

BOOK REVIEWS

nism, and anything that partakes of the general partakes of Platonism. What a waste!

EDWIN B. ALLAIRE

University of Texas at Austin

The Philosophical Review, Vol. 106, No. 3 (July 1997)

BELIEF POLICIES. By PAUL HELM. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. xiii, 226.

Helm defends the thesis that epistemically rational people can acquire and maintain beliefs according to what he calls "belief policies." Helm's main target is "sufficient evidentialism," the claim that any epistemically rational belief must be "determined only by [or, as he elsewhere suggests, based solely on] sufficient evidence" (2–3). As he seems to concede (3), his attack on sufficient evidentialism is highly indirect: he aims to show that there is a plurality of defensible belief policies which give different judgments on what counts as sufficient evidence and that the adoption of one belief policy over another is inevitably and properly subject to the will. His discussion wends its way through much familiar territory, including such topics as doxastic voluntarism; the difference between belief and assent; the belief policies recommended by Pascal, Locke, Hume, Clifford, and James; weakness of will and self-deception; responsibility for belief; toleration; and fideism.

Unfortunately, the book's weaknesses outweigh its strengths. Chief among the weaknesses is its spotty attention to relevant and important literature, both historical and contemporary. Even though Helm writes at length about assent, and even though he discusses Augustine, he completely ignores John Henry Newman, whose *Grammar of Assent* deserves at least a mention. Helm devotes more than a chapter to the relation between belief and the will and another chapter to fideism (and elsewhere discusses the topic of religious belief), yet he never mentions Louis Pojman's arguments in *Religious Belief and the Will*,¹ an analytic-philosophical treatment of exactly those issues. He attacks evidentialism without confronting the most important defenses of that view, such as those offered in Feldman and Conee's "Evidentialism."² He asserts the possibility of self-contradictory beliefs (18) without considering the reasons offered by possible-worlds theorists and others for denying that a self-contradictory proposition can be a relatum in the belief relation.³ He simply asserts that "[n]o obligations

¹London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986.

²*Philosophical Studies* 48 (1985): 15–34.

³See, for example, Ruth Barcan Marcus, "Rationality and Believing the Impos-

follow logically from facts" (22), without any indication that such a claim is both highly controversial and the focus of an enormous, decades-old literature.

The literature Helm does discuss he sometimes seriously misinterprets. For example, he interprets Alvin Plantinga's long article "Reason and Belief in God"⁴ as arguing that "one *may* believe certain propositions without having a rational . . . justification for them, a position clearly in contrast with that which claims that one ought to believe only if A, where A is the fulfilment of some general epistemic requirement which holds of all people in virtue of their rationality" (106–7). Plantinga, however, would reject the accusation that he is defending the rationality of theistic beliefs which lack a rational justification or that the theistic believers he is defending fail to meet some epistemic requirement incumbent on all rational persons; on the contrary, Plantinga contends that ordinary theistic beliefs are entirely rationally justified and that theists do not, in virtue of their beliefs, fall short of any general standard of rationality. Elsewhere, Helm reads Plantinga as claiming that we may rationally believe "propositions for which we do not have grounds" (210), making Plantinga sound strangely like Wittgenstein. But Plantinga is at pains to argue that "properly basic" beliefs for whose truth we lack propositional evidence need not be groundless, and he concedes that we couldn't hold them rationally if they *were* groundless. A bit later, Helm seems to recognize his mistake, admitting that Plantinga does not, after all, concede the groundlessness of properly basic beliefs (214), but it would be better not to have given the misimpression in the first place. Again, according to Helm, "Plantinga surely means that one who takes the existence of God as properly basic *does* know that God exists" (213, emphasis in original). But Plantinga means no such thing. Someone who takes herself to have a properly basic belief in God may be wrong about its properly basic status, or, although properly basic, her belief may not count as knowledge since it may lack the necessary ingredient Plantinga elsewhere calls "warrant."⁵

For a reason that may also stem from failing to engage the relevant literature, Helm's discussion of doxastic voluntarism often sounds odd. Throughout the book he simply assumes a compatibilist view of free will, and relying on that assumption he concludes that my free will can govern my choice of a belief policy even if that choice is fully determined by

sible," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983): 321–38; and Robert Stalnaker, "Propositions," in *Issues in the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Alfred F. MacKay and Daniel Merrill (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 79–91.

⁴In *Faith and Rationality*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 16–93.

⁵See, for example, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

external causes (170). That strategy may be fair enough, but in a debate over doxastic voluntarism, his assumption of compatibilism is likely to strike many people as unfair, since many of the arguments against voluntarism depend on the incompatibilist intuition that a belief fully determined by causes external to me cannot be subject to the control of my free will. Thus, I doubt that Helm manages to debate opponents of voluntarism on terms they would accept.

Finally, the book is marred by some bad arguments. In the space available here, I can give just a sense of the uneven quality of argumentation by quoting a representative non sequitur or two. Helm maintains that “to falsify some genuine universal proposition . . . is to verify the truth of some singular proposition” (68). But surely Helm is wrong: the universal generalization “There are no solutions to the equation $x^y = z$, where x and y are irrational and z is rational,” for instance can be shown to be false without showing that some particular x , y , and z provide a solution.⁶ So one way of falsifying a universal generalization is simply to verify an incompatible existential one. Later he claims, “if someone is responsible for investigating, and the results of the investigation are causally sufficient for some belief, then . . . that person is responsible for that belief,” where being responsible entails being liable to “praise or blame” (170–71). Helm never argues for that claim, and the implicit principle on which it seems to rest—namely, that one is liable to “praise or blame for all the effects of one’s actions—is, to say the least, controversial.

STEPHEN MAITZEN

Dalhousie University

⁶ Michael Dummett’s *Elements of Intuitionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1977), 9, credits this example to Benenson. I thank Harold Hodes for suggesting it to me.

The Philosophical Review, Vol. 106, No. 3 (July 1997)

THE METAPHYSICS OF FREE WILL: AN ESSAY ON CONTROL. By JOHN MARTIN FISCHER. Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994. Pp. ix, 273.

In *The Metaphysics of Free Will*, John Martin Fischer draws together and extends much of his excellent work on free will and determinism, divine foreknowledge, and moral responsibility. He argues here for a position that he calls “semicompatibilism”: the ability to do otherwise is incompatible with determinism and with the existence of an omniscient God, but moral responsibility is compatible with both of these circumstances. The larger part of the book, approximately two-thirds, examines three versions of an