

Reviews

METAPHOR AND RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE by Janet Martin Soskice. Clarendon Press. Oxford 1985 Pp. x + 191. £17.50.

The tendency to regard propositions as the important thing, and metaphor, imagery, etc., as an optional though often pleasing decoration, goes very deep in our entire metaphysical tradition. It certainly runs through theology. Thomas Aquinas argued, for example, that metaphors are in place in Scripture because people who are not up to grasping meanings directly need to have them coated with metaphor (*Summa Theologiae* I 1, 9). But even with the dominance of literature in modern culture, at least until recently, it can hardly be said that philosophers or literary theorists have elucidated the function of metaphor.

The first five of the eight chapters of this book deal with metaphor and how metaphor works, designedly in a way that will engage readers who have little or no interest in religious language or theological problems. Dr Soskice argues that Hobbes and Locke offer the first clear evidence of the decoration view of metaphor but that Aristotle and Quintilian had something much better to offer (chapter 1). Metaphor is a figure of speech, not a mental event; physical objects and states of affairs are not in themselves metaphorical (chapter 2). Emotive or non-cognitivist theories of metaphor have to be rejected, and Donald Davidson's recent essay falls into this category; via discussion of Monroe Beardsley and Max Black Dr Soskice reaches I.A. Richards, whose theory of metaphor in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936) wins her qualified approval (chapter 3). She next places metaphor among the other figures of speech: synecdoche and metonymy, simile, catachresis, and analogy (chapter 4). On this last she has two sensible pages on Aquinas's 'logico-linguistic' theory. Then, in the meatiest pages, too rich to digest in a single reading, she cuts through a pod of glittering witnesses, from Hobbes to Teresa of Avila, to surface with her essential thesis: 'The interesting thing about metaphor, or at least about some metaphors, is that they are used not to redescribe but to disclose for the first time' (chapter 5). For example—her example: we could say that Jesus' phrase 'This is my body' is, or was, metaphorical, but the point at issue is what the metaphor is doing here: 'is it simply an ornamental redescription, so that Jesus has redescribed bread in an evocative way? or is the metaphor genuinely catachretical, not a redescription but a naming or disclosing for the first time?' As she goes on to say: 'It is one's metaphysics, not metaphor, which is at issue. To put it another way, the question is not simply whether we have a metaphor here or not, but what, if anything, the metaphor refers to or signifies' (page 90).

Turning more overtly to the theological implications, Dr Soskice first undermines the assumption that metaphor in religion is radically different from metaphor in science (chapter 6). This clears the way for 'a cautious realism' (page 132) and the causal theory of reference (*à la* Kripke and Putnam): 'reference is determined by speakers in contexts of use, and not simply by individual speakers but by communities of speakers whose language provides access to the states and relations which are of interest to them' (chapter 7). Thus reference to God may be grounded in experiences that generated convictions and beliefs that we may reasonably share, knowing that they are falsifiable. In the final chapter Dr Soskice vigorously attacks a variety of modern theologians who apparently take a non-realist or plain idealist philosophy for granted.

While this resumé indicates the importance of the book to a varied audience, it cannot begin to convey the wit and learning—although the Japanese literary technique of *honkadori* is a suspiciously serendipitous *trouvaille* (page 154).

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.

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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