

adherence to the Church or by the charitableness of their lives—Van Buren is surely dismissing, as of no philosophical account, a whole dimension of religious language. No doubt there is always a huge mass of muddled thinking, superstition, illogicality and even idolatry in the ‘actual consciousness’ (to use the term from Lukacs and Goldmann) of any religious group, or church. But it is simply too easy to dismiss all this as merely the mistake of ‘doctrinal literalists’ in order to concentrate on a little, highly unrepresentative group of ‘educated Christians’ who have (supposedly) seen through the absurdities of such literalism, and arrived at the Church’s ‘potential consciousness’. For if we are to talk about a religion, and its ‘logic’, not about the philosophical/theological views of a small atypical minority, we must begin by accepting the language of those who belong to that religion as a datum. Of course, if the datum is intrinsically and irredeemably wrong, then the religion as a whole is, quite simply, false. But if it is not irredeemably wrong, then we must take it seriously and try to see what it is up to. In this sense, it seems to me, what Van Buren calls ‘doctrinal literalism’ or ‘literal theism’—that is, the belief that the word ‘God’ does refer to a transcendent, personal creator of the world—is basic to the Christian *religion*, even if it is unacceptable to ‘educated Christians’. No doubt a great deal of sophisticated analysis must go into making certain that this belief is not nonsensical: but the analysis must not involve jettisoning the belief itself, for if that

happens then the religion must be judged erroneous, root and branch alike.

No doubt, Van Buren would argue—indeed he does argue—that the ideas about God held by ‘literal theists’ are not of the essence of the Christian gospel: in fact, the non-theistic ideas of his ‘educated Christians’ are, he claims, also those of authentic Christianity. But Van Buren seems to posit far too sharp a distinction between simple-minded theists and sophisticated non-theists. His literalists are straw men: the people he should have confronted are not the tub-thumping fundamentalists, but the theists who have sought to ‘stretch’ language by the theory of analogy.

Nowhere does Van Buren make a clear distinction between two quite different kinds of linguistic ‘stretching’: namely *metaphorical* stretching and *analogical* stretching. It seems to me that had he considered the implications of this most elementary distinction, he would have been able to retain a great deal of his thesis about language without having to jettison the Christian religion, as I think he does, in the process. It is a pity that he had to do so, for what would otherwise have been a very useful, and even searching, examination of the basis of Christian language has been partly spoiled by this over-simplification. Perhaps the book results from too much discussion in the seminar-room and the academic conference-hall, and not enough talk about religion in the public bar or on top of the Clapham omnibus.

BRIAN WICKER

**FROM ANECDOTE TO EXPERIMENT IN PSYCHICAL RESEARCH**, by R. H. Thouless. *Routledge and Kegan Paul*. 198 pp. £3.

This is a reliable, informative and exceptionally lucid guide to a controversial subject. Dr Thouless considers our empirical knowledge of paranormal phenomena to be insufficient to support or to discriminate between the plausibility of theories that have been put forward to explain them and therefore eschews all such speculation. He regards all scientific research as a puzzle-solving activity and parapsychology as presenting a particularly formidable puzzle. Precisely why psi phenomena should be as elusive as they appear to be is just part of that puzzle.

The author selects five outstanding experiments carried out over the last fifty years (two of them in the last five) which suggest that the case for the reality of the existence of

telepathy and clairvoyance is beyond reasonable doubt. The experimental evidence for precognition and psychokinesis he finds to be ‘very strong’ but clearly not as impressive, while that for post-mortem survival is virtually non-existent. It would seem that psychical research offers little reassurance to the seeker of marvels and the firmly entrenched sceptic alike.

Thouless suggests that the main purpose of psychical research is to find out more about the nature of psi phenomena while retaining the attempt to demonstrate the existence of psi as an essential but subsidiary activity. This is a logically sound policy. Acceptance of a fact cannot but accompany understanding of that fact.

The logical credentials of a policy by no means always guarantee successful practice. The patient and meritorious application of the experimental method by parapsychologists indicates, however, that the policy is likely to bear fruit. Pieces of the puzzle are indubitably being disclosed. They point, not toward a simple solution, but to an increasingly complex picture which at the moment exhibits no particular design. The psychological researcher is in the fortunate position of having ever more questions to ask, more points from which to attack.

It is in the sense that there are more problems to be solved rather than fewer that parapsychology may be said to be progressing as a science. For example, one would like to know why ESP is apparently inhibited under a wide variety of conditions. Some of these conditions are, attitude of the subject towards ESP and toward the experimenter, duration of the experiment, alcohol, artistic creativity of the subject (for some ESP tasks but not

others), the personality of the experimenter—the list could be extended. What is important is that experimental techniques are available by which psi inhibition can be detected and to some extent measured. One might also suggest that the ease with which ESP may be suppressed points to ESP as being a rather widespread latent mode of cognition.

I would like to have seen some mention of the recent experimental work with animals and an evaluation of the attempts to find physiological correlates of ESP. These are little-explored topics that are likely to be heavily emphasized in the future. A more extensive treatment of telepathic dream research would also have been welcome. The book remains, however, a splendid critical account of what psychological research is about and how it is conducted. Both the general reader and the scientist familiar with experimental methods will find it of inestimable value.

ROBERT HARVIE

**THE ABSTRACT SOCIETY. A Cultural Analysis of Our Time**, by Anton C. Zijderveld. *Allen Lane The Penguin Press*, London, 1972. £2.75.

The subtitle of this book indicates the author's earnest intent, which is to transcend Weber's insistence on value-free objectivity in the study of society, and recover some of the metaphysical spirit in which both Durkheim and Marx attempted their interpretive understanding. The careful delineation of its own methodological approach does not absolve the book from being almost as abstract as the society it sets itself to interpret. It is hard to see how it could be otherwise: the theoretical model that the sociologist constructs cannot of its nature come to life, and is not in much danger of being taken for reality, except possibly by another sociologist. Indeed, one is left wondering where exactly such an observer is to be located, his role is as problematic in its omnipotence as the nineteenth-century novelist, and, needless to say, considerably less illuminating.

However, many readers will recognize in Zijderveld's diagnosis a genuine expression of the 'social ambiguity' which he designates as our inescapable fate. He describes the present situation as one in which an increasingly abstract and conformist society produces increasing protest in certain individuals. This is expressed by withdrawal to privately meaningful spheres, or to action intended to disrupt the existing structures. The inner world

of total reality and the outer one of total freedom, sought by mystic and revolutionary alike, display a 'Romantic Absolutism' which characterizes most contemporary protest. The developing plurality of society since the Renaissance has brought man into a more and more alienated position, something unknown to all traditional societies, where man is free, because his social reality is meaningful—he *lives* society, modern man *faces* it.

This argument is passed, rather like a torch, from authority to authority, until in the final chapters we come to the remedies. Here, as the author points out, we are presented with the result of what he had put in at the beginning, namely the notion of *homo duplex*, a double being belonging equally to the external world of the collective and to an inner, subjective one. This being is neither Philistine nor Bohemian, neither a member of the new left nor a fascist, all roles which are still tied to the structure. What is he then?

He is Creative Man, and one must grant him some endearing features. He is a professional amateur, he combines play with seriousness and learns to live in society and master its forces by a change of individual consciousness.

The picture cannot fail to appeal to those of us who do not have any certain or radical