PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIAN BELIEF by William Charlton, *Sheed and Ward,* London, 1988. pp. 239. £12.50.

The opening words of the book are: 'Christianity is a philosophical religion ... On the one hand it attaches value to being philosophically respectable'. This is true and Charlton tries to show what can be said in defence of traditional Christian belief construed propositionally (p. 22). This defence will not get 'bogged down with' the issue of whether God exists, but will extend its purview to the peculiar Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and Redemption. The book is thus wide-ranging; a harsh critic might suggest Charlton has bitten off rather more than he can chew. I admire the attempt.

As a background to his subsequent discussions, Charlton makes the point that the concepts employed in religious thinking are of the 'psychological kind'. What is needed, he claims, is an understanding of ourselves as responsible, purposive, personal agents. The author goes some way to providing such understanding and furnishes us with fresh insights via the use of models into our understanding of God's relation to the world. In tune with this line of thought Charlton conceives of God's relation to the world as creator, not as that of causal agent, but as that of an intelligent, purposive and responsible agent. He thus has to argue that it is reasonable to hold (a) that there is such an agent; (b) at least and at the most one; (c) that the concept of a non-temporal, non-material personal creator makes sense. His arguments for these theses occupy chapters 2 and 3. In chapter 4 the author faces the questions: 'What is the one God like?', 'Is He aware of us?', 'Does He care about us?'. Christian answers prove 'problematic' for there is disagreement about what, even how, Christ teaches and severe disagreement about how he saves. Broadly speaking Charlton, in some very incisive passages, roundly slaps down objections to the traditional position and admirably defends it. I would refer the reader especially to the defence of Christ's claim to divinity (pp. 101ff.).

Chaper 5, 'Soul, Good and Evil', is perhaps the most important in the book. Having rejected 'immaterial substance' doctrines and (rightly) advocated the definition of 'having a soul' as 'being a conscious purposive agent', he then gives a very careful account of 'reason' and 'purpose'. Acting for a purpose (i) involves desire; (ii) is an essential part of desiring an outcome to effect it. The notions of 'good' and 'evil' are clearly related to those of 'desire' and 'aversion' and so the question arises as to what things are good and evil. Here the argument becomes extremely complex and it is impossible for me to enter into full details in a review of this kind. Our author (initially) distinguishes between two levels of goods and evils: (i) egocentric and social goods (and evils); (ii) interpersonal goods and evils—connected with friendship and enmity. We later have third level goods and evils—goods which are pleasant or enjoyable of themselves but which, importantly, will probably yield one of the first or second level goods. Corresponding to the first and second level goods or goals are first and second level reasons for action. Charlton's abstract formula (p. 115) is helpfully illustrated by an example: 'The presence of a cobra beside my bed is a reason for me not getting out on that side; it is a reason for my friends acting lest I should heedlessly get out on that side'. (ibid.) Later we are introduced to third level reasons but these are introduced against a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028428900026627 Published online by Cambridge University Press

background of what it is to conceive others as persons. Earlier (Ch. 3, p. 63) 'person' has been described as 'conscious purposive agent that can be benefited or harmed' and here the theme is taken up. To be conscious of others as persons is to understand their second level reasons for actions. We become aware of ourselves as persons by taking an interest in others, not by any 'internal sense' *à la* Descartes. We derive from others the idea of a person they would like us to be and in that my behaviour is geared to becoming a certain sort of person I become aware of myself as a purposive agent. A second level reason becomes a third level one when I act in order that I myself may act because of it. The last part of this chapter is devoted to showing that evil behaviour *does* have a lasting effect on the human personality; it is the cancer of the soul. This being so, we have a central element in the Christian concept of 'Sin' and this takes us into a discussion of the Soul and God (Ch. 6).

The Christian view of sin, Charlton says, 'may be summarised in two theses: that evil doing had lasting bad effects on the doer's personality, and that it injures or displeases God'. The first has been established (pp. 120–6); to show the second Charlton illuminatingly compares and contrasts God's creative action with human action for second and third level reasons. He contends that the wicked will be punished in an after life, indeed 'that a person who dies hating God will eventually be blotted out' (p. 134)—by harming themselves—but this supposes (a) that there is an after life; (b) the possibility of an after life. (a) is established by Christ's resurrection and he rightly emphasises that belief in an after life is an integral part of Christian belief. (b) he holds is unprovable; what has to be done is to refute attempts to prove that an after life is impossible. To this end he advocates some clever and sophisticated arguments against the thesis that the identity of a person depends on the identity of his body (pp. 145–50). His answer to the 'old and obvious' arguments so ably presented by Hume is not so clear or convincing. Our author seeks an answer by the consideration that the benefit to us of second level action is independent of our having bodies and at third level action we have creative responsibility for ourselves as persons whereas we do not have creative responsibility for ourselves as causal agents. Indeed I fix my nature as a person by my choice.

In the chapter on 'The Incarnation' (Ch. 8), we have a cogent criticism of Wiles on the view that no single historical episode can have absolute authority. The life of Christ is not a single historical episode anyway and Christians *can* explain the sense in which the life of Christ does have absolute authority. We are presented with a telling outline of God's redemptive plan and once again strong arguments are offered against 'modern' orthodoxy concerning the life of Christ. Our author then turns to more difficult questions, e.g., what it means to say that Christ was the son of God (pp 167ff.). Adoptionism is rejected; orthodoxy defended and we have a highly ingenious account of how we can conceive the relationship between the persons of the Trinity. The final section of this chapter tackles the question of how we are to understand the doctrine that the Word became flesh and that Christ is a single person with two natures. The reader may well be suspicious of the answer to the first; it is to say the least unclear. We are told that 'the Son took flesh from the Virgin Mary in that he took moral responsibility for the causal action ... of the material object

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028428900026627 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which developed in Mary's womb' (p. 181). The answer to the second is clearer: To say that the Son of God and the son of Mary are one and the same person is to say that they are one and the same conscious purposive agent, the same beneficiary of the causal action of Christ's limbs. Since to be a conscious purposive agent on Charlton's view does not entail having a body or being in time, the age old 'paradox' of the Incarnation is on the way to a solution.

How then are we to be saved? This is the subject matter of the regrettably short chapter on 'The Redemption'. I find Charlton's writing here somewhat obscure. The final chapter presents us with some helpful discussion of the Church, Sacraments and human relationships, which are the non-severally independent means to union with God. Some readers will be particularly engulfed by the discussion of the Eucharist (p. 205ff.) and may form the impression that some issues seem to be avoided. More should have been said on the doctrine of Transubstantiation for example.

In the above I have tried to sketch out *some* of the major theses Charlton advocates and the framework in which they are set. The book is difficult and demanding in a number of ways—not least by the author's tendency to get carried away by issues that naturally crop up so that the main thread of the argument is lost to the reader; this is especially so in parts of Chapter 3 and to some extent in Chapter 9. It would have been helpful to have had some short summaries of progress; one is admittedly given on p. 119 after a complex array of sophisticated distinctions is presented, but they are needed elsewhere. We also have some problematic theses; I enlist a few:

(1) that the notion of a non-material, timeless purposive agent is intelligible. It is difficult to actually pin-point the argument for this; it should have been clearly set out in Ch. 3. I *think,* in its crudest form the argument is:

(a) purposes and intentions are not causes;

(b) responsibility for intentional acts does not entail causal responsibility;

(c) only causal responsibility entails bodies and time;

(d) therefore: one can have the concept of an intentional purposive agent (person) without reference to bodies and time.

I concur with (a) and (b) but (c) is suspect. Because intentions are not causes, it does not follow that *only* causal responsibility implies bodies and time.

(2) That we ourselves can decide the sort of people we want to be (cf. p. 153).

(3) That everything needs something else to depend on. The criticism of Mackie (pp. 31—2) is not convincing and indeed obscure in its reference to the 'error of the ontological argument'.

(4) That any argument for the existence of God *must* be cumulative.

(5) That the unpredictable excesses of nature are compatible with a beneficent creator. The argument on p. 39 is thoroughly objectionable as is the later argument on p. 42 concerning pain. It is no answer to the serious problems raised about pain to simply point out that, e.g., human torturers hurt people more than cancer or an abscess. Has Charlton ever nursed a loved one through the last stages of cancer? And again it won't do to simply note that we humans must bear some responsibility for creating unhygienic conditions or leading unhealthy lives;

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028428900026627 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(6) That the natures men and other animals have are consistent with the idea of a wise and benevolent creator (p. 79). The defence of this thesis is vague and somewhat rhetorical.

In spite of the difficulties and objections mentioned, Charlton is to be congratulated on producing a book which reveals pertinent philosophical insight, much acute argument, valuable models, considerable scholarship, a healthy scepticism of attempts to play down strong Christian tradition, some wit spiced with eccentricity and which, above all, is written by a convinced and devout believer. This shines through all the maze of argument.

MICHAEL DURRANT

THE MYTH OF CHRISTIAN UNIQUENESS. TOWARDS A PLURALISTIC THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS. Edited by John Hick & Paul F Knitter. *SCM,* **London, 1987. Pp. 227. £8.50.**

This book marks the growing emergence of a particular attitude towards the world religions. The authors want to signal a crossing of the 'theological Rubicon' away from *exclusivism* (which affirms that only Christians will be saved) or *inclusivism* (which acknowledge salvation outside Christianity, but still hold Christ as normative for, or causative of, salvation). The *pluralists* on the other hand wish to suggest that these two options are unacceptable. Why?

There are *historical, theological* and *ethical* reasons why the old models will not work. The eleven main essays of the book are grouped under three such headings. Three initial essays by Gordon Kaufman, John Hick and Langdon Gilkey together suggest that given the historical-cultural nature of knowledge and belief, Christians are over-stepping the cannons of permissible knowledge in claiming Christianity or Christ to be the 'only' or 'best' or 'truly salvific' means. Kaufman stresses that all theology is part of 'human imaginative creativity' and we cannot thereby promote theological statements to the status of universal truths when they are limited, contextual utterances. Hick argues that any claims to superiority must be based on an 'examination of facts' and the only permissible criterion would be in the promotion of humanity's welfare. Gilkey is far more cautious in recognizing the necessity of evaluation and critical judgement while at the same time acknowledging that no single revelation can be privileged over against others as the criterion by which to judge the others.

If theologies are rightly deemed 'human constructs', surely they are inadequately assessed if they are thereby rendered impotent? Truth claims are inevitably spoken by historically-culturally limited persons, but does the truth or otherwise of what they say thereby become relativised? And what of Hick's criteria: the promotion of humanity's welfare? This suffers from the vagueness of not clearly specifying the criterion by which such a process is to be discerned—thus inevitably leading back to the revelatory shaping events by which such criterion are generated within the various religions. But this is the point where the cat begins to chase its own tail if Gilkey's structures are taken seriously. Is it not imperialist to specify that no religion has the right to utilize its own revelation as a universal norm of judgement and evaluation? It may be more profitable to examine and criticise the way in which Christological and Trinitarian norms can be closed to correction and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028428900026627 Published online by Cambridge University Press