

Meynell's version of classical theism in his chapter on Evil seems to me, within its prescribed limitations, remarkably successful (supposing that any treatment of the problem can be 'successful'). In an earlier chapter he had convincingly argued for a 'libertarian' thesis, by showing that 'the claim that an action is consistent with its agent's character is a great deal weaker than the claim that it is determined by it' (p. 52), and so that many courses of action may be consistent with the character of an agent who makes his character as he goes along. In the chapter on evil, he argues for a hierarchy of types of good and evil, of such a kind that the higher and highest type of good is only accessible to creatures endowed with the freedom in terms of the libertarian thesis, those which, by their failure, can become responsible for evil of various orders. As Dr Meynell makes clear, the Christian claim is that to the good of the highest order there corresponds no evil of an equivalent order. He concludes by acknowledging the incompleteness of his account, which may, I hope, allow me here to refer to a consideration put forward by St Thomas Aquinas and never, so far as I know, brought into discussions of theodicy today. In the *Summa Theologiae* (1a: 25, 6, in the general context of a discussion of God's power) St Thomas asks whether God could make better the things he has made. Without attempting to analyse the whole finely-balanced article, the short answer here

is that he could; that in fact not only is this not the best of all possible worlds, but that the very concept of a best of all possible (finite, created) worlds is incoherent. It seems to me that this helps to relativize in an appropriate way the problem of God and Evil, ultimately by illuminating the fragility of creaturely existence; at any rate, Christians are not committed to a defence of the view that this is the best of all possible worlds, except in respect of those creaturely goods—Christ's humanity, created beatitude, the Blessed Virgin—which have a kind of infinite worth, derived from God's own infinite goodness (ad. 4).

To return finally to one of my initial doubts. Reassured as I am by Dr Meynell's honest and persuasive account of classical theism, that it is not inconsistent with my experience of God and the world—an 'experience' not merely subjective or religious but at least partly reduced to articulate meaning—I still ask why it is that I don't find classical theism a satisfactory way of sustaining and completing the partial meanings of my experience. I wonder why it is that Barth's contradictions, for instance, so clearly exposed by Dr Meynell, still have a kind of fascination; I hope I am not being simply perverse.

Herbert McCabe has no memory of making the statement attributed to him on page 43.

CORNELIUS ERNST, O.P.

ATHEISM AND ALIENATION, by Patrick Masterson. *Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1971. 188 pp. £2.50.*

This book originated, as the author says in his introduction, in a series of lectures for undergraduates studying philosophy. It has both the virtues and vices of its original form. In seven chapters, Dr Masterson outlines the history of a progressive acceptance of atheism among European philosophers from Descartes to Camus. He views this movement of thought sympathetically, in the sense that he recognizes the cogency of the reasons, both philosophical and historical, which underlie it. But he does not wish to be part of it, since—as he tries to show in a final chapter—it is not philosophically necessary or humanly rewarding to do so. There is still, he says, despite Descartes, Kant, Comtian Positivism, Modern Existentialism and the rest, a way of thinking and interpreting experience in which the affirmation of God makes good sense.

Inevitably because of its origins much of the

book consists of summaries of the thought of the various thinkers discussed (see above for the list) together with brief critiques of their inadequacies. The summaries are, on the whole, accurate and useful, though no more so than those to be found in a good many works of this kind. The danger of books like this is that they may encourage students not to read the originals. In a course of lectures, a good deal can be done to ensure that this danger is minimized. When the lectures appear as books the safeguards are removed.

I have two criticisms to make, neither of which should be regarded as damaging to what Dr Masterson says, but only as indicating what seems to me a certain deficiency in the book as it stands. The first is that the ground it covers is too familiar, too academic, and not quite up to date enough. Is it good enough to deal only with the early Marx? I should

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