Booknotes

Dorothy Emmet's *Philosophers and Friends* featured in Booknotes in January 1997, but no apology is needed for mentioning her *Outward Forms, Inner Springs* (Macmillan 1998). Subtitled 'A Study in Social and Religious Philosophy it is not, in the traditional sense, philosophy of religion. Indeed Emmet dismisses the traditional concept of God as an all-knowing, all-powerful person pretty briskly. How could an absolutely omniscient being have the type of consciousness people have? How can a person be simultaneously aware of everything and of all points of view? And if, as Austin Farrer once suggested, God is peripherally conscious of everything while concentration on some particulars, do we have to imagine God as saying to someone who is praying, 'I'm sorry, I can't attend to you just now as I'm listening to Harry: I'll come to you presently.'?

None the less, Emmet is dissatisfied with humanism. Humanism's strength is that it focuses on persons, but that is its limitation too. 'It loses the cosmic dimension which is present in most religions.' Emmet is attracted to views, religious, philosophical and poetic, which see humanity as part of a wider process. She writes of Coleridge, for her a seraph rather than a damaged Archangel, and focuses on his attempt to 'make the external internal, the internal external'. What Coleridge is doing is to suggest that in our perception and imagination we do not just copy nature, nor do we stand against nature. We create a new world out of a responsive rapport with the surrounding world. In doing this, we are drawing out aspects of agency and meaning which are potentially there in the universe and which emerge particularly in personal life: 'the more we think of personal life with its special capacities as emerging in nature, the less plausible it is to take a purely materialistic view of nature.'

This non-pantheistic religion of an emerging and enabling nature has moral and political aspects. Envy and other self-centred feelings stultify the rapport we might have with the world beyond. Against this background, Emmet is able to defend Coleridge against Irving Babbit's taunt that the Ancient Mariner is relieved of the burden of his transgression by admiring the colour of water snakes: rather his liberation emerges because in seeing the water snakes he begins to bless and so can be blessed in turn. She also writes particularly well on Plato and Augustine and on the limitations of politics engaged in for the sake of politics.

It would be exaggerating to see two slightly off-beat books as heralding a sea-change in the philosophy of religion. But the parallels and overlaps between *Outward Forms and Inner Springs* and Fergus Kerr's *Immortal Longings: Versions of Transcending Humanity* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1997) are striking. Kerr's book is also an essay in the philosophy of religion, but again not in the traditional sense. What Kerr does is to demonstrate that there are religious themes and implications in the writings of significant figures not normally seen as philosophers of religion. In successive chapters he considers what might be called the wider philoso-

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phies of Martha Nussbaum, Karl Barth, Heidegger, Iris Murdoch, Luce Irigaray, Stanley Cavell, Charles Taylor, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karl Rahner. Three of these are, of course, normally thought of as theologians. In some ways Kerr's approach seems more successful with the philosophers because there he does not get bogged down in the minutiae of theological acrimony.

What Kerr shows is that each of the philosophers he considers is presenting a *Weltanschauung,* in the broadest sense a religious view, a view which goes far beyond mere analysis or narrow philosophical specialism. It might be pushing it to see anything 'transcending humanity' in Nussbaum or Irigaray, the one apparently seeing salvation in the sweaty couplings and lubricious fantasising of James Joyce's Bloom and Molly, the other in a new ideology of sexual (or is it gender?) difference. But Kerr is persuasive in seeing especially in Barth, Heidegger, Murdoch and Cavell, the thought that we need to de-centre from narrow human perspectives and in suggesting that relatedness to the world and to others precedes individual autonomy. In an obvious reference to Coleridge in his discussion of Cavell he asks whether there might be a 'way of being for us now, with our history, our metaphysics, our science, a way of being in the world *poetically*?—as if we were all poets and artists, letting things show themselves, letting others give themselves in terms neither of fact nor of value?'

These questions might not be discussed in courses of philosophy and the current practice of philosophical writing being militate against their being raised, but as Kerr and Emmet demonstrate, they remain central to the concerns of some philosophers.

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