

In fact the book could profitably have been much longer. D.Z. Phillips at least, in the brief dismissal of his work as a bad case of theological non-realism, might reasonably complain of getting a rough deal. In the essay which Dr Soskice cites (dating from 1970), he explicitly disengages himself from the view which she blithely attributes to him. Indeed, he goes on to argue that religious beliefs cannot be understood at all unless their relation to such aspects of human existence as birth, death, joy, misery, etc., is taken into account: phenomena which are all intelligible without reference to religion. It is cruel of Dr Soskice, referring us solely to this essay, to accuse him of grounding the use of such terms as 'faith', 'hope', 'prayer', and 'God', by means of the place that each has in a system of religious utterances. This is exactly what he disowns in this essay. Phillips tries to give sense to these terms 'from the bottom up', as she elegantly says; but it is far from clear that the bottom on which he rests is very different from the body of experiences to which, according to the causal theory of reference, we may have access. Her experiences, in comparison with his, may even seem too 'religious'. But this is only a small example of how much there is in this book to discuss.

FERGUS KERR OP

HUMAN RIGHTS, by Henry B. Veatch. *Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge and London. Pp. xi + 268. No price given.*

According to Aquinas, things are good insofar as they are unimpeded in being what they are by nature. Everything seeks to be what it needs to be considered as the kind of thing it is, and its perfection lies in this. So good people are people fulfilled and bad ones are thwarted.

But people are subject to laws through which others tell them what to do and what not to do. So how can one determine what one ought to do? And how can one determine what one should do to others? Are there any standards in terms of which people should live? And do we have claims on other people?

Questions like these have, of course, been haunting philosophers for ages. Veatch, however, has answers to them. More precisely, he has the following conclusions to offer.

(1) Promulgated laws cannot be defended with reference to natural rights existing in a state of nature or with reference to the fact that people have entered into a contract. Nor can they be grounded in a 'desire-ethic' or a 'duty-ethic'. Desire ethics 'cannot claim to be an ethics at all' (p. 29) since 'the mere fact that I desire something, or like it, or want it, is no ground for supposing that I am morally entitled to it, or that I ought to have it, or that it is only right that I should have it' (p. 48). And 'Duty ethics' does not ground obligations in anything we might count as rationally significant. In particular, it does not tell us why we should do what it claims to be our duty (pp. 20ff.). (2) Ethics must be based on facts of nature, and moral laws are natural laws discoverable in facts of nature. (3) People have a natural end, perfection, or *telos* which is discernible in the facts of nature and which consists of 'living wisely and intelligently and thus of cultivating and then exercising the intellectual and moral virtues' (p. 86). Their good lies in this, and their duties and obligations can be discerned with reference to it. 'Just as from experience with trees and their growth and development we come to recognise full growth or flourishing or perfection in the case of trees, so also from our experience with human beings in our everyday life, as well as from history and art and literature, we come to learn what the perfection or full flowering of a human being is, and is by nature' (p. 103). Since good is to be done and evil avoided, 'it follows that the natural end of man that is discoverable by nature is an obligatory end for each and every one of us' (*ibid*). (4) Duties need to be understood with reference to ends, and rights need to be understood in terms of duties which individuals have to themselves. If I ought to do such and such, and if I and others acknowledge this, I can claim that I have a right not to be interfered with or to be forcibly

prevented or deliberately deprived of the necessary means of doing what I and others recognise that I ought to do. So there are rights to life, liberty and property. But there are no 'positive' rights. 'Human beings have natural rights only to the extent that they have prior duties and responsibilities towards themselves, which they could never acquit themselves of unless the necessary means thereof were vouchsafed to them, and needs which they could never put themselves in a position to satisfy' (p. 196). (5) Although a teleological view of nature is not currently popular, it can be defended philosophically. Non-teleological accounts of nature (owing much to the influence of Descartes) are not derived from experience and observation. While they may have their value, they can also be complemented by philosophical reflection conceived of as striving to know the natures of things as they are in themselves. One can describe what takes place and hence derive some knowledge of nature, including a knowledge of teleology in nature. On the basis of this 'one can also come to understand how a natural-law ethic is at once possible and justifiable in terms of such a natural teleology as is an inescapable fact about our natural world' (p. 246).

Positions on ethics which resemble that of Veatch have been subject to criticism which is less acknowledged by Veatch than it might have been. Thus, for example, one cannot dismiss 'desire ethics' simply by saying that it does not count as ethics. It needs to be shown that desires are no good criteria for moral judgement. And an advocate of 'duty ethics' need not necessarily worry about the charge that he cannot say why one should act in accordance with duty. Veatch's worry here seems to stem from a particular view of what it is reasonable to say. But we might well ask who is to decide what is reasonable or unreasonable in these matters. For rational criteria for ethical judgements are not written in the heavens. Veatch finds them written in human nature. But what we find morally significant in that will surely be determined by what we count as a reason in ethics. Veatch would presumably reply that people have a *telos* which can be discovered in nature and which can be appealed to as a criterion of moral judgement. But he does not show that this is so. His account of the human *telos* is vague. And his argument for its moral significance is circular. In telling us what constitutes the human *telos* he appeals to human good. In telling us what human good consists in he appeals to the notion of a human *telos*. As part of a discussion conducted within a given moral tradition, this procedure might pass. But it establishes very little if its aim is to convert us from one tradition to another.

On the other hand, however, Veatch is surely right to say that reasons can be given for acting in certain ways and that these are reasons which refer to what people need in order to be what they can be by nature. One can maintain this thesis even if it may always be rationally denied that the ways in question here are demonstrably better or more desirable than alternatives. In other words (and to use the current jargon) though one might raise typically 'prescriptivist' objections to Veatch's approach to morality, it is no less rational than that of the prescriptivist. And as Veatch, I think, shows, if he is correct in general, then there is warrant for talk about rights. Veatch makes much better sense on rights than many philosophers who have written about them. On his account they simply follow from what we can rationally claim as our needs. They follow, in fact, from natural law. The notion of natural law is notoriously difficult, and one is tempted to dispense with it entirely. But Veatch's treatment of it is congenial and it leaves me satisfied that rational moral judgements can indeed be seen as a recognition of law. If people have a certain nature, then imperatives can be derived from it. Once that is conceded, it seems fair to suggest that practical reasoning is a law-governed activity. For it will need to acknowledge the laws of nature by which people are constrained in acting as they do.

For reasons such as these, then, there is much of value in this book. And there are many other grounds on which it can be commended. Although it is chiefly concerned with the issue of rights, it covers fundamental questions in ethics and does so in a way that will give students of moral philosophy an excellent introduction to the subject as a whole. And

in developing his argument Veatch has some very cogent points to make against writers both classical and contemporary. He is, for example, usefully provocative with respect to Kant. And, to take another instance, he has some thoughtful things to say against authors such as John Finnis (cf. *Fundamentals of Ethics*, Oxford 1983), with whom his views might be compared, but whose final position is shown by Veatch to be subject to embarrassing queries. Readers of Veatch will quickly become annoyed by his style of writing, for, though he is always refreshingly clear, he is far too fond of rhetorical questions. They come thick and fast and they are, quite frankly, tiring. But this is a relatively minor criticism. Veatch has given us an important and lively essay on morality which can be favourably compared with some of the best recent apologies for Aristotelian ethics. It can, for example, be set beside texts like *The Virtues* by P.T. Geach (Cambridge 1977), *After Virtue* by Alasdair MacIntyre (London 1981) and *Ethica Thomistica* by Ralph McInerny (Washington 1982).

BRIAN DAVIES OP

DIVINE PROVIDENCE AND HUMAN SUFFERING, ed. James Walsh, S.J. and P.G. Walsh. *Message of the Father of the Church 17. Michael Glazier Inc., Wilmington, Del., U.S.A.*

This volume belongs to a series in which themes are treated by the selection and presentation of patristic material. A brief introduction and some link passages help to fill out the skeleton of chapter topics under which the passages are arranged. The topics covered are: firstly, Providence and Evil; secondly, Suffering and Christian Growth; thirdly, Vicarious Suffering: Jesus the Suffering Servant; fourthly, Death, the Gateway to Life. An appendix reprints a reflection on the subject by one of the editors, and the rather more lengthy apostolic letter of Pope John Paul II on the Christian Significance of Human Suffering.

The object of such a presentation must be to provide a representative selection of the material, and a coverage of the major themes and ideas in the patristic discussion. The latter task is adequately done by the four themes chosen. However, the proportion of Latin material seems rather too high, and the focus rather too much on the fully developed discussion found in the Western writings of Augustine, his contemporaries and his successors. It is inevitable that the focus will be on material best known to the editors, and other scholars would provide a quite different selection, but it would surely have been more representative if more attention had been paid to the Greek tradition. The selection has given too homogeneous an impression, and has not given sufficient attention to the anvils on which the patristic answers were forged.

The introduction suggests that the Fathers rarely posed our questions about the presence of suffering in the world, and even suggests that they had less experience of 'the incredible violence, genocide, exploitation, famine and the rest which are modern man's constant companions.' This is not born out by the contents of the book, let alone the facts. The whole of the *City of God* is in a sense a work of theodicy, and in wrestling with Manichaeism, Augustine articulated the questions very forcibly (p. 27 & cf. Ps. Dionysius on p. 31). It is true that most patristic writers simply align themselves with the optimism of the ancient philosophical tradition that the world is good and subject to God's providence, but this consensus was the result of the prolonged battle with gnosticism. For gnostics the questions of theodicy were so serious that they could only conclude that the world was the creation of a fallen demiurge, and Christian apocalypticism was itself dualistic, regarding the world as subject to the devil rather than God. Let us never forget that sickness, death and hardship were far nearer home in the ancient world than they are for us in the affluent West today. We are cushioned from reality in a way the ancients were not, and far less aware of our mortality. Had more attention been paid to the debates with dualism and fatalism, both key issues in patristic apologetics, the impression given would be less