

Book Reviews Blonergan

Man's Last End, by Joseph Buckley, S.M., A.M., S.T.D.,  
with a Foreword by Reginald Garrigou-Lagrangé, O.P.,  
Herder, St. Louis & London, 1949, 249 pp., \$3.50.

La Sagesse de Sénèque, by André de Bovis, "Théologie" 13,  
Aubier, Paris, 1948, 231 pp.

With increasing insistence historians have been advancing that the Renaissance constitutes a watershed in Catholic theological thought on nature and grace. In 1928 in Gregorianum Fr. Elter argued impressively that theologians prior to Sylvester Maurus took it for granted that perfect beatitude was to be had by man only in the beatific vision. With no less impressiveness in 1929, though his work does not seem equally well known, Fr. Doucet in Antonianum argued that theologians prior to Cajetan took it for granted that there existed in man a natural desire for the supernatural vision of God. Recently both these positions have been overshadowed by the more radical contention of Fr. de Lubac that only after Baius did it become a common view that the state of pure nature, as now understood, was a concrete possibility; and a startling confirmation of the accuracy of Fr. de Lubac's history has been given by Fr. Rondet [RSR, XXXV, 1948, 481-520], inasmuch as the Tridentine theologian, Dominicus Soto, O.P., is claimed to have affirmed that, had man been created in puris naturalibus, he could not know his last end, since that would have been supernatural.

If the history of the matter is becoming clearer, the speculative issues are so complex that a generous lapse of time will have to be granted, I suspect, before all concealed suppositions have been detected and a sound judgment can be passed upon the relative merits of the Medieval and the Renaissance positions. Accordingly, it is as valuable, if incomplete, contributions to the contemporary process of investigation, clarification, and criticism that the books under review are recommended.

In the main Fr. Buckley's work is speculative and systematic. His topic is very closely related to the Thomist statement, beatitudo perfecta est soli Deo naturalis, which was developed by Fr. O'Mahony's Desire of God over a decade ago. But, as his title indicates, he treats not of man's beatitude but of man's last end and, indeed, not of the end that might happen to be last, but of the end that intrinsically is last. Such an end is good in itself, willed because of itself (terminative), and the ground both of the goodness and of the willing of anything else (architectonic). These requirements are met by divine goodness as presented to the will in the beatific vision. Again, they are met by divine goodness considered absolutely from a metaphysical viewpoint as the final cause of all things in any order. But from the viewpoint of human psychology there appears no last end to be attained by man except through the beatific vision.

For apart from the vision man knows divine goodness not directly and in itself but indirectly and per speciem alienam. ~~Accordingly, he knows divine goodness that is the ground of~~ Accordingly, he knows that divine goodness is the ground of all other goodness and desirableness, but he does not know it inasmuch as it is that ground. Hence, divine goodness as presented to his will is not architectonic and so lacks a property of an end that of itself is last. Again, in the vision right willing follows necessarily; but apart from the vision right willing has to be postulated to ensure stability; for apart from the vision one has to argue that men will be content with their lot because they ought to be. Finally, since divine goodness is the last end metaphysically, so it is useless to look elsewhere for a last end psychologically; but apart from the vision man can attain divine goodness only per speciem alienam; and to say that man attains his last end per speciem alienam is tantamount to saying that properly he does not attain a last end at all.

This vigorous thesis, which throws not a little light on Thomist usage of the term finis ultimus, has its repercussions. For Fr. Buckley a merely natural order involves antinomies. The will tends to beatitude in general. In a merely natural order man can attain a reasonable perfection and satisfaction. But beatitude means more than that, so that the tendency to beatitude in general can find no good or set of goods in which it can rest simply. Again, within a merely natural order there is no concrete and determinate good which both is and ~~is attainable as~~

is attainable as the principle of subordination and ~~and~~ coordination of other goods of that order. Finally, within a merely natural order man's last end is, as it were, to have no last end but to remain open.

The alert reader will recognise in such statements a variation on the traditional theme emphasized by Fr. de Lubac in the section of Surnaturel entitled "Esprit et Liberté": a rational creature cannot be impeccable naturally. But while Fr. Buckley acknowledges a certain affinity between his thought and that of Fr. de Lubac [p. 180], he stoutly maintains the concrete possibility of a state of pure nature on the ground that Fr. de Lubac has not satisfactorily shown such a state possibility not to be a necessary dogmatic postulate. And if one puts the obvious objection, nihil in natura frustra, Fr. Buckley would answer that he would very much like to know for certain just what that affirmation means. For him human nature as rational is determinate only with respect to broad categories such as truth, goodness, happiness. Further determinations are a matter of divine providence and of history, so that in a sense a state of pure nature is a state of indetermination.

It might be expected that Fr. Buckley is an advocate of the natural desire for the vision of God. In fact, he regards that position as a contradiction in terms. Capacity and exigence mean the same thing to him, so that if the matter of the moon had a capacity, it also would have to have the exigence to be part of an animal organism.

May we add to our congratulations to Fr. Buckley on the appearance of his well-informed, clear, alert, and solid work, a good word for the publishers who had the <sup>kindness</sup> ~~good sense~~ ~~to~~ to print the footnotes at the foot of the page and so spare readers the perpetual inconvenience, not to say annoyance, of turning to the back of the book.

André de Bovis offers a thorough, documented study of the basic ethical and religious doctrines of the Roman Stoic philosopher, Seneca [4 B.C. - 65 A.D.]. An introductory section is followed by seven chapters on such ethical first principles as the Supreme Good, the Last End, and their relation to the moral goodness and the happiness of man. The dominant notion is the honestum defined as what accords with right reason and, again, as what accords with nature. A minor antinomy results from the twofold definition, inasmuch as conflict does arise between right reason and ~~artistic~~ sensitive nature. But the major difficulty of Seneca's position is brought out by forcing the transition from the abstract honestum to a concrete end, from the ideal norm of reason and nature to the real good to be attained by moral living. This reveals that probably the happiness of man, certainly his good and end consist for Seneca simply in the self-realization effected by moral living. Now if the moral end is immanent in the individual, there spontaneously arises the question of justifying morally the sacrifice of the individual for the ~~common~~ common good. To this there appears no adequate answer [p. 132].

Correctly the author warns one against any anachronistic determination whether Seneca thought as a monotheist or as a polytheist. The divinity exists. But its unicity does not preclude the existence of subordinate powers and deities [p. 156]. One, immortal, powerful, intelligent, it also is immense and makes of the universe its temple. Indeed it is an active member of the universe, everywhere present and effective, through though not all-powerful nor a creator. Destiny, fate, world-order, divine law, reason, nature are so many aspects of it; none the less Seneca at times seems to break through the logic of Stoic orthodoxy and to desert rationalist monism for a God transcendent and personal. Fear of God is rejected on the ground that God is good; but gratitude, even love, is recommended; still the possibility of the efficacy of prayer is more than doubtful. Suffering is understood in its moral significance, yet the problem of evil proves too grave; its existence seems to vitiate the whole perspective of the concept of God.

To the author Seneca provides the ~~spectable~~ spectacle of a purely human, a thoroughly laicized wisdom. Ethical doctrine is based on human right reason to find in the ideals of that reason its norm and in the actuation of those ideals its end. As human reason is its own absolute, God is not properly the moral absolute nor is given any significant function in moral living [p. 86]. The good to be attained lies within the reach of merely human effort; it consists in man's conquest of

self by self; it places the highest of values within the self to be realized by the self; so that if Stoicism has its harsh and repellent aspects, it also has its seduction in the glory of man [p. 147]. For man and God differ accidentally but essentially are alike; both have reason; but what in God is perfect, in man is perfectible. Thus, the self-perfection of moral life living is equated with ~~self-divinization~~ self-divinization. What makes a man wise is what makes God God. God is model and authority and judge of goodness. But by that very token, the wise man is the equal of Seneca's God, in quality of being, if not in length of days!

But, if André de Bovis offers us a concrete indication of the Lyon-Fourvière concept of theological ~~laic~~ laicism, it is only in scanty asides that he attempts to integrate this picture with the general problem of the differences between Medieval and <sup>Renaissance</sup> ~~Renaissance~~ theology. A conscientious historian of Seneca's thought, he is content with the contrast between Stoic and Christian wisdom, between a divinity cut to human measure and God at once personal and incomprehensible, between moral perfection achieved by human effort and holiness achieved by grace in answer to prayer. Yet such objective studies have the value of recalling thinkers from such a peripheral issue as pure nature to what is, perhaps, the central real issue question. Is the supernatural another essence to be conceived in parallel to nature? Or is an existentialist communion with God in which alone natural aspiration can be actuated? Were Seneca's ideals the fruits of grace?

studies have the value of giving thought a concrete turn and of providing a touchstone to test necessarily abstract theorems. That is a matter of no little importance if, as it seems, the current alternatives/are: A) <sup>ultimately</sup> conceiving the supernatural as another essence or nature and so at once parallel to and utterly distinct from nature; and B) conceiving it as an existentialist communion of man with God as He is in Himself, and so at once the act and perfection of natural ~~aspe~~ aspiration, for it is man's, yet utterly <sup>right, decent, or</sup> beyond natural achievement, for it is with God as He is God.

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