

Book Reviews

NATURE OF METAPHYSICS

Metaphysics and Common Sense

By A. J. Ayer. Pp. xi+267. (Macmillan: London, November 1969.) 58s.

It is disappointing to discover that this is not a new book by Ayer on metaphysics. It is, in fact, a substantial collection of his essays, from various sources, on a variety of topics. The nature of metaphysics is a recurring theme, however, and the essay which, like the book, is called "Metaphysics and Common Sense" is an extremely interesting discussion of it. The essay shows common sense, but the "Common Sense" of the title is G. E. Moore's. Moore's answer to those who sought to establish the unreality of time was that its reality was far more obvious to him—perhaps in such facts as that some of the events of his life lay in the past—than any premises and inferences which might be used to disprove it. Ayer is sympathetic to Moore's attitude, but rejects it because it implies that philosophy, being forced always to defer to common sense, is confined to the analysis and elucidation of opinions. Philosophical theories do not, Ayer argues, conflict with common sense in the direct way Moore assumed. They conflict only with the theories in which common sense views are embedded and against these theories they may prevail. Ayer makes generous amends to metaphysicians for his strictures in *Language, Truth and Logic*. Speaking of the paradoxical conclusions of Zeno about motion and McTaggart about time, he says: "But the problem for our metaphysicians was that they did not see how these consequences were to be avoided; they did not see what other account of time or motion could be given. And in this they were not so greatly to blame". The problem of the nature of philosophy arises again in the essay, "What Must There Be?". Ayer maintains, characteristically, that such questions as "Do electrons exist?" raise no one problem, but may give expression to a variety of problems about the nature of electrons. His approach here is an eminently successful one.

Ayer's great interest in the philosophy of science is evident in many of the essays, although most of them are general expositions rather than original contributions. In "Man as a Subject for Science" the reader longs for him to slow down and dwell for a while on one of the many problems he raises. The essay called "Chance" is marred, in my opinion, by a failure to distinguish two contentions about the calculus of probabilities: one that its propositions are true *a priori*, the other that they concern probabilities which hold *a priori*. It is possible that the propositions of the calculus of probabilities are *a priori* because they concern relations of implication between probability propositions which are not *a priori*.

Among several critical essays on other philosophers, including Russell, Moore and the existentialists, an especial interest attaches to his assessment of J. L. Austin's book, *Sense and Sensibilia*. For many years

Austin gave, both at Oxford and in the United States, a course of lectures on perception in which he brought his very considerable powers of wit and irony to bear on phenomenalism and particularly on Ayer's presentation of it. Ayer had little opportunity to reply, because the lectures were not published until after Austin's death. Whether this essay vindicates sense-data is a question beyond the scope of this review. Philosophers should not too readily assume that the task is impossible.

JOHN WATLING

WASTE WATER PROBLEMS

Urban Planning Aspects of Water Pollution Control

By Sigurd Grava. Pp. xi+223. (Columbia University Press: New York and London, November 1969.) \$7.50; 67s 6d.

ONE can hardly pick up a newspaper nowadays without finding an article dealing with some aspect of pollution of the environment, for, as the blurb to this book says, the 1960s have seen "a general public awareness" of urban pollution and "the popular press has joined the battle". We can therefore expect that many more authors will be producing books such as this, which, again quoting the blurb, "is intended as a guide and a source of information for urban planners, community decision makers and active citizens".

The book is sponsored by the Institute of Urban Environment at Columbia University, at which the author is assistant professor of urban planning. It is essentially non-technical but contains some technical material. The principal sections of the book deal with the general nature of the problem, with the technology of waste water treatment, with legal and financial implications, with local planning aspects and, finally, with special problems of the developing countries.

The lengthy chapter on technological aspects is a readable and generally correct account of the present situation in regard to sewerage, sewage treatment and reclamation of water from sewage effluent. The only major error, repeated in the glossary, is the reference to the Zimmerman process (now promoted as wet-air oxidation) as a method of sewage treatment—it is, in fact, a method of sludge treatment. Some of the definitions in the glossary itself are not particularly helpful, for example: "Ion exchange: the separation of materials in solution by electrical charge". The chapter on sources and types of pollutants contains an adequate description of the nature and amounts of domestic sewage discharged by a community, but is much less adequate in discussing the problems of industrial wastes. It also contains the following incredible statement: "... any value of BOD above zero indicates pollution, i.e. that state where no free dissolved oxygen is found in the water".

The chapters on administrative, legal and financial aspects refer almost exclusively to the situation in the United States. The difficulties in achieving pollution control by cooperation between municipal authorities are pointed out, as is the desirability of extending control over a wider region—preferably a watershed.

It would be presumptuous to assert that the Old World has all the answers to the pollutional problems of the New; nevertheless, pollution of surface waters became a problem in Britain and in some parts of Europe at least as early as the appearance of similar problems in the more heavily industrialized areas of the United States. Presumably, the author, in proposing such measures as river basin management, regional control, and charging for reception of industrial effluents into municipal sewers, has had regard to the relevant experience of other countries in pollution control. The only reference to European experience, however, is a brief description of the operation of the Ruhrverband, the highly successful water supply