

the yearnings of the human heart for both liberty and stability. But the essays we have so far considered are surprisingly tentative, if not outright indifferent, to this exploration of a middle way.

III

The name of Reinhold Niebuhr recurs throughout the pages of this volume. Sometimes he is the enemy, a bifurcator and pessimist of the worst kind; sometimes he is befriended due to his insights into social complexity or his efforts on behalf of social justice. No other theologian, nor any twentieth century philosopher excepting Whitehead, has comparable presence in the pages of this book. The process perspective advocated by most of the authors in this collection remains essentially where it was half a century ago.

In the interim between the World Wars, Whitehead proposed a metaphysical vision that caught the imagination of many theologians and philosophers, and great has been the ink spilled on behalf of that vision since. But Whitehead's contemporary, John Dewey, remains the only significant thinker to make the process dialectic of change and permanence the basis for a fully elaborated social ethic and for its underlying social ontology. Niebuhr's voice provided the best theological challenge to Dewey's melioristic analysis. It still does, although time has softened the differences between these two social ethicists and has highlighted their common opposition to institutional injustices and to myopic definitions of individual fulfillment.

One significance of this volume of essays is that it reveals the relative silence of the Whiteheadians regarding social analysis and political action. There is no real exemplification of the third stage of process social ethics, no sustained inquiry into specific social patterns, cultural practices, and institutional policies in which the concepts of process theology are asked to roll up their sleeves and go to work on behalf of the resolution of concrete social and political problems. But this volume also reveals an embarrassment over that silence, and a genuine desire to contribute somehow, some way, to the revitalization of social *praxis* in the United States. In these closing years of the twentieth century, most certainly we are in desperate need of worthy successors to Dewey and Niebuhr, two ethicists whose perishing has not yet been the occasion for new becomings.

George Nordgulen. *Perspectives in World Religions, Volume 1*. Calcutta, India: Writers Workshop, 1981. 263 + xvi pp. (Reviewed by George W. Shields, Indiana University Southeast, 4201 Grant Line Road, Albany, Indiana 47150)

Professor George Nordgulen has authored an ambitious, wide-ranging, and learned study of four world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam), concentrating upon their "modern expressions" as found in such religious thinkers as Radhakrishnan, Suzuki, Kierkegaard, Iqbal, et al. The work is written with the express purpose of "creatively synthesizing diverse ideas and values in world

religions" (ix), and doing so in dialogue with the process philosophy of Charles Hartshorne and A. N. Whitehead (generally favoring Hartshorne on issues upon which the two differ). The main thesis of the work is that God, when identified in Hartshornian fashion as 'unsurpassable by all except self', is the key to an adequate, fundamental philosophy or metaphysic; a metaphysic which is sometimes actually expressed (both covertly and overtly) in the world religions, but at any rate, *is* the ideal of a creative synthesis of world religious ideas and values.

The complete execution of the argument spans not only this first volume, which contains expositions of world religious perspectives on "ultimate reality," "nature," and "persons," but a planned second volume, which will discuss the implications of these perspectives for concrete social topics such as "war," "population," "racism," and "ecology." Students of process thought will find the introduction to the "theistic-metaphysical prolegomenon of process thought" (an exposition of largely Hartshornian themes), and the sections on John Cobb (pp. 168-86), W. Pannenberg (pp. 186-195), and M. Iqbal (pp. 213-27), to be of particular interest.

I find two features of the work to be disconcerting. One is that Nordgulen's writing style is such that it sometimes obscures his meaning. The following passage illustrates:

The existence of the Absolute is the supreme supermental realization for we stand before that which is neither objective existension, such as matter, nor subjective experience of moment by moment process but which is both subjective—Absolute as self-existence—and objective; hence, it includes both; it is neither matter nor form but both; neither being nor becoming but both."

The syntax here is convoluted. Moreover, what is the meaning of such terms as "supermental realization" and "objective existension"? In what sense is the Absolute "self-existent," and precisely why is subjectivity being associated with the "Absolute as self-existent"? We are not explicitly told. The other item: it seems to me that the significant, more recent research in Buddhism—which could very well support a Hartshornian-based interpretation of Buddhism—was not consulted. In particular, I have in mind the recent interest in the thought of Dōgen Kigen, unwitting medieval founder of the Sōtō Zen tradition in Japan, whose notions of the Buddha-nature are, on some scholarly interpretations, "panentheistic" (cf. the work of Professor Hee-Jin Kim).

Nevertheless, I think that Nordgulen's book will well serve those students who wish to read basic summaries of a global variety of religious thinkers in a single volume, and who have an interest in process philosophy.