

parallel runs of related data; test for correspondences within and between the series with a computer; identify broad structures within the material and possible *conjectures* between processes; apply structuralist functionalist modes of explanation to the resulting shapes. Of course some do better than that. Le Roy Ladurie's piece on climate offers a well-controlled analysis of modern techniques that raises nothing contentious. But others leave a disturbing sense of elision or, in the case of Vilar, no sense at all.

That worry is not trivial. It reflects a friction implicit in the entire *Annaliste* enterprise between what the authors believe themselves to be doing and what they actually do. The theory says that they are not epistemological realists: they are *Constructing the Past*. Yet their practice suggests that they are rather *Reconstructing the Past*. They sink their shafts at regular intervals into their question-led data; but having sunk them they behave as though it is the past itself into which their bit has cut. For all their language of liberation and their sense of breaking new ground, these contributors call up echoes of nineteenth-century positivism with their hopes for a nomothetic *Wertfreiheit*. Instances of 'dilemmas and unease' discovered by Colin Lucas in his introduction to this evocation of the mood of the *Sixième Section* in the 'seventies perhaps derive most essentially from the degree to which these essays sustain the suspicion that a computer-screen, no less than a camera-lens, presents a picture of its controller.

MICHAEL BENTLEY

**PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM**, J. Hick, *Macmillan*, London, 1986. pp. 148. PB. £7.95/HB. £22.50.

**THE EXPERIENCE OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY**, eds. J. Hick & H Askari, *Gower Pub. Co. Ltd.*, Aldershot, 1986, pp. 236. HB. £18.50.

Both books are important contributions to the much discussed question of the relationship between religions. In *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, Professor John Hick has collected together previously published essays (some of them eight years old) defending and developing his thesis that all religions can be viewed as differing, but equally valid, responses to the 'Real' which is experienced both personally and non-personally. In *The Experience of Religious Diversity* a number of distinguished writers explore the resources from within their own religious tradition (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism) to explain and legitimize religious plurality. This latter work is an extremely welcome multi-lateral contribution to what has tended to be a unilaterally Christian debate.

Hick's book, *Problems of Religious Plurality* is an appetizer for his Gifford lectures (1986–7). No doubt, the main course will be as engaging and controversial as this offering. Whether it too will cause a certain amount of philosophical and theological indigestion remains to be seen. Hick deals with a number of issues such as: the epistemological basis for accepting religious plurality (ch 2); explaining the view that all religions can be regarded as equally salvific paths to the 'Real' (chs 3, 7); developing truth criteria to sustain and legitimize this view in the light of conflicting truth claims (chs 5, 6); explaining the significance of Christ within this perspective (ch 4) and exploring the possibility of an after-life which further sustains his pluralist thesis (chs 8, 9).

Although Hick's arguments are lucidly presented, I remain uneasy about a number of issues. Regarding Christology, Hick still thinks that docetism is 'barely distinguishable from the traditional Christian conception of the incarnation'. (p. 54). Hick's position also seems to constantly veer towards a pragmatic agnosticism despite his professed belief in the cognitive veracity of religious language (p. 16). He argues that all religions are valid when they foster the 'transformation of existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness'. (p. 95). Therefore, in writing about conflicting truth claims, the question as to whether Jesus did or did not die on the cross seems unimportant to Hick, who writes that 'we

should all school ourselves to tolerate and live with such disagreements'. (p. 89). Should tolerance imply that beliefs are unimportant, especially such central and decisive beliefs? Furthermore, concerning the question of a personal creator, Hick suggests that an attitude of 'agnosticism' on such questions may help us properly concentrate on the *real issue* of transforming human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness (p. 93). This view presupposes that religious beliefs are totally unrelated to salvation or the ways of life in which they are formed and form.

Hick's presuppositions concerning this Reality-centred criteria emerge when he counters the claim that the value of 'universal human equality and freedom have arisen' from within Christianity. Such values apparently constitute the nature of 'Reality'. He writes: 'These *modern liberal ideas* have indeed first emerged in the West; but they are *essentially secular ideas*'. (p. 85, my emphasis). Whether or not this is true or relevant, it does indicate that in Hick's attempt to accept all religions and, in his refusal to allow one to be considered more legitimate or valid than another, he is forced to adopt some criterion of truth *outside* of the various religious traditions by which to judge them—perhaps 'modern liberal ideas'? Furthermore, in proportion to his disassociating the ways in which beliefs shape action (and vice versa), Hick's analysis becomes increasingly abstract and removed from the ways in which beliefs are held by believers 'ultimately in the assumption that they are substantially true references to the nature of reality'—as he acknowledges elsewhere in the book (p. 16).

*The Experience of Religious Diversity* contains some extremely stimulating essays—the overall thrust being that from within the traditions of the various religions it is possible to view other religions as valid paths to God—or in some cases the Ultimate, or in other cases, Sunyata. Clearly, some of the contributors views of 'Ultimate Reality' differ considerably, such as those of Hasan Askari (Islam), John Cobb (Christianity) and Masao Abe (Zen Buddhism). Nevertheless, a significant view held by nearly all the writers is that while remaining committed adherents to their respective traditions, they are not compelled to claim that their own religion contains the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Given this basic assumption, there are a plurality of views regarding the relation of religions: running from the common core of mystical experience (Askari) to the apparently legitimate recognition of different ultimates operating in different contexts (Cobb). There is also a particularly fascinating debate between Abe and Cobb and although the essays vary in style and sometimes in quality, I would strongly recommend this book to all those interested in the diversity of views about the diversity of religions.

The typological conventions of the latter book are sometimes erratic as is the behaviour of the word processor. Furthermore, the index is often inaccurate as are the internal references in the footnotes as well as the chapter numbers in the 'notes and references' section at the end of the book. For £18.50, this is lamentable.

GAVIN D'COSTA

**ONE WORLD: THE INTERACTION OF SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY** by John Polkinghorne *SPCK, 1986. Pp. 114. £4.50.*

A few years ago, John Polkinghorne resigned his Chair of Mathematical Physics at Cambridge in order to devote himself to the Anglican Ministry, and he is now Vicar of Blean near Canterbury. He is thus exceptionally well-qualified to discuss the interaction of science and theology, and has written this book to defend the thesis that 'they are both exploring aspects of reality. They are capable of mutual interaction which, though at times it is puzzling, can also be fruitful'.

He sets the scene by a brief chapter on the Post-Enlightenment World, and then considers the nature of science. His familiarity with quantum physics enables him to sketch rapidly and surely some of the main strands of modern research, and the interpretations