

nature. "Rationality needs language, but language is broader than rationality and corresponds to the whole range of personal being" (p 96). Having next admitted that animals too have language he adds that "these animal analogues to language are so restricted as compared with the seemingly endless possibilities of human

language that there we have a difference of degree so vast that it has become a difference in kind" (ibid.).

This is a wise and balanced book that distils a large amount of learning and reflection lucidly. It deserves to be widely and carefully read,

H. P. OWEN

**SELFLESS PERSONS: IMAGERY AND THOUGHT IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM**  
by Steven Collins. Cambridge University Press 1982. pp ix + 323.

There is no universal and unchanging conception of what it is to be a human being. Notions of personal identity, human nature, selfhood and individuality vary widely over space and time in response to changes in social and economic conditions and as part of wider shifts in patterns of thinking. Alasdair MacIntyre, in his book *After Virtue* (Duckworth 1981), has recently sketched a view of the way the notion of the person has developed in the last few hundred years in the west. He offers us a contrast between western ideas of man in different ages, between the classical and medieval view and that of post-enlightenment thinkers. One of the purposes of Steven Collins in *Selfless Persons* is to present us with a geographical contrast. He explores the Buddhist conception of the person, with its philosophical and social origins, inviting us to reflect on the meaning and origins of our own. But it would be misleading to suggest that such a comparative interest is at all explicit in the bulk of the book. Most of it is concerned straightforwardly with a discussion of the central distinguishing tenet of Theravada Buddhism: the doctrine of *anatta*, that human beings have no 'soul' or 'self', that we are selfless persons. Collins's aim is expository rather than critical. He gives a detailed and thorough analysis of those texts of the Pali canon dealing with the *anatta* doctrine, and of many others besides.

The doctrine of *anatta* raises serious problems with regard to other religious and philosophical doctrines that Buddhism took over from the Brahminist milieu in which it arose. Buddhism shares with Brahminism a belief in *karma* and rebirth as well as the goal of escape from the conditioned existence of *samsara*. In Brahmin-

ism, the person is essentially his *atman* or 'self', altogether non-material and spiritual, yet somehow entrapped in matter. It is, crudely, this self that is reborn, suffers the consequences of action, and so on. If, as Buddhism maintains in opposition to Brahminism, there is no self, if people are simply composed of aggregates of impersonal elements, there appears to be nothing left to be born and reborn, to be subject to the laws of *karma* or finally to escape to *nirvana*. Buddhism appears to have taken over most of the doctrinal system of Brahminism while rejecting precisely the element required to give some kind of sense to the whole. The Theravadins felt these difficulties, and others connected with personal identity and continuity, very strongly, and Collins goes into great detail in his explanation of the ways they attempted to meet them. For those not already expert in Buddhist philosophy much of the detail is, despite the author's clear presentation, inevitably difficult to follow, and this dominant aspect of the work will probably only be of interest to those concerned seriously with Buddhism, or with Indian religion in general. Much of the material would have been more digestible and of more general interest if the author had not confined himself so rigidly to the task of exposition but had devoted some space to philosophical criticism of the *anatta* doctrine.

There are, though, themes of wider interest running through the book. The relation of religious doctrine to the social structures of believing societies is an important element in the understanding of any religion, and Collins's treatment of the relation in the particular case of Theravada Buddhism is most illuminating. The opposition between *samsara* and *nirvana* is

shown to mirror that between village life and its renunciation, and much is made of the place in Buddhist thought of imagery derived from the agricultural communities in which Buddhism flourished. The author also brings out the wider importance of the *anatta* doctrine both as a kind of slo-

gan, insisted upon for all its difficulty precisely because it distinguished Buddhism so sharply from other religious systems, and as providing the basis of Buddhist religious practice and ethics.

GARETH MOORE O P

**THE WRITING OF HISTORY IN THE MIDDLE AGES: Essays presented to Richard William Southern, edited by R. H. C. Davis and J. M. Wallace-Hadrill. Clarendon Press, 1981, £22.50.**

In 1948 a notable volume containing twenty seven essays on historical topics was published by the Oxford University Press and presented by his pupils to Professor Maurice Powicke (*Studies in Medieval History: presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*, OUP 1948). The three editors included R. W. Southern who himself wrote on 'Lanfranc of Bec and Berengar of Tours' (pp 27-48). Thirty three years later, the same publishing house has produced a volume of seventeen essays in honour of the seventieth birthday of Sir Richard Southern, and the preface of the earlier volume could well have been in the minds of the editors and contributors of the second book in connection with the master and teacher to whom it is dedicated: 'under your guidance we have felt the deep influence of those lives which were the glory of their own time and still have the power to invigorate us today. These are unforgettable experiences and it was with these things in mind that this book was planned and written. . . . we offer it to you as an expression of our gratitude for all you have done in showing us the strength to be drawn from the past'. This sense of an incomparable debt of gratitude which has produced both books is shared by many beyond the seventeen contributors and it is with a special sense of delight that I take this opportunity of adding my own appreciation to those of Sir Richard's other pupils.

This is a volume within the graceful if extravagant tradition of presenting a distinguished scholar with essays which arise out of and perhaps further his own work. It can be simply a matter of *pietas*, but in this case it is more: each essay is distinguished by originality as well as by its sen-

sitivity to the work of Sir Richard out of which it arises. It is not possible to comment adequately on all seventeen ranging as they do from the eighth century to the fifteenth, from Byzantium to Scotland, and using equally varied sources. I have therefore selected those closest to my own interests, which is not an entirely arbitrary proceeding since they stem from the teaching of the same master.

It is natural that many of the essays in a volume with the title *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages* should be related to the four addresses delivered by Sir Richard as president of the Royal Historical Society, 'Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing', (*TRHS* 5th series, xx-xxiii, 1970-73) and this is especially so in the contributions on Archbishop Hincmar ('History in the Mind of Archbishop Hincmar', J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, pp 43-71); John of Worcester ('John of Worcester and his Contemporaries', Martin Brett pp 71-101) Romuald of Salerno ('The Chronicle of Romuald of Salerno', D. J. A. Matthew, pp 239-275) John Blacman ('John Blacman: Biographer of Henry VI', Roger Lovatt, pp 415-455) as well as the essays on chroniclers of Scottish affairs, fourteenth century English history, German town chroniclers, and, in an essay which recalls Sir Richard's interest in the Eastern half of Christendom (*Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, Harvard University Press 1962), the Greek historians of the Turks. In a detailed study of Bede's sources for the Picts, A. M. Duncan reminds the reader of Sir Richard's northern roots, while two essays relate directly to the subject he has made peculiarly his own, Anselm of Canterbury. In the first of these Margaret Gibson presents