

human beings of critical theory – i.e. the acceptance by human beings of the dissolution of repressive ideology – as being grounded in the human use of language. The use of language, Habermas argues, presupposes at the least the possibility of an ‘ideal speech situation’ – a situation in which human beings would, free from any form of coercion, be able to debate the nature of the good life. For Habermas, a theory or argument is ‘cognitively acceptable’ – i.e. true – if it would enjoy the universal assent of all human beings in an ideal speech situation. Geuss concludes that the much-discussed distinction between scientific theories (verified, according to positivists, by their observational content) and critical theory (verified both empirically and reflectively, according to Habermas) is really one of degree only: if ‘knowledge’ is whatever gives human beings ‘successful orientation in action’, a critical theory of society would qualify as a form of knowledge. The attempt to elaborate a critical theory which will free human beings from harmful delusions about the true nature of society is a philosophically valid project.

Throughout, Geuss is concerned not so much with the substantive knowledge which might be yielded by critical theory as with whether the notion of a critical theory is intellectually valid. All this is well and good, but the reader is left at the end of the book with the feeling that Geuss might have attempted a brief discussion of whether the project of critical theory – the communication of knowledge conducive to human emancipation, in an ideal speech situation – is a practical one. Critical theory could be *elaborated*, according to Geuss. But could it be effectively *com-*

municated? This seems to me to be a problem which Geuss fails to tackle. If the truth of critical theory is at least in part to be determined by the acknowledgement by those to whom it is addressed that it has indeed promoted enlightenment and emancipation in their own lives, then it surely becomes necessary to establish not only whether such acknowledgement is theoretically possible (it is) but also whether it is likely to occur. This is where Habermas goes wrong. Habermas’ proposed method of dissolving repressive ideologies – the creation of a debate free from coercion, in which human beings will be able to debate the nature of the good life – seems doomed to failure, since repressive ideologies exist precisely to prevent the kind of free debate about ends which Habermas sees as the precondition of their dissolution. This is not to say that the creation of such a free debate is impossible; merely to observe that, on present form, it seems unlikely that Habermas’ ‘ideal speech situation’ will ever prevail outside of V arrondissement cafes.

As I say, the reader is left with the feeling that Geuss might have pressed his discussion of critical theory a little further. But this is not to detract from his very substantial achievement in setting out clearly the nature of the debate surrounding the whole project of critical theory. Geuss’ book is now the best starting-point for English-speaking students who wish to understand the debate concerning the claims of critical theory to the status of knowledge.

STEPHEN SALTER

THE ETHOS OF THE BIBLE by Birger Gerhardsson. *DLT*. 1982.
pp viii + 152 £5.95.

‘Ethos’ here means ‘the kind of people we ought to be and the way we ought to behave . . . attitudes and behaviour which conform to norms’ (p 1), and ‘the Bible’ means the Christian (Protestant) Bible, in which the New Testament is so central that the Old Testament can be reduced to a brief section on ‘attitudes towards his-

tory and politics’ and a chapter on ‘the ethos of the Jewish theocracy’. The author regrets that in the space available justice could not be done to the Old Testament material but reflects that ‘the young church regarded its teaching as the adequate exposition in the age of fulfilment, of what is written in “the law and

the prophets” (p 2). The New Testament is itself treated selectively, with chapters on Matthew, Paul and John, but in writing his final synthetic chapter on ‘primary constituents and characteristic traits’ the author aims to have all sixty-six books in mind. The problem of patriarchal and male-dominated language is side-stepped, and questions of socio-economic background are passed over on account of their difficulty (p 4).

Within these limitations Gerhardtsson offers an attractive distillation of many years’ study. The book is full of suggestive observations on the three authors discussed. He is not afraid to criticize the tendencies to unworldliness which he sees in Paul, and exclusivism which he sees in John. Matthew is evidently his favourite,

and love what it is all about. Imitation of Christ and self-sacrifice are also strongly emphasized. There is much to be grateful for here, not least the reflections it provokes on what theology and ethics of the New Testament should be. The necessary historical work is surely to be linked with reflection upon one’s own convictions. More serious *debate* with the New Testament authors is needed, a discussion which draws upon whatever the human sciences can contribute to moral reflection today. Even in its own mainly descriptive terms this book cuts out much that was surely important in the social and political life of the early Christians. The result is an implied suggestion that Christian faith and life are conservative.

ROBERT MORGAN

FRANCIS AND CLARE: The Complete Works. Translation and Introduction by Regis J Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap, and Ignatius C Brady, O.F.M. Preface by John Vaughn, O.F.M. *The Classics of Western Spirituality.* London. SPCK, Ramsey N.J. Paulist Press, 1982. pp xvi + 255. £9.50.

EARLY DOMINICANS: Selected Writings. Selected with an Introduction by Simon Tugwell, O.P. Preface by Vincent de Couesnongle, O.P. *The Classics of Western Spirituality.* London. SPCK. Ramsey, N.J. Paulist Press, 1982. pp xiv + 508. £12.50.

The latest additions to *The Classics of Western Spirituality* give translations of some of the central documents for the history and spiritual life of the early friars, and must be warmly welcomed for providing careful versions of texts of the highest and deepest interest, and making them widely available. For Fr Tugwell’s volume, one can claim more: his is a brilliant selection and a work of original scholarship, which will breathe new life into the study of the early history of the Order of Preachers.

Fr Brady is one of the respected senior editors of Grottaferrata, and he and his younger colleague have given us careful translations of the works of Francis and Clare. For Francis, the great edition of Kajetan Esser provides a secure basis; and Fr Brady has himself translated the works and legend of Clare in an earlier publication. All that we want is here, and it is well translated; and there are useful, sometimes exceedingly valuable notes, indicat-

ing sources and comparative literature, and occasionally (as for the Testament of St Clare) recent manuscript discoveries. Of the introductions it is not possible to speak so well: they are relatively superficial and refuse either in text or notes to pay adequate attention to modern literature. The only modern biography of Francis in English which is quoted is G. K. Chesterton’s and a passage on p 15 seems to make Sabatier’s classic life of 1893-4 (not 1919) ‘contemporary’ (see n. 29). Strangely, there is no reference, except of the most general character, to recent attempts to translate these writings, though there are indications that some have been carefully considered. More serious, the discussion of the authenticity of Clare’s *Testament* (pp 174-6, 226) is vague, even contradictory: at one moment it is left uncertain, at another the Testament is cited as a clear reflection of the saint’s mind. The Editors are wonderfully precise on the textual evidence (p 226): could they not have paid