

have thought that, in 1971, this emphasis was a little old-fashioned. Similarly, nothing is said about Sartre since *Being and Nothingness*. More serious, I should have thought, is the absence of any discussion of the philosophical and historical significance of contemporary flirtations with Eastern religions. There seem to be attempts to combine a religious atmosphere with an atheistic philosophy, in some of these developments, which surely deserve treatment in a book of this kind. Also one would have liked some discussion of the contemporary Marxist/Maoist world of thought. For a course offered to undergraduates today, some mention of these movements of thought would surely have been very apposite.

The second criticism is that the discussion of individual thinkers takes place without very much recognition of the social, political or cultural contexts in which they worked. But surely one of the lessons that this whole movement of thought has taught us is that it is impossible fully to understand a philosophy in isolation from its context? I am not suggesting that philosophy is merely an epiphenomenon, in the manner of a crude Marxism: but I am suggesting that the connexion between the history of philosophy and the history of civilization in its economic, social, political and cultural aspects cannot be adequately treated in isolation from each other, and that Dr Masterson's summary of post-Cartesian

atheism would have been much richer had he been able to situate it in a whole context of this kind. But this would have made a far larger and perhaps less manageable book.

The final chapter, in which a sketch of a possible theism for the present-day is given, is an honest and courageous attempt to grapple with the problems raised in the historical sections. Briefly, the thought is that the impasse to which existentialism brings us—namely, an heroic assertion of human meanings in a world that in itself has none—is capable of being overcome: but only by a philosophy which not only places all its weight upon the ontological primacy of personality, but in which personality is seen as the ultimate ontological reality underlying the world, instead of finally being—as for existentialism—only a kind of unintelligible accident in the universe. What emerges from this very tentative argument is perhaps best exemplified in the life and thought of Bonhoeffer (whose work is not mentioned in the book). For he is a case of one who considered it 'a more authentic witness to die for freedom, truth, justice and love than to live in acquiescence to the ultimacy of the limitations which encompass (men) as humanly experienced' (p. 163). That acquiescence is the key-note of modern atheism: but it is also its weakest, most dehumanizing feature.

BRIAN WICKER

**EXPLANATION AND MEANING: An Introduction to Philosophy, by Daniel M. Taylor. Cambridge, 1971. £1.75.**

Taylor's book tries to show how philosophical questions arise directly out of quite different disciplines. To do this, he deals with two topics, explanation and meaning, which are central to these disciplines.

The first half of the book attempts to show weaknesses in the explanations, or accounts of explanations, offered by the sciences, psychoanalysis, history and literary criticism. Taylor adopts, as the best account of scientific explanations, Hempel's 'covering-law' model: a scientific explanation takes the form of a syllogism consisting of a law or universal generalization, a statement of facts making up the initial conditions, and a statement of the event which occurred. The strength of this model is that explanations, and theories, are falsifiable by the making and testing of tacit predictions involved in the law-like generalizations.

Chapter 4 introduces 'what-explanations'; these explain an event by redescribing it

(e.g. in the terms of a scientific theory) in such a way as to throw light on it. Explanations in the social sciences, according to Taylor, are what-explanations; they are not scientific because they don't explain why a certain system (which they describe) obtained and operated. Chapter 5 extends what-explanations to explanations in terms of mental states and events ('She's screaming because she is angry'). Such explanations don't describe mental causes of physical events; rather, they put events in a pattern of behaviour, and knowing the pattern we know what is going on. Chapter 6 deals with reason-giving explanations, which show why, for the agent, X was a good thing to do.

Chapters 7 and 8 deal with explanations in history and literary criticism respectively. They are almost entirely negative. Taylor queries the claim that historians can pick out important factors in, or the main causes of, events. Just as a carelessly-tossed cigarette end

is no *more* the cause of a haystack fire than the presence of oxygen or of the rick itself, so the exclusion from politics of the bourgeoisie and *sans-culottes* in 1789 was no more the cause of the French Revolution than the vacillating character of Louis XVI. In literature, critical disputes about explaining the behaviour of characters arise because different critics argue for different (what-explanation) patterns. While agreeing with A. C. Bradley that 'the only way in which a conception of Hamlet's character could be proved true would be to show that this conception *alone* explains all the relevant facts presented in the text' (p. 100), Taylor thinks such proof impossible.

The second half of the book offers a good summary of the philosophical problem of meaning, trotting briskly through the false starts of twentieth-century British philosophy till it arrives at the promised land of Wittgenstein. Taylor discusses and disposes of the causal (ch. 10) and 'Fido'-Fido (ch. 11) theories of meaning (perhaps the best part of the book); and offers his own refined version of meaning as use (chs. 12-15).

Despite his references to Freud and Evans-Pritchard, unusual in such a book, Taylor is a traditional British analytical philosopher. As such he holds firmly to the twin pillars of the pre-eminence of the methodology of the natural sciences, and the dichotomy between fact and evaluation. We are told several times that the social sciences, psychoanalysis and history do not offer 'scientific explanations'. Either this means simply that they don't offer explanations on the same model as the sciences (here, as usual, equated with physics), which is true, but precisely *doesn't* help us to see how they *do* explain; or it is intended to imply that they are somehow unscientific and unobjective because non-conforming, which ignores the fact that each of them has a method proper to its own subject matter. As a result, these disciplines are treated in a manner which sometimes appears derisory. Thus, the supposed weakness of literary criticism and the criticism of behaviour, as offering explanations not susceptible to proof because any hypothesis, any what-explanation pattern, can be made to fit, is a 'weakness' of the natural sciences too. Quine and Ullian, in *The Web of Belief*, point out the desperate shoring up of New-

tonian physics after the Michelson-Morley experiment of 1887, brought to an end only by Einstein's special theory of relativity. And they compare this with the fact that: 'The belief that someone is a selfish scoundrel, once adopted, may be defended in the face of almost anything he is seen to do.' There are, of course, qualities desirable in a hypothesis in any discipline, but the fact that hypotheses in history or literary criticism are not testable in the same way as those of physics does not indicate that they are quite arbitrary, to be held or dropped at one's own whim, as Taylor seems to imply.

So much for the philosophical content of the book; what of its qualities as an introduction? Though the method Taylor adopts is well worth trying, I think it must be said that he fails. In the second half, where he tries to show analytical philosophy in action grappling with questions of meaning, the novice who is not familiar, as Taylor clearly is, with the ins and outs of the relevant literature will sometimes be left unclear as to how certain questions arose, and what the answers offered to them are trying to deal with. More seriously, the first half which is designed to attract the specialist in another discipline will surely fail since, as we have seen, it offers a quite unsatisfactory account of how these disciplines work.

In a book like this, with no footnotes and very few references in the text itself, it is surely necessary to provide a detailed critical bibliography. Someone coming to philosophy for the first time and wanting to follow up some point in the text will be quite incapable of finding his way around the bare list of books given for each section or chapter. Further, the bibliography gives only the first occasion of publication of each article, without reference to any inclusion in later collections (often cheap paperbacks) which are frequently more accessible to students than sets of periodicals. There are in addition some irritating sloppinesses; Austin's *Philosophical Papers* were edited by Urmson, not Urinson, and mention should be made of the co-editor Warnock. A triangle may well be a three-sided plain figure (pp. 162, 164), but it is more often referred to technically as a three-sided plane figure.

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