

PURE LUST : ELEMENTAL FEMINIST PHILOSOPHY, by Mary Daly. Beacon Press, Boston, USA, 1984. \$18.95.

Mary Daly's latest book can be read on two different levels. On one level, it is a very profound and often brilliant analysis of the system of cultural oppression and deception which has turned much of civilization into a tale of murder, leading perhaps to the final annihilation of the planet earth.

It is a plea to strip off this system of deception which masks policies of destruction, as if they promoted peace, justice and the will of God, and to reclaim our authentic roots in earth, air, fire and water as the elemental powers that underlie our existence. It is a search for an authentic base in biophilic values and modes of life from which to rescue the earth and its many beings from its threatened destruction by human (mostly male) civilization.

Read on a second level, however, the book is narrow-minded and isolated from fellow humans of various traditions who are seeking to travel the same path as herself. Mary Daly's basic mistake is that she has arrived at a position where she has confused the system of sin and evil with the humanity of males.

If one were to summarize the anthropology of this book, it would go something like this. The only authentic persons connected with real life are radical feminist women of Daly's perspective. Such female persons naturally reproduce parthenogenetically and have only daughters. The first lie and deception of male culture is the myth that natural human reproduction is bisexual. All males are spurious, demonic non-persons.

From these male non-persons there has emitted a vast anti-cosmos of noxious vapors that is co-terminous with historical culture, the purpose of which is to reverse parthenogenetic aboriginal female culture and turn it into its opposite; i.e., necrophilic rather than biophilic existence. Most females have thereby also been drained of their authentic life and turned into "fembots" who mindlessly do the bidding of diabolical males. Daly does admit some glimmers of truth in some male culture, particularly Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Tillich. But this is only because such male culture preserves in spite of itself, glimmers of the aboriginal parthenogenetic female culture from which all true ideas were stolen and then reversed by the male devils.

The Bible she dismisses out of hand as a possible source for feminism, not even granting it the redeeming grace of some remnants of earlier goddess culture.

Thus when St Paul speaks of the new life in Christ against the "elementary spirits", she assumes that he is engaging in a war against the real life of embodied existence. The possibility that he too might have engaged in a quest not unlike her own of trying to strip off the masks of cultural and systematic evil which has turned human life into anti-life, and it is *this* which he identifies with the "elementary spirits" and the "powers and principalities", is not even considered.

He may have gotten it wrong in confusing this system of lies and oppression with the material elements of the universe, but then she has also gotten it wrong in confusing this system of lies with male humanity. Both miss that comprehensive humanism that is able to dispel the lies without dismissing an aspect of our good humanity in the process.

Daly's false anthropology results in a dismissing of the humanity not only of all males, but of all non-feminist women, of all religious feminists who still identify with Christianity, Judaism, Islam or other "patriarchal religions", and of all radical feminists who have ever criticized Mary Daly.

This appears to have left her with a small circle of female friends and two female cats as "familiaris". She talks a lot about "horizontal violence"; i.e., criticisms of women by women, which she takes to be the ultimate complicity of females in a male system of assault on women. But she identifies horizontal violence only with what some feminist women have done to her, never what she does to other feminists.

I recommend that one read this book on this second level cursorily, not taking too

seriously Daly's hostility to and dehumanization of other people. This direction of her spirit should be looked on with sorrow and pity, rather than anger. It should be recognised as a mindset of one who has sojourned too long in the realms of negativity, and not as a "radicalism" to be admired or imitated.

However, I recommend that the first level of the book be read carefully and with the utmost seriousness. On this level Daly has much to tell us about radical evil, about the systems of deception that justify violence, terror and destruction of life. She is undoubtedly correct when she begins by saying that this book appears in the 1980s, a time of extreme danger for women (and, I would add, for men as well) and for the earth and all her creatures who stand in danger of annihilation by nuclear bombs, chemical contamination, hunger and disease, all of which "proliferate in a climate of deception and mind-rot".

ROSEMARY RADFORD RUETHER

EXPERIENCE, EXPLANATION AND FAITH: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION, by Anthony O'Hear. *Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.* Pp. xiii + 266. £6.95.

Although this lucidly written and (for traditional theists) challenging book is an introduction in the sense that it covers most of the topics relevant to the philosophy of religion, it is not so in the sense that it can be recommended as an introductory book for students (alongside such books by H.D. Lewis, John Hick and Brian Davies). However, it certainly deserves consideration by those who specialize in the philosophy of religion. There are six chapters on faith and religious life, religious experience, religion and morality, religious explanations, suffering and evil, religion and the rational man. Particular attention should be paid to what O'Hear says about the differences between religious and sensory experience, to his critique of natural theology and to his remarks on evil. His thesis (as summarized at the end of his introduction and expanded in his last chapter) is the negatively bold one that religious beliefs are not rationally acceptable; that faith derives its strength largely from its inbuilt tendency to uncritical dogmatism; and that therefore rational men should look beyond religion for the fulfilment of their spiritual needs. I do not find O'Hear's presentation of the thesis convincing. On the contrary some of his statements tell in favour of theism's rational defensibility. Nevertheless the thesis (in this or in any other form) requires examination by Christian philosophers.

H.P. OWEN

WHY BELIEVE IN GOD? by Peter Lee. *Beckett Publications. Oxford, 1984.* Pp.79. £2.50.

There are many arguments for the existence of God, and plenty of literature about them. But it is hard to find a short and cogent defence of belief in God suitable for those who cannot or will not wade through the technical treatments of it. This book therefore fulfils a real need, for it is direct and easy to read as well as sensible. Lee bases his case for God on simple statements of the cosmological argument and the argument from design. Subsequently, he deals with topics such as morality, religious experience, God and beauty, God and history, Christianity and world religions, and the problem of evil. There is nothing particularly original in what Lee says, and there is plenty in the text with which one could take issue or ask to be developed. But the general approach seems to me a reasonable one. It is presented in a popular manner, but it shows signs of philosophical sophistication. The proverbial layman should find the book very useful, but so should many others. In terms of scope and rhetoric it cannot compare with the work of writers like Küng. But in terms of conciseness such writers cannot compare with Lee, who in this book shows how important matters can still be considered in a way that is both unpretentious and to the point.

BRIAN DAVIES OP