

**DIALOGUE AND TRINITY: Conversations on Counselling between a Doctor and a Priest.** ed. Marcus Lefebure O P. T & T Clark. 1982, pp 98.

**STILL SMALL VOICE.** An Introduction to Pastoral Counselling, by Michael Jacobs. SPCK. 1982. pp x + 182. £3.95.

**LETTING GO: CARING FOR THE DYING AND BEREAVED** by Ian Ainsworth-Smith and Peter Speck. SPCK. 1982. pp xii + 153. £3.95.

**INVISIBLE BARRIERS: Pastoral Care with Physically Disabled People** by Jessie van Dongen-Garrad. SPCK. 1982. pp xii + 156. £3.95.

*Conversations on Counselling* is a difficult book to assess. 'Doctor Gregory' talks weightily about counselling with my colleague Marcus Lefebure as gaddy and, afterwards, as editor. Together they elaborate a systematic view of the stages of the counselling process. Furthermore they try to relate their picture to the stages of prayer. I shall not try to summarise their thesis – there is no substitute for the actual reading of the book. The attempt to construct a unified and unifying picture I find very sympathetic. I doubt if it can succeed! But there is a great deal to be learnt from the trying! This is a courageous book to expose its authors so to scrutiny. The dialogue form is a difficult one to bring off. At times it verges on the precious. There are rather too many German words scattered through the text – translated but still an irritant. It is a book for the experienced therapist or counsellor to read and let it resonate with his or her own experience. The perseverance needed is well worthwhile and very necessary because we are few of us comfortable with such attempts to understand the 'faith' which motivates our work in this field. I welcome its insistence that for the counsellor, his work is part of a way of life – that only a thoroughgoing concern to keep himself in such emotional preparedness will suffice. Anything less is to fail his client. Its authors speak from their experience and deserve an attentive, if strenuous, hearing.

**THE MIRACLE OF THEISM** by J L Mackie, *Oxford University Press*, pp 262 £12.50 and £4.95

This is a challenging and disturbing book. It undertakes a very comprehensive survey of some of the main arguments and stances to be found in religious thought, and especially in Christian apologetics. The presentation of these arguments is

The 'New Library of Pastoral Care' is edited by Derek Blows, Director of the Westminster Pastoral Foundation. It is intended for the pastor, cleric or layman, who works with those to whom faith is important. The aim is to make available insights from the associated fields of e.g. social work, psychotherapy, community development. A welcome enterprise and, to judge from the three volumes to hand, a successful one.

Michael Jacobs in *Still, Small Voice* sets out to write a general introduction to pastoral counselling. Ian Ainsworth-Smith and Peter Speck deal with the care of the dying and the bereaved in *Letting Go*. Both books are sound, balanced, moderate in their opinions, informative. The experienced pastor will learn from them. If I were asked to recommend but a single book on these topics these are the ones I would choose. Both provide good guidance for further reading.

*Invisible Barriers* by Jessie van Dongen-Garrad deals with the pastoral care of the physically disabled. This is a more specialised area of work less familiar to most pastors. I found it helpful and challenging of my own assumptions about the physically disabled. It is a good, objective book. I would have liked a chapter going into some depth about the helper's feelings and reactions when working with disabled people.

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extremely fair and comment upon them, although not always new, marshalls effectively the main objections to theism as it is often presented. As far as the discussion goes, it is difficult not to concede the sceptical case to Mr Mackie. The snag, and

it is a very serious one, is that the view of the subject which would usually be considered the most impressive by adherents to various faiths, and especially Christians, seems to be overlooked altogether; and this is more sad and astonishing since that view has some of its more forcible presentations of late in the work of outstanding Oxford writers of very recent times, such as Austin Farrer, surely a writer to take note of by Oxford writers on the philosophy of religion today, and E L Mascall whose masterly survey of the famous traditional arguments, in what must now be a minor classic, *He Who Is*, ought to be required reading for anyone today who ventures to comment on those arguments. So are recent studies by F C Copleston and C A Campbell. There is indeed one short reference to Campbell's excellent *Selfhood and Godhood*, but only in the context of his defence of free will. The sustained and most impressive defence of the supra-rational element in religion, both in itself and in its relevance to the problem of evil also much discussed in this book, is entirely ignored. So is the same author's *Scepticism and Construction* which one might also regard as a must for anyone setting out to challenge the essential justification of theism today. It is true, as Mackie himself notes, that one cannot hope to do 'justice to all who have made significant contributions to this subject' (p 11). Indeed one of the amazing things in the recent literature in this area is that authors obscure what they have to say themselves, and blunt the force of obvious criticism, by cluttering up their discussion with interminable allusions to all and sundry in the long history of the subject. Mackie is delightfully free of this fault, although he does refer extensively to other writers past and present. His references to them are clear and directly relevant to his purpose. My complaint is that what will seem to many much the most important line in religious apologetics is ignored altogether, even though the writings in question come from the milieu in which Mackie thought out his own views on the subject. This is one of the main ways in which the book is disturbing.

Mackie's treatment of miracles centres

on the familiar difficulty of getting further, at the initial level, than acknowledging something to be astonishing and well beyond the reach of such explanations as are available to us at present. There may be 'unknown circumstances' and 'yet unknown kinds of natural causation' (p 26). It is not made clear whether these include paranormal phenomena, although it would have been interesting to hear more about them in this context. But Mackie seems altogether right in urging that the case to be made for miracles presupposes 'the truth of theism itself'. Granted that, the probability that some events could plausibly be ascribed to the intrusion of 'a supernatural being' or of factors derived from his impact on others, is very much heightened. But this can hardly be the foundation of theism itself. Indeed, some profoundly spiritual people, including Jesus, have warned us not to set the 'marvellous' in the forefront of our case for what we are to believe.

To review Mackie's careful discussion of the Cartesian arguments would take much space. It will certainly be helpful to all who are studying the subject, most of all as a reinforcement of the case against the claim, that natural theology can be built up out of 'premisses and principles which nearly every rational person must accept' (p 63). It does seem that Descartes thought, most of the time, that this is what he was really doing. But it has been pointed out also very often that most that is attractive and plausible in Descartes' account of the subject derives its strength from subtle presuppositions and borrowings that go far beyond that kind of natural theology. What grounds are there, for example, outside the special context of theistic belief and a special interpretation, for supposing that a cause contains the effect – and that this can be applied to what was alleged to be the objective reality of an idea? Mackie rings the changes also on the involvement of the ontological arguments and the cosmological arguments in one another, but he does not consider closely the very vital claim of traditional theism that they both in their way point to something more fundamental which gives us one case where essence and

existence are not distinct.

The crux in these discussions comes in the account of the cosmological argument 'which is *par excellence*' the philosophers' argument for theism' (p 81). The key notion here is rightly taken to be contingency. This is closely combined with the principle of sufficient reason which it is said 'cannot be known *a priori* to be true'. 'Even if, as is possible, we have some innate tendency to look for and expect such symmetries and continuities and regularities, this does not give it an *a priori* guarantee that such can always be found' (p 85). Nothing justifies the 'demand that things be intelligible *through and through*'. It is here that the limitations of Mackie's approach become apparent. For while there are apologists whose thought moves in the way Mackie has in mind, the move from contingency to necessary being is not at all a move from acknowledged finite premisses within the terms of our ordinary thinking, but rather the recognition that the very limitations of such explanation points to some Ground or Ultimate which is not related to the world as items within it are related to one another; this is altogether beyond explanation in the ordinary sense, an ultimate mystery which we have nonetheless to recognise, at the ultimate logical start of religious thinking, as an immediate insight into the impossibility of ultimate fortuitousness. To present this fairly in a few lines is hardly possible, but the force of it, including its unique logical character, might have made a greater impact on Mackie, and on those who think like him, had closer heed been paid to the sort of religious thinkers I have noted earlier.

At one point Mackie does refer to 'the principle that nothing can come out of nothing', but he thinks of this also in the form of 'a gap in the series of impermanent things', and he notes that in this sense we can 'certainly conceive an uncaused beginning to be of an object'. That things could not start up after the gap is not 'an *a priori* truth', it 'requires to be shown'. It certainly would be at the normal level. But then we should not be thinking here of what holds within a finite system of things but of a way in which both the finite and the infinite have to be apprehended to-

gether.

The account of the moral arguments for the existence of God follows familiar lines, and is most illuminating within its limits, but it is singularly unfortunate that Mr Mackie did not relate this more closely to his more sympathetic discussion of Plato's notion of the Form of the Good and the approximation to it, as an alternative to the idea of a personal creator in the recent writings of John Leslie. Much of the thinking we find here is that most impressively presented in the regrettably neglected work of Nicolai Hartmann and in recent work like that of A C Ewing in *Value and Reality*, to which again, alas, very little attention is paid in the fashionable philosophical thinking of today. A great deal in this context to which Mackie is obviously attracted, especially in the notion that value may be creative without a divine person or conscious purpose, echoes thinking which has its place, in a very different form, in the initial and formative stage of the thinking which culminates in proper theism. Necessity and perfection go very closely together in traditional theism from the start, and a careful regard to this, in its affinity with the sense of the irreducible mystery of ultimate being which is so closely bound up with its necessity, might have put the earlier discussion of the traditional arguments in a much fairer perspective.

The sustained discussion of religious experience suffers from the same defects. The main target is taken to be William James, and no one would deny the exceptional value of James' account of the varieties of religious experience in itself. But whether James is the best interpreter of their significance is another matter. There is much reference also to Hume's *The Natural History of Religion*, admittedly also a classic of its kind. But there is no reference to Otto, Bradley, Mansell, Edwyn Bevan and others in the tradition which finds the numinous and the transcendent together at the very core of religious experience. Not many have argued, in the obviously simplistic way, from the claim that we have experience of God to his existence; and 'the appeal to religious experience' is properly made, in the context of

our initial awareness of the being and necessity of God, to account for the fuller mediated knowledge of God in experiences, of disclosure and presence, in which the being of God is throughout a regulative factor. Given this there is a much neglected evidential factor in the claims made in various religions, Christianity among them – a feature of apologetics of which a great deal more should have been made by those who press upon us today the question ‘what could count for or against?’ etc. . .

Mr Mackie’s book is not confined to the more familiar theistic arguments. The account of ‘the argument from consciousness’ is both provocative and illuminating. It is a temptation to comment upon it at length. My own heart warms to the insistence that the element which we find hardest to explain in terms of the ‘physical basis of awareness’ is ‘the possession of an experiential content’. I welcome also the insistence that ‘any theory has to tolerate a certain amount of sheer brute fact’ (p 131). I also fully share Mr Mackie’s difficulties over the attempt of Professor Swinburne to rationalize the case for theism more exhaustively than it allows by the extension of personal explanation, ‘the intentions of the agent’ etc, to all events, thus attempting ‘a reduction of all explanation to personal explanation’. The way to a sensible theism cannot afford the ‘short way’ of seeking to rationalize all that we find in the world around us and in ourselves to that extent. Unhappily Mackie himself hesitates also to take the full force of the ‘brute fact’ feature of the world as we find it and insists, a bit forlornly, that ‘the mind-body gap must be bridged somewhere and somehow’ (p 131), apparently along the lines of the complexities ‘of electro-chemical systems and awareness’. But to seek this kind of explanation, indeed the very demand for an exhaustive explanation, plays directly into the hands of the physicalist, as the recent literature

of the subject amply shows.

The main objection to the argument from consciousness again is that it owes its attractiveness to subtle importations from the cosmological approach. It would have helped here to extend the case to those curious procedures of T H Green and similar idealists who provided a double account of the unity of our experience, firstly as the experience of individuals and again as ‘an order of nature’ sustained by a universal mind.

The discussion of the problem of evil follows the lines made familiar in Mackie’s other writings on the subject. Attention tends to be centred again on the more exhaustively rationalist solutions. The suggestion that moral evil is due to misuse of our freedom is taken, rightly, to involve a genuinely open freedom of choice, the latter being, however, ruled out on the ground that it would require ‘an extra-causal self’ of the operations of which no account is offered. But such an account is in fact one of the main themes of the book to which Mackie refers particularly in examining this view of freedom. The line, on the problem of evil, which derives from the book of Job, extensively considered the most profound and given exceptionally fine presentation by Campbell, receives very short shrift.

The book closes with severe strictures on the notion of religion without belief. We are here ‘struggling helplessly in a bog’ (p 224) and swinging ‘from one alternative to the other, wrapping both in obscurity . . . a symptom not of depth but of incoherence’ (p 226). On these chapters I have no comment but to hope that those, theologians and philosophers alike, who indulge in these fanciful and evasive modes of apologetics will heed very closely indeed every word that Mr Mackie has to say about them.

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**THE CROSS A PASTURE** by John Dalrymple, *Dartman, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1983, pp 114 £2.95*

In present society there is a growing tendency for radical Catholics to steer

clear of devotional practices and for traditional Catholics to hanker after a devo-