

HISTORY, ETHICS AND EMERGENT PROBABILITY by Kenneth R. Melchin.
Lanham, Maryland. *University of America Press*. 1987. Pp xiv + 281.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is being forced on us by the great moral crises of the present day; yet there is no agreement on the right basic framework upon which to mount such collaboration. How are we to proceed in order to discover moral criteria for the guidance of society? How are we to relate scientific discoveries to the direction of economic, social and political life? The author is convinced that the problem of ethical foundations is connected with that of collaboration between disciplines. It is often said that ethics differs in kind from other inquiries; but rather less often does anyone make a suggestion as to exactly *what* kind of difference this is.

The author hopes to traverse this quagmire of intellectual problems by the use of Lonergan's conception of emergent probability. He remarks, and I believe rightly, that expositors of Lonergan have given insufficient attention to the connection between what this writer has to say about emergent probability on the one hand, and his work on ethics and the structure of history on the other. The book begins with a sketch of a number of conceptions of the nature of social ethics, relating them to the world-views with which they are associated. The second chapter further sets the scene for discussion of Lonergan's thought by treating the ideas of determinism, chance, and the roles of religion and tradition as they appear in the works of Immanuel Kant and Jacques Monod. So much by way of introduction; after an exposition of Lonergan's notion of emergent probability in chapters three and four, the author applies it to a consideration of practical and moral action, and to the philosophy of history. Chapter seven attempts an outline of the structure of historical development, and introduces the problem of historical evil. An epilogue draws the whole discussion together.

The style is not particularly graceful; but it is worth persevering with, given the importance of the problems with which the author is concerned, and the intelligence and resource with which he approaches them.

HUGO MEYNELL

MEISTER ECKHART — THE MAN FROM WHOM GOD HID NOTHING edited by Ursula Fleming. *Collins (Fount)*, London. 1988. Pp. 160. £2.95 Pb.

Ursula Fleming's recent anthology of citations from the German sermons and treatises of Meister Eckhart ostensibly represents a labour of love. She came to know Eckhart in 1951 from the two-volume 1924/1931 translation by Miss C. de B. Evans of Franz Pfeiffer's 1857 edition of Eckhart's German works. Understandably, she prefers the Evans translation and chose to utilize it even though her decision could 'rouse the ire of some academics'. But her anthology, she forewarns any rampant Eckhart scholars, is not meant for them or for 'the hippy fringe in the States who have adopted Eckhart as some sort of mystic guru'. It is meant, rather, for 'ordinary, intelligent people whose wish is to strengthen their knowledge of the Christian faith and to discover the truth ...' (pp. 13—14).

Such pre-emptive apologetics will not, I fear, quell the ire of academics or even ease the angst of the 'hippies' in the States (whose fringe is quite grey by now, but not from reading Eckhart, who has been adopted as a mystic guru mainly by New Age Christians not very unlike Ms. Fleming in her 1951 period). The ire at stake will rise not from dissatisfaction over Evans' poetic style, or even her occasionally wooden style, nor perhaps because of inaccuracies in translation, which in Evans' case were much fewer than in Blakney's 1941 edition still being promoted by Harper and Row. Rather, the scholars' dismay will stem from the use of a dated translation which, because it lacks the context of another seventy years of careful textual scrutiny and interpretation, can be misleading philosophically, theologically, and spiritually. To retreat to an inevitably inadequate presentation of Eckhart's teaching,
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given the excellent translations available by Maurice Walshe, Edmund College, Bernard McGinn, Frank Tobin, and Reiner Schürmann, ignores the results of real progress in understanding the Meister's doctrine.

Even so, the regression would have been misleading had Ms. Fleming succeeded in her intention to avoid 'quoting from pieces which M. O'C. Walshe' in his three-volume translation of Eckhart's German works (Element Books, 1987) 'states are not truly by Eckhart' (p. 13). For included are at least fifteen citations from sermons Professor Walshe considered doubtful enough to find substitutes for—those marked as being taken from pages 39–41, 146–49, 169–171, and 196–198 among them.

The damage to the strength of faith and knowledge of truth of Ms. Fleming's ordinary, intelligent readers should be slight, however; the disputed passages sound sufficiently like Eckhart to represent his doctrine. They were undoubtedly meant to, and are probably by his students. But they still sound a bit strange and tend to obscure Eckhart's point, e.g., 'God dwells in the nothing-at-all that was prior to nothing, in the hidden Godhead of pure gnosis whereof no man durst speak' (p. 135).

It was mildly disconcerting to find Eckhart once again rechristened 'Johannes' on p. 14, more than a generation since Josef Koch demonstrated the error of that peculiar conceit. His name was simply Eckhart. With luck, Ms. Fleming's book will be the last to perpetuate the mistake.

Apart from any unintentional ire detected in the previous remarks, I hope that this small anthology will in fact introduce a new generation of ordinary readers to Eckhart, whose teaching has much to offer ordinary, intelligent people as well as academics and hippies. To that end, Ms. Fleming has prefaced her anthology with an adequate introduction containing the outline of his career as a Dominican friar as well as a short report on the commission to 'rehabilitate' Eckhart established in 1983 by the Dominican Order, partly because of her own efforts. There is also a brief glossary of terms found in Eckhart's writings. These are, however, less definitions in any strict sense than descriptive remarks which the Meister was quite happy to contradict in other places. The citations themselves are arranged in a loose order according to a thematic structure based on some of Eckhart's characteristic preoccupations—God; Method (in approaching God); the Just Man and the Unjust Man; Suffering, Images, Time, and Unity; the (spiritual) Weapons We Have; the Soul; and the Ending (i.e., the Godhead and union). Each section is generally introduced by a short commentary which relates the citations to current issues and problems.

For anyone not inclined to purchase a two or three-volume translation of Eckhart's German works, and not too fussy about accuracy, they would do well to consider this short anthology, which has the merits of being inexpensive, readily accessible, and organized into convenient subject headings.

RICHARD WOODS OP

THEOLOGY AND LITERATURE by T.R. Wright. *Basil Blackwell*. 1988. Pp 243., £8.95.

Knowing how to read a book, and thus how to judge it, is to know not least the kind of use you are being asked to put it to, and the games you should play with it. Each branch of literature, each trade, has its tricks; and the art of good reading is to know which tricks to look for as well as the meaning that they effect. (Which is only to say that you don't count the syllables, or attend to the rhythm, in a line by Delia Smith, and wish you hadn't in a line by Matthew Arnold). This particular book by T.R. Wright belongs to the larger series produced by Basil Blackwell of 'Signposts in Theology' and as such we might expect a twofold aim: to map out the landscape in this neck of the theological and literary woods, by outlining the major positions taken up by literary theorists and theologians; and secondly to guide us through the trees by assessing the relative strengths and weaknesses in each position. The first aim has been admirably realised. T.R. Wright introduces his reader to all sorts of views,