

RESPONSES

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Dear Fr Editor,

Anyone who thinks it worthwhile finding out whether Miss Primavesi fairly represents the tenor of my review, will look it up in your January issue. I would have wished merely to remark two particular matters and to make one general observation. I long ago found 'operese' in a poem of Auden, whom I take to be almost an Oxford Dictionary in himself. I must admit the slang. The Kienholz technique does not work completely: I own not a Japanese music centre but an old record-player of doubtful provenance, however, though certainly not possessing a record of monastic chaunts, I must admit the Mozart. I cannot repent my review. However practical, however distressed, however admirable, and in my times in Latin America I have witnessed something of the like in others, the authors do not in these books offer a generous enough account of the possibilities of human kind. Or of God. I am saddened that to express a hope that the gnostic few here celebrated as the Church might enlarge their theological appreciation of all our lives, should seem impertinent in

Hamish Swanston

Faith and Reason: A Reply to

Geoffrey Scarre

Brian Davies O P

Geoffrey Scarre (*New Blackfriars*, April 1981) writes as follows:

Now to believe the proposition that P
is to believe that P is true, and one
is entitled to have that belief in P's
truth only if one is in possession of

grounds which make that truth highly probable . . . To the extent that the faithful claim to believe with conviction, they are called upon to hold grounds which make their beliefs highly probable. (pp. 158 and 162)

I suppose that Mr Scarre believes what he says here. But is he entitled to do so? Surely not on his own terms. For what on earth could make it highly probable that one is only entitled to believe that P if one has grounds which make the truth of P highly probable? Certainly no proposition offered by Mr Scarre, who, with an air of intellectual imperialism, is content simply to assert that one is only entitled to believe that P if one has grounds which make the truth of P highly probable.

But suppose we agree that Mr Scarre is right. It will then follow that every belief that I am entitled to hold must have grounds that make it probably true. Let us then suppose that I believe that P-I. I must now be able to say that P-I is true because P-II makes it highly probable that P-I is true. But what about the status of P-II? If I am entitled to believe P-II, then I must now have grounds for believing that it is highly probable that P-II is true. But how am I to avoid an infinite regress on this account? And how then, in Mr Scarre's view, can we be entitled to believe anything at all? I suggest that 'We are entitled to believe nothing' is actually what we are left with if we accept Mr Scarre's thesis as noted above, in which case his article is self-refuting.

I ought to point out that the move I am making in reply to Mr Scarre is hardly original. The question of having grounds for all one's beliefs has occupied philosophers from Aristotle to Wittgenstein, who both allow for the place of indemonstrables in rational belief and who would both, I presume, have rejected Mr Scarre's pan-rationalism. (Cf. *An. Post.* 71a 1-17; *Philosophical Investigations*, paras. 481-5; *On Certainty*, paras. 130-1, 163-4, 172, 191-2, 204, 253.) Most recently, such rationalism has been interestingly rejected with reference to belief in God by Alvin Plantinga (see 'Is Belief in God Rational?' in C. F. Delaney, ed. *Rationality and Religious Belief*, Notre Dame and London, 1979).