linguistics after this book. For example, in the discussion on phonemes, it is not the case that linguists (with no qualification) recognise four pitch phonemes (p. 25 and fn.): this is a theoretical position, held by a diminishing number of American scholars, which is in fact highly suspect. Also, in the general discussion of views about the phoneme (pp. 27-8), some reference should have been made to current views in generative grammar, where the concept of the phoneme is completely scrapped. Similarly, Chomsky's position ought to have been mentioned, in the discussion of deep and surface grammar on page 35; and indeed, I had expected more attention generally to be paid to the rationalist/

empiricist debate in contemporary linguistics, apart from the rather brief mention on pages 50-1. It is frequently assumed that it is in this area that linguistics has most to say of relevance to the philosopher (cf. the radio discussion between Chomsky and Hampshire a few months ago, reprinted in *The Listener*, 30th May, 1968), though I do not myself agree with this: I would like to have seen Black's views on the matter.

The only important issue in linguistics which Black misrepresents is in his discussion of morphology, which he defines (over-generally) as 'the classification of words (and other linguistic elements) into form-classes' (p. 34), whereas a more usual definition would be 'the study of the elements of word-structure (i.e. morphemes) and their combinatorial properties'—in other words, subsuming the study of affixation, which he takes separately. The only omission of any seriousness (as far as reflecting current trends in linguistics is concerned) is that the sub-fields of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics should have received separate mention somewhere—not for their own sake, but because their fields of study are highly relevant for many of the points which Black wishes to make, e.g. in the chapter on language and thought it would have been useful to see some reference to the evidence provided by language disorders such as aphasia.

Much of this, however, is a question of emphasis, and would hardly affect the newcomer to this subject. By showing clearly how language relates to other fields of inquiry, and by emphasizing the need to avoid constructing a simplistic model of language, Professor Black places the reader on a firm footing throughout and produces a book which will provide an admirable basis for further study.