

has to move odd sentences around in order to restore Paul's chiasmus, and when we are also told that Acts, the Gospel behind the Synoptic Gospels, and John follow the same structural pattern, we are forced to conclude that Fr Bligh has not allowed his ability to conceive hypotheses to be sufficiently checked by self-criticism.

There are wise and interesting discussions scattered through the book, which would have made many a lecture-hour more fascinating and profitable, but I should have welcomed greater brevity, compression, and concentration. The book is beautifully printed.

J. C. O'NEILL

THEOLOGY AND MEANING, A Critique of Metatheological Scepticism, by Raeburne S. Heimbeck. *George Allen and Unwin*, London, 1969, 274 pp. 50s.

DO RELIGIOUS CLAIMS MAKE SENSE?, by Stuart C. Brown. *SCM Press Ltd*, London, 1969, 188 pp. 36s.

THE CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, by H. P. Owen. *The Athlone Press*, London, 1969, pp 341. 80s.

Not only aspects of religion but religion as such has become problematic in modern Western society, and it is for this reason that Fundamental Theology or Philosophical Theology, or whatever you want to call it, has become the most favoured of theological subjects. The dominating publication in this field is doubtless *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by A. Flew and A. MacIntyre. In *Theology and Meaning* R. Heimbeck discusses the arguments of the 'metatheological sceptic's', as he calls them. They deny to God-sentences any cognitive meaning that implies reference to a transcendental reality called God. The author suggests that we see the Sceptic's demand for checkability as a demand for 'evidence' rather than for 'criteria'. A child can know from evidence that its brother is in love without knowing what it is to be in love. It then becomes possible to show that God-statements can and do in fact have entailments and incompatibles, by which they satisfy the

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Do Religious Claims Make Sense?

Stuart C Brown

Non-religious people cannot grasp what it is that religious people believe. This lack of communication is the problem of this essay: the bearing of epistemological issues on religion. 36s

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checkability conditions of verifiability and falsifiability. The author presents his argument with great logical skill, and he makes sure that every possible objection to his thesis is dealt with. It is a useful book for those who are prepared to go into details and who want to make use of the many bibliographical notes.

However, at times the argument becomes so technical and the footnotes so many and so long, that the reader can no longer see the wood for the trees. And I am not sure whether the author himself does. Discussing, for instance, Flew's opinion, he points out that, when the Sceptic allows evil to be evidence against God-statements, he should also admit that the existence of good can be evidence for God-statements. Such remarks, of which there are many other examples, show that Heimbeck has concentrated too much on the details to understand the real point the Sceptic is making. Flew would say: I cannot attach any meaning to any statement concerning an absolute being, for its absoluteness excludes even the possibility of asking questions about its truth. Your attempt to reconcile the existence of evil with God's goodness is only an affirmation of this, for it is precisely the absoluteness of God's goodness which enables you to explain away any possible objection.

God-statements are meaningless because they are statements of absoluteness; basically they don't tell you anything. This is the theme that runs through all the articles of the *New Essays*. It is not an unsuccessful attempt, I must say, to formulate the present crisis in the Christian world, where ministers continue to talk a language that concerns some ideal, heavenly world which seems to have lost its relevance for present-day man. Has religious language any meaning for present-day man?

This is the question Stuart Brown deals with in his book *Do Religious Claims Make Sense?* Actually he speaks about the intelligibility gap between believer and unbeliever, but from the fact that most of the book discusses the opinions of people like Feuerbach, Bultmann, Van Buren, etc., we must conclude that Brown has the unbeliever in the believer in mind. There are seven—not more—possible ways of dealing with this gap: Some say that religious statements are unintelligible for both believers and unbelievers; others would agree with that, but add to it that it is possible to re-interpret them, for instance by reducing them to anthropological statements (Reductionism). Then there are those who believe that religious statements

used to be intelligible, but are no longer so because of conceptual changes which have taken place; others believe that religious view can be re-expressed in such a way that they can once more be understood. The fifth thesis holds that religious claims are neither true nor false but that they merely express a non-factual perspective in which human life may be lived. Finally there are those who maintain that all religious beliefs are superstitions. The author argues that none of these six possibilities is tenable, and so there remains only number seven: religious beliefs are unintelligible to the unbeliever by virtue of his being an unbeliever. The obvious objection to this opinion is that such a view could defend a total separation between religious language and everyday language, which would *ipso facto* make religious language meaningless. But we can say that religious language is, indeed, inconceivable without common language in as much as we learn in religion how human life should be understood ultimately, though this does not mean that the norms of intelligibility of religious language are to be found within common language.

This is, of course, only the outer framework of a very interesting and well-written book. Since it is important for the argument that the author's thesis is the only remaining one after the other six have been rejected, it is perhaps useful to point out that there are a number of interpretations of religious beliefs the author does not seem to have thought of. Jung, Durkheim, and others are unbelievers who claim to understand believers without becoming Reductionists. Epistemologically it is quite acceptable, says Stuart Brown, that people continue to believe even when they notice that others cannot make any sense out of their beliefs. But this does not alter the fact that quite a number of Christians are asking themselves whether their faith has any meaning for them. These may profit from reading Owen's *The Christian Knowledge of God*: a more traditional work in the field of philosophical theology. Owen believes that the Christian faith in God is firmly anchored in reason; not in the sense that we can prove anything about God (an idea repeatedly rejected by the author), but in the sense that it can be demonstrated that if we want to complete our understanding of nature, the theistic postulate of the existence of God is the most reasonable one, better for instance than the monistic postulate. It follows that ultimately our knowledge of God

is intuitive, but the very fact that so many men of outstanding intelligence claim to have such an intuition is, notwithstanding Freud, an argument for the theistic standpoint. Thirdly there is an intrinsic rationality. It can be shown that faith is not self-contradictory.

H. P. Owen tells us that his opinion comes very near to Kant's although there are important differences, but I don't think that Kant would appreciate this. There is a strong Rationalist/Nominalist tendency in the book, which comes out particularly in the chapter on analogy which could have been copied from Cajetan's work on the same subject. The question is: How to link the idea of God with common language? The guiding principle here, the idea of God's infinity or 'via negativa',

works as a correction, imposed upon the rational operation as a sort of after-thought. The point of the sound cosmological argument is precisely that reason is to experience its own limitations as regards the knowledge of God, but for H. P. Owen it is some pre-conceived idea of transcendence that is supposed to bring reason back to its humble proportions, and I cannot think of anything more un-Kantian. Statements like 'The world would cease to be if God's creative power were withdrawn' and 'God could have done otherwise' are just other illustrations of the fact that 'God' is thought of before the world, i.e. before man himself, and, surely, such a presentation of the Christian faith makes it almost too easy a target for atheistic criticism.

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THE MORAL LIFE, by Oliver Johnson. *George Allen and Unwin*, London, 1969, 107 pp. 25s.

RESPECT FOR PERSONS, by R. S. Downie and Elizabeth Telfer. *George Allen and Unwin*, London, 1969, 165 pp. 40s.

THE CHRISTIAN NEW MORALITY, by O. Sydney Barr. *Oxford University Press*, New York, 1969, 118 pp. 42s.

MAKING MORAL DECISIONS, editor D. M. MacKinnon. *S.P.C.K.*, London, 1969, 91 pp. 8s.

'The fear of the Lord, far from being the beginning of wisdom, is the end of morality.' Moral scepticism, long admitted in some philosophical circles, is reflected in theology in the current predicament about natural law and the recourse to types of Intuitionism like Situation Ethics. However, two of these books suggest that some reconstruction is possible, while another points out the pitfalls of Situationism.

Oliver Johnson rejects Intuitionism on account of its logical defects and of subservience to Hume ('One cannot derive an ought from an is') and H. A. Prichard ('An ought can only be derived from another ought'). He pleads for a self-justifying Ought. Each individual has a right to happiness, and each of us has a moral obligation to promote the happiness of all, i.e. in pursuing our own happiness we must not infringe the other's rights. It becomes obvious that this is not Mill writ new. Mr Johnson's scope is huge—the right to happiness belongs to stranger as well as relative, the person living five hundred years hence as well as now. Of course, this is a staggering obligation, and he accepts that for all practical purposes most men must adopt a morality fashioned by their membership of a relatively small circle which allows the mutual waiving of rights while preserving a basic happiness. But he stresses that this is a compromise: ideal and actual may coalesce as the human condition improves. To be fair to Mr Johnson his aim is deliberately

limited, to establish the logical possibility of an ethic of obligation—and, after all, much ethical scepticism is founded on sheer logic. But scepticism is reinforced by psychological and social studies: he must now analyse more fully what he means by 'happiness', otherwise the whole matter is unreal. Nor does his theory really suggest guidance for moral action in a group larger than the circumscribed unit that he describes, though his discussion of discrimination may be the answer here: if discrimination militates against the inalienable right to happiness, however the latter is described, then it can never on any occasion or in any situation be permitted, even if it had religious sanctions.

The equally useful book by R. S. Downie and Elizabeth Telfer elucidates what is meant by the (undoubtedly odd) notion of respect for persons as *ends*. A person as an 'end' is the formal object of the attitude of *agapé*, and this means that he is treated with the 'sympathy' (carefully defined) and respect which one feels as a rational, self-determining and rule-following individual towards one similar. In a sense this complements Johnson's approach, viz. the discussion of discrimination on pages 49f. Even the possession of a minimal personality (problems here?) allows the notion to be extended to the dumb creatures. *Agapé* is well defined but the publishers' blurb that this is a philosophical analysis of the *religious* idea of the supreme worth of the individual is not really