

But while coherence relativism can provide at least some grounds for criticising other moral positions, it also provides good grounds for a certain level of tolerance for different moral convictions; since there are likely to be more than one justified (=coherent, etc) moral view, and it is wrong to impose one's own views on others unless ours are better justified than theirs, tolerance becomes a duty.

This is the link between ethics and political liberalism, to which the second and rather shorter part of the book is devoted. Political liberalism does presuppose some account of which beliefs are reasonably justified and which are not. Any account of reasonable disagreement involves accepting that people may justifiably hold beliefs with which one disagrees. It further entails that people, including myself, may on occasion justifiably hold beliefs which are false.

As one might expect from a book which has grown out of a doctoral thesis, it is argued in considerable detail, and demonstrates a firm grasp of the current state of debate in both ethical and political theory. Long's criticism of views such as those of Rawls, MacIntyre, Barry and Larmore are careful, precise, and fair. It also seems to me that in most cases they are also well aimed, and that Long's case is a very persuasive one indeed.

Perhaps the conclusion, that there is a form of moral relativism which is true, which justifies tolerance, and can properly be used to support political liberalism, is rather less controversial than might at first sight appear. The most extreme form of relativism involves a thesis about the radical incomparability of moralities within different cultures, and this remains open to all the criticisms usually levelled against it. Long has no intention of defending anything of this kind. He assumes that we can recognise views which are quite different from ours as moral views; he argues that there are defensible standards of reasonableness which are strong enough to form a shared basis for criticism, while yet being very different in the assessments they reach about moral issues. The key claim of his 'coherence relativism' is that there is no one uniquely justifiable ethical theory, even though each moral theory might claim to be of universal application. Consider, then, a serious moral dilemma – for instance, how to distribute an inadequate food supply in a camp full of starving refugees. Some analyses of moral dilemmas start from the assumption that in such situations any possible course of action will be wrong, and that any moral theory which allows for the existence of genuine dilemmas will fail to be action-guiding. It might, however, be argued, as the Jesuit casuists of Louvain famously (or notoriously) did, that any action for which a reasonable case can be made out is permissible, even if none of them is either uniquely obligatory, or forbidden. On that view, it would be the case that the moral theory did not generate any uniquely justified course of action. Moreover, it is surely likely that any ethical theory which is sufficiently complex to deal adequately with the complexities of life is *itself* not in every case going to yield a uniquely justifiable view, if by that is meant a view whereby there is just one action which in the circumstances can be morally justified. If that is accepted, it is not simply that Long's coherence relativism is a view about competing moral theories; it would turn out to be a feature of any one moral theory. To that extent, it might not be thought to be relativist at all, as that term is often used.

But that, perhaps, is largely a matter of terminology. Long has produced a detailed and sustained argument on what is surely a central topic of moral and political debate. His book is not always an easy read, but it is a rewarding one, and much to be recommended.

GERARD J HUGHES SJ

DRAWN INTO THE MYSTERY OF JESUS THROUGH THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
by Jean Vanier, *Darton, Longman and Todd*, London, 2004, Pp. 360, £9.95 pbk.

God hears the cry of the poor. Before they speak, therefore, prophets learn to listen: 'Speak Lord, your servant is listening,' is the response *par excellence* to the prophetic

call, for attentiveness to God's voice patterns a mind on Christ. If listening really is at the heart of the prophet's vocation, Jean Vanier fits the job-description well. For 40 full years among those devalued by our society has fine-tuned him to what the Spirit of God may be saying to our age.

His latest book is also to be welcomed as the fruit of a lifetime's listening to Jesus in the Gospel of John. Given that the Fourth Gospel is not exactly short of comments and reflections, readers of this review will want to know why this one is being singled out. To my mind, therefore, what sets it apart is Vanier's rare vantage point: his life-experience has made him a keen witness to 'the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time'. So be prepared for reflections from the sharp end as Vanier lets the Gospel address western society today. This work takes us beyond the traditional comfort zone of academic theology, therefore, and out to the margins of society, in the company of one who has long made his home there.

As the title suggests, it takes time to be 'drawn into the mystery of Jesus'. Such is the nature of friendship. In keeping with this spirit, the book's layout offers plenty of pauses for reflection. The division of each chapter into headlined sections invites slow meditative reading. Each chapter brings fresh, and often surprising insights from Vanier's friends with a learning difficulty. For instance, to illuminate the story of Nicodemus, who secretly visits Jesus under the cloak of darkness, Vanier introduces Antonio, a young man with multiple physical and intellectual needs of every description. The connection might not be obvious, but at the heart of Nicodemus's story lies the question of trust; and Antonio has in abundance what the teacher of Israel lacks. Similarly, the reader learns from – as well as about – Claudia in Honduras, Eric in France, and Sumasundra in India. From virtually every page comes the exultant cry of Jesus that Vanier has made his own: God delights in revealing to his little ones the secrets hidden from the learned.

Although his book celebrates this Gospel truth, Vanier's experience teaches him that suffering 'romanticised' is suffering betrayed. He is quick also to disillusion any who regard community life at L'Arche as a never-ending honeymoon. For some of us, anguish is a frequent visitor. Nevertheless, he still insists that the poor can be counted among today's gifted evangelists and cutting-edge theologians, and that L'Arche is essentially a place where their voice may be heard.

In his radical commitment to the marginalized, Vanier is setting 21st century theology on a course one hopes others will follow. Theology must not walk by on the other side: its task is to kneel down in service of the wounded. Not out of charity, for our condescension is not required, as Vanier here underlines. No, we kneel at the feet of the Antonios of our world because he is a teacher of our hearts: his total trust lays bare the half-heartedness of our own faith; more deeply, he has the power to reveal the controlling fears lying at the back of our disordered priorities.

In proposing a way of dealing with the human crisis, Vanier recalls that the purpose of Jesus's mission is fullness of life. Contrary to the popular advice of the self-help manual, Jesus insists that the path to true fulfilment lies through judgement and suffering: thus, at the moment of truth, it is not just the Roman Governor but his/our values and priorities, which are being judged by the alleged criminal standing before us. Jean Vanier applies the Evangelist's lesson to our own century. Those whom we reject are still revealing the underlying fractures of our society, our disease. When even the most apparently disabled life is invested with a world-enriching purpose, then friendship with the *anawim* is beginning to sound like a pearl of great price.

In line with his thesis, Vanier provides some refreshing insights, Bethzatha, for instance, that gathering-place for the sick, being aptly described as an 'asylum'. He further notes that the house at Bethany is consistently referred to as that of Martha and Mary, and not of their brother. This is puzzling in a patriarchal society, and Vanier speculates that Lazarus was not capable of being the householder. Indeed, was the friend

over whose death Jesus wept himself mentally disabled? This is clearly speculation. But to say that God hears the cry of the poor is fact. To hear what God hears, read this book.

JIM CARGIN

VALUES, EDUCATION AND THE HUMAN WORLD edited by John Haldane, *St Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Imprint Academic, Exeter, 2004, Pp. xiv+274, £14.95 pbk.

This book contains edited versions of the Victor Cook Memorial Lectures delivered in the universities of St. Andrews, London, Cambridge, Aberdeen, Oxford, Glasgow and Leeds. The essays are written for a non-specialist audience so it is accessible to the general educated reader. The subject is considered from a range of perspectives including culture (Anthony Quinton and Anthony O'Hear), the state (Richard Pring and Mary Warnock), religion (Jonathan Sacks and Stewart Sutherland), and science (Mary Midgley and Bryan Appleyard). John Haldane and David Carr provide opening chapters from a philosophical perspective which draw together and provide context for the titles. The title, *Values, Education and the Human World*, gives an indication of the broad scope of the collection and the contributions of the different authors reflect the multidisciplinary theme. Footnotes are occasional and there is a bibliography and index.

The core themes of the book centre on the moral dimension of the purpose of education and contemporary challenges to the nature of education, both in higher education and at school levels. If anything binds the authors philosophically it is that they are realists, promote a values dimension in education, and are concerned about trends away from traditional liberal education and towards a more market-oriented and relativistic one. Some essays explore and challenge dualisms in education, be they vocational and liberal education in Richard Pring's essays, or science and the arts in education in Mary Midgley's and Bryan Appleyard's essays.

John Haldane and David Carr's opening chapters provide a general theoretical framework and explore aspects of values and values education. They raise the key theme of the return to the metaphysical question of value as opposed to the dependence on empiricist traditions. John Haldane argues that the truth of the matter is that not every truth is about matter and David Carr reinforces this point, arguing that educational theories should support the acquisition of qualities for intrinsic motives, rather than configuring itself for extrinsic justification alone.

Anthony Quinton gives an account of the decline of traditional education and the classical canon. Politically correct censorship in libraries, the growth of post moderns, antirealists and anti-rationalists and the presence of gender studies and cultural studies in educational circles undermine the classical canon and the principles of education. His use of the phrase 'sexual deviancy' is likely to cause offence and as such detracts from the point he is making.

Anthony O'Hear makes a case for a return to moral education with Platonic notions of objective goodness and Aristotelian ideas about the acquisition of virtue. Children should be given dispositions towards the virtues before they are encouraged to apply reason to safeguard values from overly critical analysis. In contrast to much contemporary educational theory he maintains that education is the transmission of wisdom and requires a subject-centred approach to learning, rather than a child-centred approach.

Richard Pring identifies different features as the main threats to education. He discusses the failure to steer between vocationalism and traditional liberal education. Both are needed for a balance which gives justice both to the knowledge of the past and to the learners' need to look to their future experience of life and work. His other concern is the increasing commercialization of the language of education which is undermining its values and principles.