

THEOLOGY AND INTELLIGIBILITY, by Michael Durrant. Routledge & Kegan Paul. London and Boston, 1973. 204 pp. £3.75.

This book is another volume in the series *Studies in Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion*, of which various previous volumes have already been reviewed in *New Blackfriars*. The series is fast proving one of the most valuable and interesting ventures in its field for many years, taking in each case some manageable topic and treating it in depth, usually with considerable technical rigour. The present volume is no exception, dealing as it does with two questions only: 1. the proposition that God is the last end of rational creatures, and 2. that God is three persons in one substance. The first is treated with special reference to the first few questions of the *Summa Theologica* Part II the second with special reference to St Augustine's *De Trinitate* V. The second topic is preceded by a lengthy discussion, essential to understanding Augustine, of Aristotle's doctrine of substance.

Durrant's conclusions are negative: the concept of God as the last end of man, and of the Trinity as three persons in one substance both fail to pass essential tests for intelligibility, and must therefore be regarded as void of sense. But the manner and tone of the argument is far from that dismissive, bored flippancy that has come to be expected from linguistic philosophers sitting in unhealthy armchairs in Oxford common rooms. (Mr. Durrant teaches in Cardiff and learnt much of his theology on the edge of the Yorkshire moors, at Mirfield). His arguments are sharp, concentrated, systematic and tough: one might also say inelegant, over-confident, naggingly insistent, completely anti-mandarin.

For this reason, they deserve to be answered, if possible, in the same manner. I'm not sure if my objections to the first thesis are valid or not, but for what they are worth, here they are. First of all, it is necessary for Durrant to show that when Aquinas says such things as 'the end is the principle in human operations' (II, 1, 1 *sed contra*) he is not making a statement of fact, but is merely elucidating the concept of 'end'. But I think it is not as obvious as Durrant would like us to think, that for Aquinas the one excludes the other. Certainly Aquinas is trying to elucidate the concept: but the fact that, as Durrant puts it, 'Aquinas produces nothing which could constitute *evidence* for some empirical thesis' (p. 5) does not mean that such evidence is irrelevant to what Aquinas is doing. On the contrary it seems to me that he is simply appealing to a consensus which he takes for granted as the starting point of his whole en-

quiry. And furthermore, this consensus is a *Christian*, not an Aristotelean one. That is to say, it is a consensus which includes the idea that the 'happiness' which, for Aristotle is man's last end, is to be identified with man's vision of God's essence. And moreover, for philosophical reasons and for religious reasons, it includes the belief that the reality to which the attributes of divinity belongs, is one. Now whether this consensus, which is the background of Aquinas's whole enquiry, is *true* may be irrelevant to the question whether it makes sense to speak of man having a last end, and whether this last end can be identified as God. But it is important when we come to assess the arguments which Durrant mounts against the thesis. For Durrant's most positive conclusion is this: while it can make sense to say 'God is a last end', that 'God is the one and only last end' of man does not make sense. For to say that X is a last end is to say that the question 'For the sake of what are you pursuing X' has here no application. Now while it is reasonable to say, of such a question, that there is *at least* one case in which it has no application, (that is to say, the concept of 'a Last end' is not devoid of sense) it is not reasonable, but nonsensical, to suppose that there is *at most* only one case in which it has no application. Durrant therefore concludes that all we can legitimately say, on Aquinas's principles, is (a) Happiness is one substitution for X which produces a situation where the question has no application, and (b) that God can be identified with happiness (for happiness is of his essence). But this does not, according to Durrant, show that God is man's end in the required sense. I don't see why not. Part of Durrant's reason is his assertion that God cannot be identified with happiness since 'happiness is a state which man can acquire, work towards, strive after, and achieve by his own efforts'—whereas God is not a state at all. (p. 37). Now, I'm not sure if this is itself a conceptual or an empirical statement: but in either case it is open to question. It seems to me that Aquinas's whole outlook (and that of the consensus) is that happiness is obtainable only as a 'by-product' of right living. The man who strives after it directly (i.e. sees it as a state to be directly sought) does not achieve it. Happiness is that which supervenes upon the exercise of virtue. Of course in a subsidiary sense, a man may be happy in the knowledge that he is doing right, but happiness as a last end is *not* something we can attain by our own efforts.

I think this is what lies behind Aquinas's distinction between 'created' and 'uncreated' happiness (in II, Q.III, i.). If this is so then Aquinas is not misusing the distinction between happiness and the possession of happiness as Durrant says he is (p. 31).

Durrant's objections to the formula (and indeed the doctrine) of the Trinity, in the second part of his book, rest on an analysis of the use of the terms 'substance' and 'hypostasis' in the Greek fathers. He tries to show that the Fathers misused the Aristotelean concepts in such a way as to involve themselves in logically illicit manoeuvres. They tend to think of 'substance' as some kind of underlying reality which individuals share, or alternatively as a characteristic which different individuals possess in common, and without this misuse of Aristotle, the Trinitarian formula cannot even 'get off the ground' (Durrant's unfortunate choice of phrase, not mine). Similarly, the formula misuses the concept of 'person' by supposing that the predicate '— is a person' gives a criterion of identity and thus a basis for enumeration, such that it is possible to speak of Father, Son and Holy Ghost as three persons in one and the same substance. Durrant argues that the concept person cannot be so interpreted for the purposes that the theological tradition requires, and that therefore the formula, and indeed the doctrine of the Trinity, is unintelligible. Further, since it is essentially unintelligible, there is no question of 'reinterpreting' it in other terms. You cannot reinterpret something which has no sense in it anyway—for there is nothing to reinterpret.

I have no space, nor indeed competence, to dispute Durrant's arguments in detail here. But one general point can be made about the kind of problem posed by a book of this sort. Where an argument is very intricate and runs against the grain of a long and massively significant tradition, the reader is bound to ask himself the question, which is the more likely, that the whole tradition is wrong or that there is a flaw somewhere in this man's argument?

Thus, if my bank manager produced a set of sums which seemed to prove that I was a millionaire, I would be more inclined to say

that he (or his computer) had gone wrong somewhere, even though I couldn't see exactly where, than to accept his assertion contrary to everything I believe to be the case about my own finances and those of my family. Similarly, I ask myself whether it is really possible that the whole of Christian tradition can be as wrong as Durrant says and in the way he says. Of course, in the abstract there is nothing inherently impossible about such a thought. But we aren't dealing with something merely abstract (though Durrant's treatment might suppose we were), but with something that has been believed and lived by a countless millions of highly intelligent people. Now this argument in no way shows that there is something wrong with Durrant's reasoning: but it is a caution not to jump to hasty conclusions. And it has some force when we look at Durrant's treatment of the objection, raised by Professor Mackinnon, that the argument presented in his book takes no note of the historical context of the questions which the Trinitarian formula was designed to answer. Durrant simply replies that if a proposition is logically unintelligible, there is no need to look outside it to the context, since it cannot be the answer to anything. This seems to me to be dangerously over-confident. After all, in an earlier volume in this series Anthony Kenny attributed a view to Aquinas which a reference to the larger context of Aquinas's thought would have shown to be impossible. (See Professor Geach's review of *The Five Ways in Philosophical Quarterly*, July 1970, pp. 311-2). Similarly, without some analysis of the historical context of the Trinitarian controversies we cannot be sure that the logical fallacies attributed by Durrant to St. Augustine and the rest are in fact there, since we cannot be sure that the conceptual framework in which the fallacies arise is the framework they were using. If historians of ideas can often be accused of shying away from the questions of truth which, in the end, matter most to us, logicians can equally often be accused of only producing logical maps of territories nobody actually inhabits. We need both a sense of logic and a sense of history: neither will suffice without the other.

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THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR MODERN READERS, by D. B. J. Campbell. John Murray, London, 1972. 136 pp. £1.50 (70p paperback).

Miss Campbell has endeavoured to bridge the gap between the Old Testament world and the modern reader by patient and simple explanation. She ranges from the Hebrew view of history and of God, through a discussion of the different literary genres in the Old Testa-

ment, to an item by item account of 'primitive' religious beliefs, Jewish festivals and concepts of sacrifice. The book would be particularly useful for schools and students as it brings together information which must otherwise be extracted piecemeal from Bible