

REVIEWS

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CHRISTIAN MORALITY BY J. Fuchs S.J.
Gill & Macmillan, 1983. pp 230.

Josef Fuchs is already known to English readers through two earlier books, *Natural Law* (1965), an impressive introduction to the subject, and *Human Values and Christian Morality* (1970), a number of essays loosely linked by consideration of the effect of the Second Vatican Council on moral theology. This present work is another collection of papers. Date of first publication varies between 1968 and 1980.

As with his previous writings Fuchs centres his discussion on natural law, stressing its ubiquity. So the distinctive contribution of Christianity is held to come not with any new moral insights or divine commands, but in 'Christian intentionality', the sort of conscious motive with which acts are done (e.g. love of God or imitation of Christ). Even love of enemy and the Cross are seen as part of a naturally perceptible morality, the latter's 'overcoming of egoism' being described as 'a basic requirement of authentic being-human'. The passion of his insistence on the universal availability of such moral perceptions cannot fail to impress, but this is hardly a new feature in his writings.

However, some innovatory elements, or at least changes of emphasis, are detectable, along with a greater use of semi-technical terms. Thus, one notes a greater readiness to speak of moral 'categorical' experience as an experience of God, or, as he now puts it, 'in this realm of consciousness the Absolute is present ultimately as the living God'. Secondly, while formerly the precise meaning of 'natural' was left vague and a number of different explanations offered, here a consistent terminology is employed. It is 'basically and substantially a *humanum*, that is, a morality of genuine being-human', in which man's 'primary task as man' is 'to realize himself', though it is a form of self-realisation that necessarily involves the suppression of

egotism. Finally, particularly in Part III, one observes a greater pessimism about determining the actual content of the natural law. Not only are various examples cited of the way in which New Testament and ecclesiastical norms have been culturally conditioned, but also, somewhat surprisingly, the general inference is drawn that 'even that which essentially constitutes man. . . is basically mutable'. But, given such a perspective, his commitment to *epikeia*, adaptability to circumstances, ceases to be strange, as does his liking for Charles Curran's 'theology of compromise'. On his view there just is no escaping the mutability of morals that comes with man's historicity, though he fails to tell us how extensively he thinks this applies.

With Fr Fuchs' general position on natural law I find myself very much in sympathy. The great strength of such a position is that it enables a full dialogue to take place between the Church and secular society. Even his new-found preference for the language of self-realisation can be defended. But, unfortunately, in these articles it is vitiated by a failure to offer any further characterisation. Does it mean, for example, happiness or maximum consistent realisation of potential or fitness for Heaven, or what? It is a question that cannot be ignored in the dialogue. As an illustration of the difficulty one need only reflect that the American psychologist, Abraham Maslow, in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (1973) uses exactly the same terminology but offers as prime examples of such self-realisation, along with Schweitzer and Buber, the names of Mrs Roosevelt and President Truman.

My other main criticism pulls in the opposite direction. Even granted Fuchs' position on natural law, one wonders whether a more positive role could not be given to Revelation and the Church than he allows. For, if determining the content

of the natural law is as difficult as he supposes, is there not something after all to be said for authority in morals? Nor need this be given a specifically religious foundation by appealing to a belief in divine guidance for Bible or Church. Two purely secular considerations can be offered. First, some respect for the past guards us against following too closely the fashions of the age (and the moral fashions of our own

age are as much culturally conditioned as those of any other). Secondly, it can be argued that moral perceptivity is a function of quality of life. If that is so, it cannot be wrong to give at least as much weight to the insights of those of conspicuous sanctity as to our own reflections.

But it is a book that deserves to be widely read and reflected upon.

DAVID BROWN

THE IDEA OF A CRITICAL THEORY. Habermas and the Frankfurt School
by Raymond Geuss. Cambridge University Press, 1981. £10.00 and £3.75.

In the preface to Raymond Geuss' book, the editors of the Modern European Philosophy series published by CUP state that: 'The purpose of this series is to help make contemporary European philosophy intelligible to a wider audience in the English-speaking world, and to suggest its interest and importance in particular to those trained in analytical philosophy'. The work of the Frankfurt School authors in general, and that of Jürgen Habermas in particular, is notoriously difficult to come to terms with even if one has enjoyed the benefits of a 'continental' philosophical education. A clear exposition of the objectives and methods of 'critical theory' for those English-speaking students lacking such a background is thus to be welcomed.

Geuss defines critical theory as 'a reflective theory which gives agents a kind of knowledge inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation'. By critical theory, then Geuss has in mind the work of Freud and of those philosophers who have drawn inspiration from Marx's theory of society. Critical theorists have always claimed that the truth of their analysis of society would be demonstrated by the enlightening and emancipatory consequences of acceptance of their analysis. Geuss is concerned to examine the claims of critical theory to the status of 'knowledge' (*Wissenschaft*) against the background of claims by both proponents and opponents of critical theory that the 'knowledge' offered by critical theory is not strictly comparable with scientific knowledge as understood by empiricists and positivists.

The methods of critical analysis are clearly demonstrated by psychoanalysis.

Only if a patient accepts the truth of the analyst's diagnosis of his condition will he be able to free himself from deep-seated neuroses. The acceptance of the truth of the analysis is thus a precondition of the cure; whilst the cure, in turn, verifies the truth of the analysis. This form of verification is implied by the description of critical theory as a 'reflective' theory.

Whilst it is thus fairly easy to verify or falsify (on its own terms, at any rate) psychoanalysis – either patients get better or they don't – the problems surrounding the notion of a critical theory of society are clearly much greater. The central tenet of a critical theory of society is that human beings fail to perceive true interests as a consequence of the hegemony of an ideology which misinforms them as to the true nature of society. They thus fail to recognise that they are being exploited, and are unable to embark on the kind of political action which would create the kind of society in which they could realise their true interests and lead the good life. Geuss recognises that central to this kind of argument is the idea that we can sensibly speak of the real or true interests as opposed to merely the desires of human beings; and concludes that when we speak of the 'interests' of human beings, what we are in fact doing is attempting to describe the way in which individual human desires could be rationally integrated into a coherent 'good life'.

Geuss then moves on to examine the work of Jürgen Habermas in an attempt to discover whether the notion of a critical theory of society is a valid one. Habermas sees the conditions for the acceptance by