

realize how exceedingly difficult it is accurately to grasp the direction in which, on any given occasion, his subtle and complex mind is moving. And yet it would be ridiculous either to make him the prophet of the contemporary Church, or to dismiss him as thinker of the second rank, until this prior task of comprehension has been achieved. An obvious weakness of Father Sillem's study of Newman's philosophy (which will, I suspect, turn out to be more important than the volume of unpublished philosophical writings which it was written to introduce) is his failure critically to evaluate Newman's philosophical positions. This criticism, though justified, is perhaps ungrateful because the prior task of exposition, to which Sillem restricted himself, is excellently done.

The detailed account of the sources of Newman's philosophy (Ch. IV, pp. 149-240) is especially valuable, but it is also misleading in so far as Newman's relationship to the English empiricist tradition is concerned. The judgement that 'Newman . . . stood opposed to

the whole tradition of British Empiricism' (p. 193) was only possible because Sillem concentrated on questions of metaphysics and natural theology, rather than of epistemology or philosophical method, and because he himself lacked a sympathetic grasp of the strengths of the empiricist tradition (in this he follows Boekraad and Walgrave: it is significant that James Cameron earns only one passing footnote reference). The original and persuasive argument that the 'Associationists', and especially Abraham Tucker, were a significant source casts a great deal of light on some of the more puzzling features of Newman's philosophy.

Apart from the fact, already mentioned, that Sillem's concern for expositional accuracy resulted in an absence of critical evaluation, one other overall weakness is a tendency to overstress the consistency of Newman's thought, ironing out tensions and ambiguities. This is a pity, because it encourages just that 'bad', superficial Newman reading which Sillem warns against in the opening pages of this scholarly labour of love. NICHOLAS LASH

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL, by M. B. Ahern. *Routledge & Kegan Paul*, London, 1971. 85 pp. £1.25.

Evil brings with it many problems. Some are connected with belief in God, and these are selected by the author for discussion.

The main point of this book is that the question of the logical compatibility of evil and the existence of God is a complex one, involving several kinds of problem.

The basic problem is both general and abstract: would evil, if it exists, make the existence of an all-good and omnipotent God logically impossible? If an affirmative answer is wanted, one has to show that there is an analytical connexion between evil and the non-existence of God. And this cannot be done, for one needs only one instance of evil being justified by good, or one example of a person being justified in not preventing certain evils, to show that such an analytical connexion cannot be construed.

Still at the level of abstraction, one could perhaps argue that a specific kind of evil—something very terrible—is incompatible with God's existence. But we could be certain of that only if we had an exhaustive knowledge of good and its logical connexions with evil, and we lack such knowledge.

Then, finally, there are the concrete problems of demonstrating how particular cases of evil are compatible with God's existence. Ahern feels that most scholars have dealt with

these concrete questions, believing that they were tackling the whole problem of evil. He discusses four of them: Leibniz, Hick, Campbell and Joyce. But his handling of them does not strike me as very satisfactory; in particular his treatment of Leibniz leaves much to be desired.

Philosophers, he concludes, must realize that they cannot offer adequate solutions to all concrete problems, although they could usefully study the several questions involved.

So there are two conclusions. First that it cannot be shown that evil and God's existence are irreconcilable. Second, that it cannot be proved that they are compatible; for the believer the compatibility of evil and God's existence is a synthetic *a priori*.

The author says that it falls outside the scope of his book to tell us what exactly he means by these technical terms; which is rather odd. He should have added a few pages to tell us more precisely what all this means for the religious experience of evil. Perhaps I may make the following suggestion.

If it is true—as the book argues—that the question of the logical compatibility of evil and God's existence cannot be solved either way, then it seems that the importance of the question is grossly overestimated. The logical issues involved in the problem of evil are only secondary. Encountering evil makes people

wonder about God and his work, but with this there comes usually the uneasy feeling that God will blame them for responding to the encounter in this way. Such attitudes are so riddled with ambiguity that one can hardly

THE FABER BOOK OF RELIGIOUS VERSE, edited by Helen Gardner. *Faber and Faber*, 1972. 377 pp. £3.75.

At about a penny a page, this book is extraordinarily good value. It does everything that an anthology should do: it contains enough of everybody's favourites to give the reader a satisfying feeling of being at home in a more or less common culture—for instance, there is a sprinkling of well-known hymns like 'When I survey the wondrous cross'; 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and 'Little Gidding' are printed in full, and the editor's own translation of 'The Dream of the Rood'. But enough of the editor's personal preference also shows through, giving us the chance to extend our horizons by entering into *her* enjoyment of certain writers and poems. For instance, never before have I got so much delight from reading George Herbert, whom I have always enjoyed (the selection is very original and helpful); or, funnily enough, from Isaac Watts. On the other hand, there is enough missed out to give each reader the chance to indulge in delightful indignation that—whatever it may be—has been omitted, and so to rediscover afresh his own preferences. For myself, I would gladly have traded in all the Romantic contributions for, perhaps, 'The Dream of Gerontius' (neither Newman nor Faber features at all), and perhaps one or two of Clive Sansom's delightful Festival of Britain pieces.

The poems are presented in strictly chronological order, and we are invited by the editor to notice how the poems of different periods show the different religious moods and attitudes of those periods; the whole arrangement clearly reflects Dr Gardner's interest in the general relationship between religion and poetry. To some extent the limitations of a Book of Verse thwart this particular concern. Some major literary monuments do not really lend themselves to excerpting for anthologies. Dr Gardner makes no attempt to include anything from 'Paradise Lost', and personally I don't find her abridged Passus 18 of *Piers Plowman* all that successful—as with most poems of heroic bulk, it is precisely the bulk that contributes much of the effect. Further, in the Middle Ages, on the whole, verse was rather a 'hack' medium for religious writers, their more serious and exalted reflections being reserved for prose.

Evil is really a logical problem only for those who have stopped believing in God anyway.

ROB VAN DER HART, O.P.

All the same, a great deal does come through, and I think this anthology gives us a good feel of the varying religious inspiration of different periods of our history (except the modern, which is seriously, though perhaps inevitably, under-represented).

Naturally most of the poems are Christian; but not all: the early nineteenth-century poems given here are religious in a typically indeterminate kind of way. Is it just a prejudice on my part, or is it the case that clear religious beliefs make for much better poetry? The Romantic verse given here strikes me as unbearably fluffy and turgid—in an attempt to be non-dogmatically mystical, it succeeds only in being obscure and vague. Hopkins, by contrast, rediscovering both the old faith and the old rhythms, makes a far more definite impact, without in any way either eliminating the mystical sense of nature sought after by the Romantics, or reducing everything to intellectualist order.

One apparent eccentricity in this anthology is the inclusion of a few satirical poems about false religion, and also poems expressing religious doubt, rather than faith. I don't quite see that these really fit in, if we start, as Dr Gardner says she does, with religion defined in terms of commitment. I would have thought that satirical and doubting poems would be more poems about religion, than religious poems. But, after all, even an anthology of religious verse does not set out, strictly, to be a religious book; the editor's concern is, rightly, with the literature and not with the religion, and satire and doubts are certainly part of the literary picture. This is only a very minor complaint; and so is my occasional feeling that the notes (usually very helpful) could have given us sometimes a little more information about the poets' own religious and denominational commitment (after all, at the time of the Reformation and again in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, denominational allegiance was often a major element in religious sensibility). On the whole, this is a thoroughly enjoyable book; and parts of it are—an added bonus—quite spiritually uplifting as well.

SIMON TUGWEL L, O.P.