

ing we associate with Rome, that an introductory chapter that defines the term is very necessary. Father Mathew's detailed treatment of twelve centuries of Byzantine art, beginning with the transition from classical art-forms in the third century to the 'creation of a Christian art that conveyed a hidden sacred meaning', is in effect a commentary on the four factors he outlines in the beginning, namely a taste for classical reminiscence, a mathematical approach to beauty, an interest in optics and thus a preoccupation with the function of Light, and, finally, a conviction that the material world is only a shadow of an invisible world that altogether transcends it. The continuity of these standards provides a consistent basis for understanding objects in themselves so diverse as a fourth-century silver disk of the Dance of the Seasons, the mosaic Virgin of Torcello, the church of San Vitale in Ravenna and the fifteenth-century mural painting of the Raising of Lazarus at Mistra.

It is this harmony of interpretative criticism that gives unity to Father Mathew's study, fortified as it constantly is by the wealth of his patristic learning and his first-hand experience as an archaeologist. And his very language has an astonishingly evocative power, as when he writes of the décor of the Byzantine court: 'the blue silk robes tight-girdled, the scented tapering beards, the harsh cosmetic and the great officials holding in their hands the red enamelled apples of their rank'. So, too, his commentary is always deepened by the range of his sympathy as well as by the extent of his learning. Nowhere can the symbolism of the Fish (usually dismissed in simple terms of Greek initial letters) have been so profoundly analysed. And the sudden phrase, the happy analogy, enlightens a whole argument, as when we are reminded that 'an appreciation of Russian ballet is still perhaps the best introduction to Byzantine aesthetics'.

But it is perhaps where Father Mathew draws on his acquaintance with the Greek Fathers that his book takes on dimensions altogether more significant than those of a conventional study in aesthetics. He sees very clearly the unity of the world he describes, so that St Gregory of Nyssa's conception of man as the bridge that links the two worlds in which all Being is divided is a profound commentary on the works of art themselves, evoking as it does the hidden, lasting mystery they so wonderfully image.

PEREGRINE WALKER

**HUMAN ACTS**, an essay in their moral evaluation, by Eric D'Arcy; Oxford University Press; 25s.

**THE CONCEPT OF A PERSON** and other essays, by A. J. Ayer; Macmillan; 30s.

The concept of human action is central to the whole field of moral discourse, but very little work has been done on it from the point of view of ethics, since Bentham, whose utilitarianism demanded an enquiry into the distinction between an act and its consequences, and also into what constitutes the circum-

stances of an act. More recent philosophers have discussed the predicates of moral evaluation or the logical classification of the propositions of moral discourse. The discussion that has taken place about the concept of action has been rather in the field of the philosophy of psychology; the questions of what constitutes an action as the subject of ethical discourse and how such elements as consequences and circumstances affect the description and moral evaluation of an act have been, on the whole, ignored. However in 'Human Acts' Fr D'Arcy is intent on raising these and related questions.

Although he uses Bentham's 'Principles of moral and legal legislation' as a starting point and as a means of limiting what would otherwise be an extremely wide area of enquiry, Fr D'Arcy puts forward no general ethical doctrine as a substitute for Bentham's utilitarianism. His aim, he tells us, 'is rather to look for some of the assumptions about acts and some of the rules for their moral evaluation which are present or implicit in our day-to-day discussion and behaviour'.

The first part of the book is concerned with actions and their consequences. In it the author examines certain assumptions which he takes as generally shared by philosophers of whatever ethical persuasion, about the non-elidable nature of certain act-terms, such that they could not be elided into a description of the consequences of the act itself. The case of the suppression in the account of a given act, of some relevant and important circumstance, is very similar to that of unjustifiable elision of the description of an act and the description of its consequences. This is not to say, of course that an action can only be given one true description. It is a point well made by Professor Hampshire which has been taken and developed by Fr D'Arcy, that there are a number of different ways of answering the question 'What is he doing?', depending upon the context within which the question was asked. He explains the fact that we sometimes do not feel able to elide certain act-terms into descriptions of consequences, by emphasising that the act-terms which are non-elidable describe acts which are 'so significant for human existence, and welfare and happiness, that they must always be taken into account . . . and their presence must be revealed.'

The criteria for judging what is significant are peculiarly subjective. What is significant for one person will not be significant for another. Although we may agree with Fr D'Arcy in his general account of non-elidable act-terms, it seems impossible to make this at all specific while remaining neutral towards particular ethical theories. Even to assume that acts which are significant for human happiness are morally significant, is to judge the issue from a particular ethical standpoint, albeit a common one. However, if we grant Fr D'Arcy that this is a well-nigh universal assumption, it remains notoriously true that what is considered significant for human happiness by one man can be rejected as unimportant by another. The author at this point is caught upon the horns of the dilemma which besets any man who writes on ethics; he must either resign himself to formulating impeccable, but rather empty, distinctions, or descend into the dust of battle and write from a particular bias.

The book as a whole contains much useful material and is written in an attractive, clear style. Fr D'Arcy brings together many of the assumptions about the concept of action which are common among English philosophers, although not always expressly stated, and by using these in the field of ethics, is able to make some valuable distinctions. The chapter on what constitutes an act as intentional, and those on circumstances and motives are generally helpful, and would be even to those who are not professional philosophers, as the problems with which Fr D'Arcy deals are basic to this branch of philosophy, and are lucidly presented.

The collection of nine essays by A. J. Ayer, which passes under the title of 'The Concept of a Person', provides a very good illustration of the breadth of his interests, ranging through problems in the Theory of Mind, the relations between philosophy and language, and treating of questions which have their source in the philosophy of science. These nine essays would be very useful for anyone wishing to know about Ayer's more recent work; four of the essays have not been previously published. Although his approach to philosophical problems has altered somewhat in answer to the current philosophical scene, his basic opinions are for the large part unchanged. Sometimes this can be rather disappointing, as in the essay on 'Truth', at other times it is provocative and stimulating.

IRENE BRENNAN

EDUCATION UNDER PENALTY, by A. C. F. Beales; The Athlone Press; 50s.

At the end of his three-volume 'Reformation in England', Mgr Philip Hughes asked 'where (amidst the post-Reformation changes) is the mind and heart of the ordinary man?' The careful and exhaustive work of Professor Beales in collecting and collating what must be all the known evidence of Catholic education given secretly in England and openly on the continent, from the Reformation until the Rebellion against James II, gives some answers to that question as far as the minds and hearts of ordinary Catholics are concerned. It contains shining gems of heroism, as the story of the Wellington boys refusing to give up the faith after being forcefully removed from their relations after their parents' death to be proselytised (p. 59). It reveals a bright and shining hopefulness, nurtured by evasion and occasional protection from the harsh and penal laws, looking forward to a time of Catholic restoration; and it finds the sparks of hope kept alight in the schools abroad, or in hidden places in this country.

The foundation of Douai in 1568 and the Venerable in 1579 and the Iberian seminaries was followed by the arrival of young students, not all of whom were potential clerics. To meet this need, the Jesuits founded St Omer in 1593; and later the Benedictines, Franciscans and Dominicans founded their schools. The attempt of the government to stop children from going abroad to these colleges, and their ineffectiveness in suppressing clandestine schools and Catholic