

BOOK REVIEWS

The Moral Mystic, by **James R. Horne**. (SR Supplements, 14.) Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1983. Pp. x + 132. \$7.50.

Reviewed by **WILLIAM J. WAINWRIGHT**, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Horne distinguishes "pure mysticism" from "mixed mysticism," and argues that while the former is amoral, the latter is sometimes moral. Horne has a number of interesting things to say, but the way in which he draws his distinction between the two types of mysticism and his characterization of morality are both questionable.

While the pure mystic is sometimes identified with the introvertive or monistic mystic who cultivates a state of empty consciousness, the general thrust of Horne's discussion suggests that pure mysticism is not to be identified with a distinctive experience but with an attitude towards it. Pure mystics, according to Horne, deliberately cultivate their state of empty consciousness and "tend to dismiss religious and other doctrines as irrelevant to their mystical way." (58) Because they focus on the experience itself to the exclusion of other (intellectual and practical) concerns, pure mystics are amoral. The mixed mystic places his experience in a larger context, and integrates his quest for illumination with other concerns. When these concerns include moral concerns, the mixed mystic will be a "moral mystic."

There are varieties of mixed mysticism. In characterizing these varieties, Horne assimilates Stace's distinction between pantheism, monism and dualism, and Zaehner's distinction between nature mysticism, monism and theism, and argues that the three should be regarded as "interpretations of illumination." The first emphasizes "that the experience is of consciousness alone, emptied of its contents," and interprets illumination as an experience "of nothing" ("all nature unified, nothing in particular"). The second emphasizes "that it is after all an experience, and that it is the individual mystic's own experience," and interprets "it in terms of selfhood." The third emphasizes that an "experience is always of something" and that any relation can be experienced in either an I-it mode or an I-Thou mode, and interprets illumination as a meeting with an eternal Thou who is "equally present" in encounters with human beings. (62-3) Only the last interpretation of illumination is likely to express itself in a pattern of life which does justice to moral concerns.

In my opinion, Horne's typology is very problematic. (1) Horne's characterization of pure mysticism conflates things which ought to be distinguished, viz., a deliberate cultivation of the state of empty consciousness and a self-centered

preoccupation with one's own experiences which is uninterested in their intellectual and moral ramifications. Shankara is a pure mystic in the first sense but not in the second. Indeed a positive evaluation of pure mysticism in the second sense would appear to be a largely modern (and western?) phenomenon. (Christian and Buddhist literature, for example, consistently admonishes us to remember that what is important is not experiences but union with God or entry into Nirvana.) (2) Nature mysticism ought not to be identified with, or assimilated to, empty consciousness, for the former has natural objects as its contents (even though they are perceived in an extraordinary new way) while the latter is devoid of content. (3) Stace may be talking about three different interpretations of what he regards as a single experience, but Zaehner is clearly talking of three different *experiences*. (4) Finally Horne often speaks as if there were a single experience underlying the various types of mysticism. (Even though this experience will be variously colored by the mystic's attitude towards it and the pattern of his life as a whole.) I am not sure that Horne means to assert this, but if he does he is surely aware that this is a highly controversial thesis.

The root of these problems lies in the fact that Horne attempts to combine three different sorts of typology, viz., a typology of experiences, a typology of interpretations, and a typology of (mystical) styles of life. The three typologies are indeed related but they ought to be distinguished. (The experience of the nature mystic can be interpreted theistically. Theistic mystics can become preoccupied with their experiences. And so on.)

Horne distinguishes between "proper-name morality" in which the agent embraces an ideal or cause or command or value as his special "calling" or "destiny", and "social morality" which sympathetically responds to the needs and concerns of others. Horne maintains that "distance"—by which he means moral uncertainty and doubt, a sense of the ambiguity of moral life, and a sympathetic response to the ultimately irreconcilable diversity of needs and points of view—is an essential feature of the latter.

It is not clear to me that moral doubt or uncertainty is an essential feature of morality. I am prepared to concede that it would be essential *if* the needs, concerns and yearnings to which social morality sympathetically responds are irreconcilable, but the latter is (as MacIntyre, Sandel and others have pointed out) a highly controversial presupposition of modern "liberal ideology." It is not clear that it is a presupposition of morality itself. It should also be noted that moral doubt can take two quite different forms. One may doubt one's own ability to meet standards which one regards as compelling or doubt the quality of one's own moral achievements, or one may be doubtful as to which standards follow. Horne tends to conflate the two and to emphasize the latter. But while the former is typical of (at least) theistic mystics, the latter, it seems to me, is not. That we find the second sort of doubt in modern mystics like Underhill and Merton

is largely irrelevant, for they are products of a liberal culture which emphasizes precisely this sort of ambiguity. In short, if “distance” in the latter sense is essential to morality, then it would seem to me that (until quite recently) very few of those mystics who have interpreted their experiences in I-Thou categories have been moral—a conclusion which I find hard to accept.

It would be unfair to conclude on a negative note. The issues which Horne raises are important, and a number of his observations and distinctions are suggestive. In particular, serious consideration should be given to his central thesis, viz., that while mysticism can enhance morality by providing it with depth and motivation, the sources of moral life are largely non-mystical, and that mysticism by itself is insufficient to support morality. I suspect that this may be true. In any case it deserves our attention.

Epistemology: The Justification of Belief, by **David L. Wolfe**, InterVarsity Press, 1983, pp. 92. \$3.95.

Reviewed by JAMES A. KELLER, Wofford College.

This book is in the *Contours of Christian Philosophy* series of “short introductory-level textbooks in the various fields of philosophy.” Its style should be of great help in communicating with beginning-level students, for it is simply and clearly written and employs well chosen examples to clarify difficult points. Moreover, the author makes a serious effort to grasp the attention and interest of the intended readers by focusing on an issue about which college undergraduates might have doubts and on which techniques for assessing beliefs might be welcomed. Thus there is no consideration of Gettier-type problems, and one hears nothing of barn-facades or of grebes. Nor does one find the problem of proving that an external world exists, only its notation as a problem which did not arouse the interest of undergraduates (p. 14). Instead, the primary focus is on religious and metaphysical beliefs (p. 18), which also provide the most common source of illustrations. Nevertheless, the argument and conclusions would be applicable to issues other than these, though more copious use of other issues as illustrations might help drive home this point with beginning undergraduates.

Although, as Wolfe notes, epistemology traditionally was defined as “the study of the possibility and nature of knowledge” (p. 14), the book is not concerned with knowledge but with justified belief, or more precisely with what is involved in *showing* that a belief is justified or “to put it somewhat differently” that our assertions are warranted (p. 15). He promises to return later to the