

THE ALTERNATIVE TRADITION in philosophy to which Miss Nott appeals is, as she explains it, the tradition "whose standard of reality is the way the world has been looked at and thought about and described and accounted for by real human beings." And real human beings, she goes on to say, have to live and choose, to face moral problems, and bear the responsibilities which flow from their freedom. This experience and this engagement, she suggests, "seeks a language which . . . expresses its universal concepts and claims in concrete terms, very often in images, or else aphoristically." It is at this point that Miss Nott moves from philosophy to poetry.

She is naturally sympathetic to Existentialism, at least in its earlier forms, when even Sartre himself spoke of literature as being the most appropriate medium for formulating conceptions of existence and reality. But Miss Nott is disappointed with the later Sartre, who in turning to politics and social science has gone over to the ranks of those theorists who "think

that everything can and ought to be made finally explicit." Miss Nott believes that the most important truths are precisely those which resist, or elude, clear and distinct utterance.

Miss Nott draws on both C. S. Peirce and Collingwood to adumbrate, if not fully to articulate, a type of philosophy which reaffirms the uniqueness of the human person, reclaims men's freedom from the determinism of the scientists, and which looks to a literary language, particularly a poetic one, to communicate most successfully those few insights and glimpses of reality which our experience affords us. In short Miss Nott's two vigorous and stimulating books, being mainly critical, point to a third in which we may hope that she will one day set out in greater detail the speculative and constructive features of her own kind of humanism. The empiricist philosophers have robbed us of Mind and Self and virtually everything but movement: Miss Nott promises to give us back something we had almost forgotten we possessed, a soul.

## The Moralists

*Values & Choices—By G. J. WARNOCK*

TO READ THESE EIGHT BOOKS in fairly rapid succession—none bad, some admirably good—is an unnerving experience. Somehow all recognisably belong to the same subject; but the view from the window, so to speak, changes utterly from one stage to the next—from desert to icefield, midland suburb to tropical jungle—with correspondingly sharp and extreme changes of temperature; and at times one view makes one doubt one's recollection of another. Perhaps most philosophical landscapes have something of this Protean instability, but on this score moral philosophy must surely lead the field. No doubt that is

why some philosophers regard it with abhorrence.

Mr Hudson's book<sup>1</sup> offers a usefully comprehensive introduction and dwells resolutely in temperate climes (with some tendency to dryness). But even here issues will not quite stand still to be scrutinised. We seem at first to be concerned with problems about *language*—are moral judgments emotive, prescriptive, descriptive?—or about *logic*—can "is"-propositions entail "ought"-propositions? But are we? The claim that moral language is emotive has a tendency to turn into a disquieting thesis about people—that people do not have reasons for their judgments or do things for reasons, but are interlocked with others in obscure emotional conflicts in which no one is right or wrong, but the stronger wins. It is possible, as Professor Williams and others argue in Mr Casey's collection,<sup>2</sup> to construe emotivism as merely part of a less radical doctrine; but if

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<sup>1</sup> *Modern Moral Philosophy*. By W. D. HUDSON. Macmillan, 75p

<sup>2</sup> *Morality and Moral Reasoning*. Edited by JOHN CASEY. London, Methuen, £2.50; New York, Barnes & Noble, \$8.80

it is seriously offered as the whole story, then what seems to be at issue here is not language, but Freud.

The thesis that moral language is "prescriptive", and the *is-ought* business, can again be discussed at a most drily linguistic level. What is the relation between indicative and imperative sentences? Can imperatives entail or contradict other imperatives? How far can one distinguish what a sentence *means* from what a speaker *does* in uttering that sentence? Can "institutional" facts, such as that I have promised to marry you, entail "evaluative" conclusions, such as that I ought to do so? But even in Mr Hudson's sober pages, these highly academic issues turn into something else. What—the question arises—do we take "morality" to *be*? Do we take it that there are, independently of ourselves and therefore in some sense "in the world", moral principles and standards by which at any rate some moral judgments just are (and could be known and shown to be) right, and others wrong?

<sup>3</sup> *Consciousness and Freedom*. By PRATIMA BOWES. London, Methuen, £2.75; New York, Barnes & Noble, \$8.00

<sup>4</sup> *Responsibility*. By JONATHAN GLOVER. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, £2.25; New York, Humanities Press, \$5.50

Or do we see "the world" as a wholly neutral, value-free setting, thickly colonised by scientists, to which values—moral values and others—must somehow be *assigned* by our own choice, by our wills, by "commitment"? We seem a long way here from questions about moral language, though of course there are connections—if there are somehow independent moral principles, then moral judgments may be, and may be known to be, true or false; but if there are not, in moral utterance I am not really asserting, but rather making decisions, choosing, "prescribing."

WE FIND NEXT, on each side of this great divide, what might be called hot and cool versions of the opposing theses. That moral values are not found in the world, but are put into it by our own free decisions, is a position propounded, of course, with terrific rhetoric and drama, by continental Existentialism (discussed here, unrhethorically, by Pratima Bowes<sup>3</sup>). We have the picture of man, in the chilly vacancy of his absolute freedom, facing Ajax-like his blank, recalcitrant world, and bravely shouldering his burden of total commitment therein. With writers in English the temperature is seldom so high. Mr Glover, in his excellently measured and lucid *Responsibility*,<sup>4</sup> holds

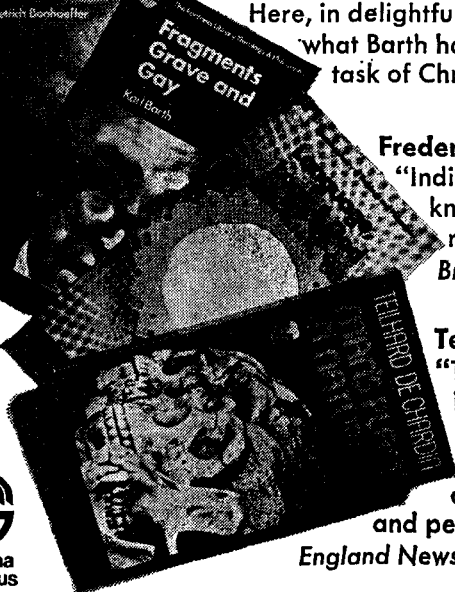
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indeed that morality cannot be located in the world, since people may "adopt" quite disparate moral principles; he sees no great drama in this conclusion, however, and holds that the responsibility of most agents for their actions is neither heroically absolute nor despairingly nil. Mr Hudson inclines to agree with the coolly argued contention of R. M. Hare that morality is ultimately a matter for decision; but he not only mentions some rather strong reasons for rejecting that view, but also accepts it without any evident excitement. In spite of this Iris Murdoch alleges, in her own most curious and interesting book,<sup>5</sup> that the position, however flatly stated, is really "romantic." She sees in it inescapably a picture of the solitary will, of the decision-making agent *contra mundum*, which offers at least the materials for Existentialist drama even in those writers whose own manner is most carefully undramatic. (That she should call Hare and Hampshire "romantic" seems at first rather as if, say, Verdi were to charge, say, Boccherini with a taste for melodrama; but she is alluding, of course, to the message, not to the medium of its expression.)

Among those on the other side of the fence there is a good deal of quiet agreement. Those who hold that morality is in no real sense a matter of choice, that one cannot make something morally right by deciding that it is, and that facts can really settle at any rate some disputed moral issues, seem for the most part to adopt positions that clearly derive, even if they also diverge, from classical Utilitarianism. This is what Mr Osborn's modestly argued Humanism<sup>6</sup> amounts to. It seems to be the unifying theme in Professor Downie's elaborate and wide-ranging survey of "social" ethics.<sup>7</sup> And it lurks perhaps, though a good deal more elusively, behind Mr Kupperman's studiously academic defence of the popular notion that there is such a thing as "ethical knowledge."<sup>8</sup> These are cool versions. Roughly, let us unambitiously agree that, lodged as we all are in human communities, we want to get along

<sup>5</sup> *The Sovereignty of Good*. By IRIS MURDOCH. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, £1.40, paper 70p; New York, Schocken Books, \$3.40, paper \$1.75.

<sup>6</sup> *Humanism and Moral Theory*. By REUBEN OSBORN. Pemberton Books (second edition), £1.50, paper 60p.

<sup>7</sup> *Roles and Values; an Introduction to Social Ethics*. By R. S. DOWNIE. London, Methuen, £1.60, paper 80p; New York, Barnes & Noble, \$5.10, paper \$2.70.

<sup>8</sup> *Ethical Knowledge*. By J. J. KUPPERMAN. London, Allen & Unwin, £2.75; New York, Humanities Press.

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J. P. McKinney

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rather better than we should do if the propensities of human nature were wholly unconstrained; let us take it that "morality" is supposed to contribute to this; it is then a question of what principles (standards, rules) will *in fact* prove conducive to the end in view—not an easy question, but one that looks in principle as if it should have an answer.

Here Iris Murdoch stands out as a very warm dissenter. Her objection to the picture of the solitary agent, making choices—"chucking one's weight about", as she uncharitably puts it—at the centre of the empty stage of a value-bereft universe, is not only that it is disagreeably, perhaps dangerously, romantic; she sees it also as unrealistic, and perhaps above all as not *necessary*. We do really believe, I think she holds, that our moral questions can have answers not prescribed by ourselves, but somehow discovered; what is needed is scrupulous attention to the cases before us, and watchfulness against the distorting influence of the exorbitant self. And this alternative picture of our moral situation, she holds, is not merely fanciful—we have at least as good a right to it as the Existentialist has to his. But what are we to attend to? Here Miss Murdoch does not, as do so many others, look at all in the direction suggested by Bentham or Mill. She draws her clues, not from that dryish source, but (romantically?) from Plato. It is the Good, she says, that in morality

is the fundamental subject of inexhaustible exploration—not lawyer-like notions of right and wrong, or the vague philanthropy of "the greatest happiness."

I find this worrying. For one thing, Miss Murdoch seems at times to be carried away by her own considerable eloquence. Though she concedes, in passing, that things do actually go better by and large if people practise virtue than if they do not, she speaks also, with evident approval, of "the pointlessness of virtue"—a phrase which, construe it how I may, seems inescapably to mean something silly. But more importantly, I do not see how she can really parry the charge of fancifulness, unless her thesis is taken to mean a good deal less than she wants it to. It could be read very well as a contribution to, so to speak, the phenomenology of moral experience—the way it seems to people to be, the picture they use. But we are meant to be able to take it as saying how things *are*; and that is not at all so easy. With Plato, the sovereignty of the Good appeared as a feature in a full-blown scheme of metaphysical truth. I believe that Miss Murdoch would not supply her thesis with a load of metaphysical scaffolding, but could it be that it needs some? Alternatively it could be part of a system of religious belief. On this she says explicitly that beliefs of that kind make no difference; but how that could be true, I cannot imagine.

## Nets of Language

*Between Sense & Nonsense — By PETER HACKER*

WITTGENSTEIN DOMINATES the philosophical scene of the last half century. His *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) gave impetus to a style of philosophy preoccupied with the potentialities of formal languages for the succinct statement of onto-

logical and metaphysical problems, and to a serious hope of providing final answers to problems so formulated. The *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) inspired a therapeutic conception of philosophy in which the dissolution of the pseudo-problems of philosophy is sought by uncovering the articulations of our conceptual scheme through painstaking attention to ordinary language and its use. He has been hailed as the "first philosopher of the age," and vilified as the source of the linguistic corruption and trivialisation of philosophy; but his work is disregarded by few.

The extensive professional interest in his work can be gauged by the useful 60-page bibliography of writings on Wittgenstein appended to K. T. Fann's elementary intro-

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