

sanctification is 'an anticipation of the life to come' (p. 51). This is plainly a part of the Christian tradition, and he makes the point: 'it would seem that in principle the argument could be extended to any theistic religion' (p. 59). There is much more here that I am tempted to quote, but there seems no need to give further proof of the book's merits, so I shall confine myself to the one topic on which I find Sherry's conclusions insufficient, that of the Beatific Vision. He speaks of the life to come as 'an embodied existence involving activity and community' and refers to writers like Unamuno, for whom there must be time and change in it, 'for man's highest aspirations are dynamic rather than static' (p. 62). He also writes: 'The relationship between the Beatific Vision and mystical experience may well hold, but we do need to supplement what has been said about it by considering the dimensions of community and of personal growth', distinguishing 'the *experience* of the Beatific Vision' from 'our completeness, healing and purification' (p. 81). I agree with him that, if 'mystical experience' is taken as the clue, there must be development, but the reason for this is not, I think, that it is needed for our 'acquisition of holiness' but that God is inexhaustible (so Gregory of Nyssa). That presupposes a theory of the Beatific Vision as a union with God (in which knowledge and love of him, I suggest, become indistinguishable), not a static awareness but the highest possible human activity, the perfection of man in the ontological sense. Resurrected bodies, on such a view, would be part of the Kingdom's 'new earth' of which the blessed become aware 'in God' just as they become aware 'in God' of those whom they have known and loved on earth (v. Aquinas, ST 1a. 12, 8). The blessed, I would say, are healed and purified immediately *by* this experience, the development of which makes them indefinitely more and more 'complete'. But in any case these are matters only incidental to an admirably presented thesis, which should be of great service.

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GOD, JESUS AND BELIEF by Stewart R. Sutherland. *Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984. Pp. 218. £5.95.*

For someone like myself who shares few of Professor Sutherland's presuppositions this is both a challenging and a difficult book: challenging because his rigorous critique of traditional positions demands a more articulate response; difficult because it is not always easy to comprehend what has led him to espouse his alternative proposal.

His previous book *Atheism and the Rejection of God* might have warned us what was to come. At all events, the problem of suffering is central to his rejection of traditional theism. He believes that there is no adequate answer that philosophy of religion can offer, and, when to this is added the conceptual difficulties of talking of God as a person, whether timeless or temporal, he deems this sufficient to jettison the notion. God has no objective existence; the value of the concept lies simply in giving an alternative perspective to our actions, as *sub specie aeternitatis*. But, if the existence of evil was one of the central concerns of that first book, the religious perceptions of novelists was another, and that also finds its echo here, with the claim that even Dostoevsky had to admit his failure to achieve a plausible portrayal of the triumph of good over evil in his Christ-like figure of Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot*. For that Sutherland believes a more ambiguous figure is required, and that he finds uniquely in Jesus himself. So, though the objective existence of God has been excluded, Christ still finds a central place in the moral scheme of things.

There is a subtlety in his argument, what he himself at one point calls 'contortions and complexities' (p. 98), that means that one is not always quite sure that one has grasped his meaning. Some of his challenges are certainly hard to answer, but the following two criticisms do seem fair.

First, his rejection of all attempts at a solution to the problem of evil in the philosophy of religion ignores two very different roles that need to be assigned to

philosophy and theology in considering the issue of theodicy. From philosophy all that is required is a formal resolution of an apparent logical incompatibility; nothing more. But from theology much more is necessary; not just possibility, but plausibility—something that will comfort people in their suffering. This has traditionally been supplied by pointing to the Cross as God's direct and personal identification with us in our suffering. But Sutherland rejects any such appeal to Revelation, though the adequacy of his grounds are far from proven. There is a brief mention of Troeltsch, but in the only detailed critique he gives he is surely wrong. He claims that the Virgin Birth is ruled out by obvious parallels elsewhere, such as Virgil's fourth *Eclogue*. But classical scholars would now be in general agreement that the poem refers to the birth of a human child in the ordinary way. Even if the virgin Astraea had been intended as the mother, there is still no hint that she would have conceived the child other than through intercourse with Jupiter.

With his own positive view I find it puzzling why one is supposed to need the figure of Christ to engender optimism. Are there not a hundred minor acts of altruism to encourage us on our way? And, if only heroic self-sacrifice will do, again instances are not wanting in modern times. But even more puzzling is the way in which he sometimes explains the significance of Christ in language which makes sense only in terms of the traditions of Christianity which he has rejected. So, for instance, we are told that 'evasive action' was 'ruled out from the start' in 'the weakness of the cradle' (p. 124). But that surely only makes sense if we think of the birth as a significant event in the life of God incarnate. Again, he attaches moral significance to the way in which the Fourth Gospel describes Jesus' approach to the Cross (p. 191). But what significance can this have, unless with St. John you accept the doctrine of the Incarnation?

However, neither of these two criticisms should be taken as implying that the book is not worth reading by those of a very different suasion. Rather, the better we understand such religious atheism the better equipped will we be to show the richness of the alternative. Indeed, as I read the book I could not help but be struck both by the similarities and the differences from his fellow-Scott in the philosophy of religion, Donald MacKinnon. There is the same care for intricacies of argument, the same admiration for Kant, the same preoccupation with suffering, the same enlightenment sought through literature. But then there is this vast difference. It has led the younger man to the edge of disbelief, the older in worship to the foot of the Cross.

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PERSONAL IDENTITY by Sydney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne. *Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984, Pp. 158. £15.00 (paperback £5.50).*

This is one of the first two volumes in Blackwell's new series 'Great Debates in Philosophy'. In it, '(e)ach author contributes a major original essay stating his or her position', and then each comments on the other's view. The aims are 'to provide ... a series of clear accessible and concise introductions' to the issues discussed, and also to bring together 'two outstanding philosophers to throw light on a topic of current controversy'. I doubt whether absolute beginners will find the present volume easy going as an introduction. (For that purpose, John Perry's booklet 'A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality', Indianapolis (1978) is better.) But it is certainly a lively and thought-provoking exchange of views, which will prove very useful indeed in teaching philosophy, particularly as a text for seminar discussion. It is unfortunate for the authors and publisher that the book appeared almost simultaneously with Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* (O.U.P. 1984), a masterpiece which must now be the central text for any treatment of personal identity, and is likely to remain so for a very long time. Although both authors here do discuss Parfit's views as previously published—Shoemaker with a fair measure of agreement, Swinburne with none—the fact that they do not consider the sustained, developed and systematic treatment which

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