

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION, by Thomas McPherson. *Van Nostrand, 1965.*

The author has the rare philosophical virtue of a perfectly sceptical mind, which has produced here a relentless yet invariably sympathetic sifting of both arguments and counter-arguments. On the question of God's existence, the well-known arguments of Anselm, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume and Kant are set out with great clarity and yet without distortion. His general conclusion on this matter is that these arguments may strengthen and clarify an already held belief in God's existence, but that they cannot establish it. I believe he is wrong about this, at least in a sense, in relation to the cosmological argument; but to show why would take up too much space. There are fair yet provocative chapters also on analogy, immortality, religious experience, and the bearing of psychological discoveries and theories on religious belief.

His treatment of the problem of evil is without either the vulgarity and complacency of many religious apologists or the rancour and bitter sarcasm of some of their opponents. He *seems* to say in conclusion that God's omnipotence and goodness on the one hand, and the existence of evil in the world on the other, are incompatible with each other; and yet that the believer may say that *somehow* both are true, and whether his doing so is rational is a matter of one's personal taste. Surely not.

If the Christian faith contradicts ascertainable facts, then the Christian faith is false. By faith one may remove mountains, but not surmount proven contradictions. To pretend to do so is to poke fun at God.

I think the book shows lack of balance in that it is preoccupied with matters relevant to apologetics – by which I do not mean to say, of course, that the author is doing apologetics. It is as though a philosopher of science, in a general introduction to and survey of his subject, were to concern himself only with arguments for and against the scientific attitude and scientific beliefs, failing to expound also the way in which scientific theories are developed and modified, their relation to experience, and so on. Similarly, this book would have been more complete, and the precise bearing of the arguments which it actually does contain would have been clearer, if it had included some account of the genesis and development of credal assertions, their relationship to Scripture and the Church, and the way in which they, together with Scripture and the liturgy, impinge on the believers' experience. One cannot after all discuss the legitimacy of the use of the term 'God' and other religious expressions except against the background of their actual normal use.

HUGO MEYNELL

REALITY AND MAN, by S. L. Frank. *Faber and Faber, 1965, 42s. 1965.*

'The purpose of this book is to overcome the fatal dissension between faith in God and faith in man which is so characteristic of the spiritual life of modern Europe and the main source of its troubled and tragic character' (p. xiii). The reconciliation is attempted in terms of a Neo-Platonist metaphysics, according to which creatures are good in so far as they realise the Divine ideas of them. For all the ominous generality of scope, and the unfashionable character of the philosophical positions adhered to, a great deal of the argument is sane, shrewd, and precise; and the comparison with Teilhard de Chardin on the dust-cover, though no doubt kindly meant, is inept.

In some places, there is a pungent odour of the kind of religious philosophy which was fashionable in Britain at the turn of the century.

We need God, apparently (p. 99) as a counter-balance to the enmity of the external world and the chaos within our selves. Isn't this an emotional rather than an intellectual requirement? Doesn't it tend to show rather that some men need to believe in God than that God actually exists? And I do not see quite why to know what we are is to know that a reality consisting only of things is not enough to bring us into being (p. 104).

But if the book is not successful in proving the existence of God, it is impressive in its sketch of how the relation between man and God should be articulated. Anyone concerned to rebut the Marxist jibe that one can only make something of man by making nothing of God would do well to read it with attention.

HUGO MEYNELL