

social sciences. It is entitled 'Insights into Obligations to Children', and links theory to practice or, at least, to what theologians advocate with regard to children. An example of this in action is the essay by Riggs on African American children. Here the work and writings of Mary Church Terrell are given prominence in relation to the upbringing and education of children. Another example would be the references to how Rahner's thinking influenced Church teaching on original sin and baptism in post-Vatican II theology. So the book does more than adequate justice to the claim, both in these examples and in the many other ones in each chapter.

In addition to the introduction, seventeen chapters, and indices (including one on scriptural references), the book also contains a bibliography referring to primary and secondary sources. Each chapter is meticulously annotated throughout, so that further investigations on the part of the reader are facilitated rather than hindered. The book is on the whole excellently well-presented and would be useful not just to academics but also to anyone working in fields related to children. I warmly recommend it.

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MADE FOR HAPPINESS, Discovering the Meaning of Life with Aristotle
by Jean Vanier, Translated by Kathryn Spink, *Darton, Longman and Todd*, London, 2001 pp. 288, £8.99 pbk.

The sure mark of a good question, lies not just in the quality of the answer it generates, but in its own durability. Thus, the fundamental questions of our lives and of our world do not finally go away, for our answers are always provisional: each successive generation, pondering the possibilities of its times and circumstances, poses the old questions anew. Of perennial relevance, therefore, is this one asked by Aristotle almost two and a half millennia ago, in Athens: how can we live together happily? Is happiness even possible, and in what might it consist? This new book on his thinking, by Jean Vanier, lucidly presents the answers he arrived at then, and proposes convincingly that they are still of relevance today.

Our own context for addressing the issue of human happiness altered on September 11th. The attacks on America then, and on Afghanistan to the present day, have brought home two naked truths: first, with the distance between normal daily life and death either by terror or stray bombs now shrunk, our global village has acquired a sinister new dimension. Secondly, tolerance alone has proved too wishy-washy an ethic to provide the strong, cohesive foundation our village-society needs in order to undergird the broad cultural diversity that is our chief hallmark.

The author of this book suggests Aristotle may provide some of the answers we are looking for. While Aristotle's thinking has been enjoying a revival in recent years, his usual exponents are—not surprisingly—academic philosophers, who tend to assume a well-developed knowledge base in their readership. What sets this book apart, therefore, is that Vanier makes no assumptions about the reader's background knowledge. Instead, careful explanations of technical terms in lay language ensure that it passes muster

as a beginner's guide to Aristotle's *Ethics*, as your present reviewer is well-placed to judge.

That said, since Jean Vanier is better known for writing on spiritual rather than philosophical themes, he might seem an unlikely champion for Aristotle. But readers need have no worries here, for his own life-story does in fact make him uniquely suited to the task. Before founding the Faith and Light communities, and L'Arche—his home for the past 40 years, shared with many whose gifts are other than intellectual—Vanier completed a doctoral thesis on Aristotle's concept of happiness. Thus, the book is enriched for being the fruit of one wise man's reflections, distilled through the mind, heart and life-experience of another, well used to conveying complex themes in straightforward language.

Vanier briefly recounts the facts of Aristotle's life such as we know them: the son of a 4th century BC physician in the court of Philip of Macedon, he spent about 20 years in Plato's Academy, later setting up his own school in Athens. Drawing chiefly on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, from which he quotes extensively, Vanier outlines the rudiments of Aristotle's thinking.

Aristotle had an optimistic view of humankind, unlike his mentor, for whom the created world was a source of mistrust. Anchoring his philosophy in the observation of life, he deduced that happiness itself must be the ultimate purpose (or "supreme good") for which humanity was made, since all people desire it. He defines it as a joyous activity of one entirely oriented towards that which is nobler and greater than oneself. Thus, although its title might suggest that *Made for Happiness* is akin to the numerous self-help guides on the bookshelf, it is clear that Aristotle advocates neither self-fulfilment nor a superficial quick-fix as the way through. Indeed, he concludes that happiness can only be achieved through life-long struggle to live virtuously.

Finally, two words of caution. First, Aristotle's concept of political correctness was somewhat at variance with our own: were he a contemporary writer, his unquestioning acceptance of slavery and the subordinate place of women in society would rightly put him beyond the pale. However, this should not be the reason for dismissing his *Ethics* out of hand, but rather for setting them in their original context and sifting the wheat from the dross.

Secondly, beware the familiar everyday words used here with a quasi-technical meaning. To follow Aristotle's reasoning, one needs to pay attention to how he uses his terms, e.g. that happiness is an activity, rather than a state.

In short, Vanier has presented the lay reader with a handy introduction to Aristotle, well rendered into fluent English by Kathryn Spink. My only disappointment was the absence of an explicit synthesis with his own Christian belief: after all, without the assistance of Grace, a life of beatitude lies beyond the grasp even of an Aristotle, as Dante recognised in the *Divine Comedy*. That said, if Aristotle is evaluated purely on his own terms, we must ask to what extent, after 2400 years, his reflections on happiness still apply. Jean Vanier, for one believes that Aristotle's *Ethics* could well be part of key that our explosively diverse society is seeking.

JIM CARGIN