

BIOLOGY AND PERSONALITY. Ed. I. Ramsey. *Blackwell*: 30s.

This book is the outcome of a few days' discussion among a very mixed group of people including biologists, psychologists and philosophers, both christian and agnostic. The papers are very diverse in content and quality, but a certain coherence is given to the book by the full discussions printed after each paper, in which the participants often refer to other papers as well as the one under discussion. Some of the comments appear as footnotes interrupting the text: this is very discourteous to the contributors and extremely irritating for the reader.

I fail to see the value, in this context, of papers on the most recent findings of molecular biology, or the precise effects of particular kinds of brain lesions on behaviour: such information does not throw any new light on the problems under discussion, which include familiar puzzles such as the origin of human characteristics, free will and biological determination, disease and moral responsibility, and the relation between social and moral behaviour: we have known for some time that there is no discontinuity between living and non living matter, and that bodily changes affect behaviour.

However, there is much of value in some of the papers, particularly the discussions on evolutionary ethics by David Lack, J. Maynard Smith and A. M. Quinton. Dr Lack gives a lucid exposition of the problem of human origin, suggesting that 'good' behaviour is not

necessarily co-extensive with social behaviour, and pointing out the difficulty of accounting for the origin of goodness by natural selection when there is evil to be accounted for as well. As a Scientist however he feels obliged to hold that human beings must be entirely explicable in evolutionary terms; and there the conflict remains for him, unresolved, as in his earlier book on evolution.

Maynard Smith sees no difficulty in accounting for the origin of ethical behaviour in evolutionary terms, but rejects the other part of the notion of 'evolutionary ethics', i.e. the view that right conduct is that which furthers evolutionary progress. A. M. Quinton subjects the whole idea to a thorough philosophical analysis at a high level.

Maynard Smith's paper seems to me very valuable also from another point of view: it is an excellent exposition of the standpoint of modern scientific humanism at its best, and sets out the reasons for its objection to what it deems to be the claims of christianity. The greatest weakness of the book is the lack of a contribution from a competent theologian who could have entered the discussion at Maynard Smith's level. Such a theologian might have objected to the concluding paragraph summing up the symposium, which states that religion is an affair of the inner life. Has the author never heard of the Chosen People?

E. WANGERMANN

THE SAMARITANS. Edited and introduced by Chad Varah; *Constable* 18s.;

About six thousand people kill themselves each year in Britain, and probably one in every hundred people has attempted to commit suicide at some time. Professor Erwin Stengel, a contributor to this book, believes that there is an important psychological difference between these two groups and that it is usually the second that will turn to the Samaritans. These figures, and the desperate loneliness they indicate, were the reasons why Chad Varah made his offer of personal help twelve years ago to those tempted to suicide or despair. At that time there were three suicides a day in Greater London, and these were not, as Varah says, just statistics, but desolate people dying miserably in lonely rooms.

There have been charges laid against the Samaritans, querying the usefulness of a non-

medical counselling service staffed by non-professionals; there is a feeling that this sort of work should be left to the psychiatrists and social workers. However, Chad Varah became convinced that there *was* a contribution for non-medical counselling to make. Psychiatric research into suicides had shown that thirty per cent of suicides have had psychiatric treatment, and it is estimated that half as many again ought to have had such treatment. Ignoring the fact that the thirty per cent have died in spite of their treatment, this leaves fifty-five per cent of whom it is true to say that they required some kind of attention other than psychiatric treatment; the forty-five per cent who were psychiatric cases also needed some other kind of ministrations in addition to medical help. Roughly one in eight of the serious