

of the dispute between ethical consequentialists and absolutists and argues well for a qualified form of absolutism. Its conclusion that absolutism may sometimes have to be abandoned seems to me premature in context, but it is at least consistent with Nagel's tendency towards a certain kind of scepticism.

That Nagel is basically sceptical emerges at several points. "I believe", he says, "we should trust problems over solutions, intuition over arguments and pluralistic discord over systematic harmony". (p. x) In a paper called *The Absurd*, Nagel's line is that life can seem absurd because we take it seriously but are unable to avoid the conclusion that all our ideas are somehow misguided. "We cannot", he explains, "live human lives without energy and attention, nor without making choices which show that we take some things more seriously than others. Yet we have always available a point of view outside the particular form of our lives, from which the seriousness appears gratuitous. These two inescapable viewpoints collide in us, and that is what makes life absurd.

It is absurd because we ignore the doubts that we know cannot be settled, continuing to live with nearly undiminished seriousness in spite of them". (p. 14)

The question, of course, is whether the doubts can be settled; for there are doubts and doubts and the general possibility of some doubts does not establish that everything can be doubted or that every belief needs a certain kind of support and justification. Here one would welcome a detailed discussion of truth and certainty, but Nagel, unfortunately, does not provide one.

One of the things he does provide, incidentally, is a delightful philosopher's definition of hunger. It is, he tells us, "an attitude towards edible portions of the external world" (p. 41) Moore would doubtless have been overjoyed with such a description, but quite what this external world is, Nagel does not explain. In a footnote to the paper on absurdity he merely tells us that he is sceptical about its existence. Food for thought here.

BRIAN DAVIES O.P.

JULIAN OF NORWICH, SHOWINGS translated by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh
SPCK London, 1979. pp. 369 £6.50

The growing cult of Julian of Norwich is a recent phenomenon which has parallels with the medieval cult of earlier minor and local English saints. Instead of a translation of relics we hold a conference. Instead of pilgrimage, miracles and all the hullabaloo of a shrine we produce editions and translations and we form associations of like-minded persons. But perhaps the central significance of the saint has not changed: here is a friend of God, one who has influence in the court of heaven and can therefore be asked to mediate the healing mercy of God to man. With Julian it is not a case of approaching her physical remains (though presumably her bones still rest in Norwich) to ask for material help but of finding in her writings a power mediated towards the deeper ills of mankind, most of all that 'sharpest scourge', sin, 'which scourge belabours man or woman and breaks a man and purges him in his own sight so much that at times he thinks himself that he is not fit

for anything but as it were to sink into hell.' (p. 244)

The recent critical edition of the text of the two versions of the *Revelation of Divine Love* (Toronto, 1978) is a major contribution to the study of Julian's teaching, and this volume provides a translation of both texts by one of the scholars who produced the Middle English versions. The translation (and it is not at all certain that a modern English translation of a text already in English almost as familiar as that of Shakespeare is a necessity), this is an excellent book. The style is clear and rhythmical and the translation accurate. The notes which have been provided as an introduction, as with the notes of the Middle English texts, are curiously unsatisfying and on occasion are the product of unproved assumptions. For instance, the constant references to the works of William of St Thierry leaves the impression that he was a major influence on Julian, which is itself an assumption as yet un-

proven. One of the most felicitous parts of this translation is the restoration of 'all things will be well' (p. 225) for 'alle maner of thynges shall be wele' (crit. ed. p. 405) after the bathos of the best-known of Modern English translations and its 'everything is going to be all right'. (Clifton Wolters, Penguin, 1966, p. 103).

One criticism which might be levelled at the preface to this volume is the kind of emphasis it gives to the imagery of motherhood in Julian. This has been widely and mistakenly seen in certain circles recently to be a statement about the nature of God as 'mother'. Julian's 'insistence on referring to God as Mother' (p. 8) is here compared to the 'presence of God as Mother in other religious traditions, especially Hinduism' (p. 10); another presupposition which cannot be established from the text. Julian is a careful and orthodox theologian, and though, like St Anselm, she can describe the action of God in Christ towards the human race in terms of the imagery of

motherhood, this is in no sense a statement about the essential nature of the Trinity or any Person of the Trinity as feminine. It is both less and at the same time very much more.

But these are details and perhaps irrelevant in comparison with the value of this translation which makes available the texts of the *Revelations of Divine Love* in an accurate and readable version which is both true to Julian's text and a proper medium for the prayer and meditation which she should draw forth. The impact of the details of the revelation of the crucified Jesus which is the foundation of her writings is presented in its true light, as essentially of its time, and equally clear is the relevance and truth of the wisdom she drew from it. This is one of the greatest of spiritual writings in any age and the presentation of this new translation is a matter for congratulation.

BENEDICTA WARD S.L.G.

BONAVENTURE: THE SOUL'S JOURNEY INTO GOD; THE TREE OF LIFE.

THE LIFE OF ST FRANCIS translated and introduced by Ewert Cousins with a Preface by Ignatius Brady O.F.M. SPCK pp. xx + 353 £6.50

This is one of a sixty-volume series, 'The Classics of Western Spirituality', published originally in America by the Paulist Press, an undertaking which demands much gratitude. A great deal of care and industry has gone into the producing of this book, and there is much in it that should benefit the class of reader which the editors seem to have in mind. But I cannot help wondering whether a good many may not be put off by some features of these three works. This is to suggest, not that it would have been better to choose others, but that it might have been more useful to publish selections from the *corpus* as a whole. The main trouble is that medieval piety tends to be fancifully exuberant in a way that many of us find merely embarrassing or to be scholastically abstract. Professor Cousins, in his generally helpful Introduction, writes that *The Tree of Life* is free from 'the sentimentality and flights of fancy that characterized much of the later writing in the same genre' (p. 12) – which is, of course, strictly

true. But then it may be surprising to find in the Prologue, for instance, a description of the tree which can be thus illustrated: 'The fruit of the tree of life, therefore, is pictured and is offered to our taste under twelve flavors or twelve branches. On the first branch the soul devoted to Christ perceives the flavor of sweetness by recalling the distinguished origin and sweet birth of her Savior ...' (p. 121). In *The Soul's Journey into God* (I am not convinced by Cousin's argument for translating *in* by 'into' rather than 'to'). We read, for instance, that 'just as absolute nothing has nothing of being or its attributes, so contrariwise, being has nothing of non-being either in act or potency, either in objective truth or in our estimation' (p 91) and, still less acceptably: 'Our intellect perceives this necessary relationship not only in existing things, but also in non-existing things. For if a man actually exists, it follows that if he is running, he is moving; the same conclusion follows even if he does not exist' (p. 82).