

Selected Articles from *The Individual* January 1995

Society for Individual Freedom

Since 2002, each new issue of the SIF's journal, *The Individual*, has been uploaded onto the SIF's website at www.individualist.org.uk as a PDF file. Before that, online availability was very limited.

To remedy this, we have reconstructed back-issues of the journal using only the core articles. We hope that you will find them of interest. Any comments should be directed to the current editor of *The Individual* at editor@individualist.org.uk.

Please note that views expressed herein are not necessarily those of the SIF but are printed as a contribution to debate.

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MORALITY IS MORE THAN ME

Reverend Bryan Rippin

The Christian faith is grounded in the social experience of a Semitic people for whom individual righteousness and national well-being were indivisible. When the prophets saw that things were going badly for Israel, they either castigated the king for unfaithfulness, or the king's prophets for being sycophantic or the king's people for dealing unfairly with each other in the markets, in the law courts, or in personal relationships. In the Ten Commandments there are four rules about the people's relationship with God but six about personal relationships (Exodus 20, 1-17). The Sermon on the Mount where Jesus speaks about the poor whom God blesses and about the rich whom God warns, is the focus of all Christian behaviour (Matthew 5, 1-11).

Market morality as practised by four successive Conservative governments insists on economics being the prime base for human relationships. As a consequence and with considerable success the one has been separated from the many. Margaret Thatcher — influenced early in her life by her Methodist upbringing and later by her mentor, Keith Joseph, who was of the Jewish tradition, has fiercely argued for the individual's right for the freedom to achieve. The justification was that the generation of wealth from whatever source and by whatever means, ultimately like manna from heaven, provides wealth for all the masses. Lady Thatcher has quoted the dictum of John Wesley, "gain all you can" so that you can "save all you can". Her present considerable wealth points to the fact that this principle has certainly worked for her. She forgot of course that John Wesley added a third principle of Christian prudence, namely "so that you can give all you can" ("The Use of Money", in 'Forty Four Sermons', 1944, p576). Thus the Christian motive for money making is not the accumulation of wealth or even its investment, but its distribution. Personal success must be directly related if there are some Christian ethics around, to the public need and to the public good.

Pure 'marketism' has been painfully revealed in all its ugly greed in the recent decisions of British Gas to inflate its Chief Executive's salary by 75% and at the same time to decrease the wages of its high

street employees who, at £13,000 a year are considered to be uncompetitive against the wages paid to other high street employees. When Jesus told the story of labourers who were paid the same amount for varying hours of work he was emphasising social need. A family at home still needed bread however long their breadwinner had worked (Matthew 20, 1). When the prophets expressed their anger at the extreme wealth of the powerful and the poverty of the poor, they were emphasising that wealth and justice have a basic dynamic relationship. As John Wesley says in the sermon already quoted, we were brought into being and placed in this world "not as a proprietor but as a steward".

The focus of Christian social responsibility has always been the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom of God. The term has never been easily understood and is a constant theme of contemporary theology. Jesus' own understanding of the rule of God is so ambiguous that He continually speaks of it by analogy or parable. Whatever it meant to him it certainly had an intensely *personal* meaning. God knows about every sparrow that falls and numbers every hair on every head (Luke 12, 7). But the personal is always treated as part of an entire social coherence. All the time He worked out the rule within the companionship of His friends, on the streets, amongst the crowds on the hills, in people's homes. Again and again He emphasises a morality that involves personal dignity and the solidarity of the group.

The rule of God cannot be separated from the basic purposes of God, from His intentions as creator. Our new understanding of the importance of the environment for the survival of the earth and its inhabitants; our rediscovery through technology that we are all interdependent confirms this — just as primitive people have always known it. Just as the earth and its environment depend on this vital inter-relationship of all living creatures and the plants which populate it, so the survival of life depends on getting the right balance between the desires of the individual and the needs of the corporate dimension of life to which every element of

creation contributes.

For such reasons as these I believe there are no individual rights that can exist without reference to the whole life of humanity and its environment. In the last fifteen years a political and socio-economic battle has been going on between the proper wish to preserve the state and also to free the individual from its unreasonable demands. But a new machinery of state has grown out of this desire and far from helping to achieve that purpose it is preventing it. The irony is that the effort to secure such freedom has in fact created a new tyranny and the deregulation has only been achieved by a whole mass of *new* regulations: particularly the effects of the numerous QUANGOs which are accountable only to ministers of state, the privatised industries which are insufficiently regulated, and the immense centralised power now in the hands of government. All of this — far from ensuring new freedom — has created a miasma of power which threatens to generate a sophisticated form of anarchy. In fifteen years the government has in fact gained a degree of power which has robbed people of a sense of their own accountability to something more than to their own interests. There is insufficient focus to our life.

The 'kingdom' idea in the New Testament Gospels contains the evocative theme of an ethic of love — for self, for God, for righteousness — as well as a theology of power based on mutual responsibility. The failure of the Thatcherite revolution is that there has been too much concern for a licence that is unbalanced by a sense of responsibility; too much self love and no neighbour love; too little reflection about the nature of power and how it is responsibly used; too much patrimony for those who succeed and too much contempt for those who don't. A person alone is too narrow a context in which to build a philosophy of individual freedom. The con-

text must comprehend all people; the rich and the poor, all nations, the whole earth. St. Paul had some funny ideas but several brilliant ones. For example he liked to call the Church the "Body of Christ". He was talking about a holistic philosophy of human nature. There is no other. God sets people free. That's where the Judean tradition begins and that is the heart of the Christian understanding of Christ. But that is only the beginning of the story. How the freedom can be used to honour God and for the wellbeing of the wider community is the real issue.

Adrian Hastings, the Professor of Theology in the University of Leeds, in his book "The Theology of a Protestant Catholic" describes Jesus as a prophet. "His call for disciples is, above all, for men and women to take on the task of prophesy, its fierce intellectual honesty, its bearing of the burdens of the weak, its condition of marginality, its promise of unpopularity, its refusal to take refuge in the temple, but its equal refusal to see the world through the spectacles of the world's own justifying ideologies" (p 67). That's a good statement with which to begin a Christian definition of the individual. S/he is a person who discovers his/her personhood not merely in the temple, the law court, the boardroom, the lobby, but always amongst the people — and for them.

Rev. Bryan Rippin represents the Free Churches on the Government's Inner Cities Religious Council. He is Chairman (the Methodist equivalent of Bishop) of the Sheffield District of the Methodist Church and has been a minister for the last 38 years, working in Bristol, Bradford, Nottingham, Wolverhampton and Poplar in East London. Also multi-faith and community ministry experience and likes living in cities, having chosen, when he came to Sheffield in 1990, to live in a central area instead of the more fashionable ones. He is author of "The Christian Juggler", published in 1985.

GOD AND MORALITY: HELP OR HINDERANCE?

Paul Anderton

Do you remember doing Venn diagrams at school? They were helpful in solving problems such as: A certain political party had 315 members; 125 said they put their principles above personal ambition and 208 said they put the interests of Britain above

party loyalty; how many put *both* their principles and British interests above other considerations? If you draw two overlapping rings, one to represent each group and put the numbers in you see the overlap represents the number required and this makes the

solution obvious. Perhaps such a simple case can be solved by 'common sense' anyhow and you don't need the diagram.

But this little visual aid — the Venn diagram of rings to represent sets of ideas some of which might be in several groups — can help outside mathematical puzzles.

Suppose we use the Venn rings to represent the moral precepts and 'values' of various religions? Those of, say, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism would overlap in some respects and not in others. Only Christianity deifies Jesus, only Islam proscribes alcohol. Both Judaism and Islam proscribe eating pork. But there are some rules in common — where all three Venn rings would overlap. They all forbid murder, theft, neglect of ageing parents, even adultery. And the worship of false gods, except that the 'genuine' god is different in each case.

The arguments and wars between religions are invariably about the beliefs and values outside the overlap — those peculiar to a particular faith and which distinguish that faith from the others.

This is well illustrated by the famous Ten Commandments. The first four are, in effect, threats and encouragements to maintain faith in Christianity itself and its priests and officials. The last six are often quoted (the first four nothing like as often) with the observation that they are 'common sense' anyhow. There is then an implied invitation to believe in the whole religious package, as if the obvious common sense of some simple rules of behaviour were proof that all its other articles of faith were common sense as well.

The practical moral problem is to get people to obey the moral rules for the long-term good of 'society' in those circumstances where individuals can see some short-term benefit for themselves from not doing so. Making some connection between morality and religion with a system of immediate penalties and rewards for compliance through the reactions of the peer group of believers, has obvious practical benefits.

But there are some serious disadvantages, the main one being the inevitable built-in rigidity. The full package of morality includes a substantial number of add-ons — such as the first four command-

ments, together with some mundane considerations such as hygiene requirements learned by experience — and these can become outdated. Then if these have been presented as 'the word of God' doubt is introduced about the wisdom of the word of God in these respects and this can quickly spread to the 'common sense' areas as well. This is the big practical danger of associating morality with religion. In its 'absolutist' attitude to social rules in general it can be made to appear ridiculous or capriciously repressive by developments in technology or changes in attitude due simply to increased knowledge. Examples include the effect of economic prosperity in supporting ever growing world population which changes the emphasis from procreation to resource management. So the old religious emphasis on procreation as the major purpose of sexual relationships, for instance, seems quaint or perverse. So does the demand for redistribution of wealth by state confiscation and doling out foreign aid on political grounds rather than by market trading.

So if you want to know what is 'true morality' there are two sources, one pragmatic, the other deductive. The pragmatic is evidently those areas of personal behaviour where the various religions agree — the overlap of the Venn rings. The deduced rules require some careful thought rather than jumping to simplistic conclusions — including sometimes rejecting what seems like common sense because this 'common sense' might be the result of limited knowledge and experience.

The Ten Commandments boil down to: (1) Worship no other God; (2) Do not worship idols; (3) Do not take Lord's name in vain; (4) Keep Sabbath holy; (5) Honour your Parents; (6) Do Not Kill; (7) No adultery; (8) No stealing; (9) No False Witness; (10) Do Not covet neighbour's goods. The order in which they are stated is interesting — particularly if it is to be taken as an indication of order of importance.

WHAT ETHICAL PROBLEM?

Sean Gabb

Currently in the United Kingdom there are some 10,000 people so ill that, without the expense and hardship of a dialysis machine, they would die. Their one hope of restored health lies in a kidney transplant. Sometimes a donor can be found, but never often enough to meet the full demand; and as progressively fewer die in the first stages of renal failure, so numbers grow of those trapped in the limbo of dialysis.

This may be about to change. A British research team has possibly found a means of suppressing the body's normal tendency to reject non-human tissue. The pig's internal structure is similar to our own, and transplant experiments are already underway. The prospect opens before us of a limitless supply not merely of kidneys, but also of livers, hearts and lungs, and of every other organ or kind of tissue the shape and size of which we have in common with any species of animal nearly related to ourselves. Within five years, the dialysis machine could be as obsolete as the leech. Within 20 years, heart disease might be as fatal as gall-stones.

Reactions though have been oddly unfavourable. The animal rights people we can ignore. It may or may not be that "breeding pigs as living organ banks owes more to sick horror fantasy than medi-

cal science"*. It is certainly consistent with the belief that animals have rights like our own; and no talk of 10,000 kidney patients will or ought to change that belief. But why are the rest of us so apparently worried? Why, for example, is the BMA eager to set up a committee, packed with philosophers and theologians, to consider the ethics of the matter? For most of us, where is the least moral ambiguity in further exploiting the other species? We wear leather shoes and clothes. We eat animals. We test drugs and even perfumes on them. Perhaps all these acts are grossly immoral. We tolerate them nonetheless. How is putting a pig's heart into a man so different?

It differs here: Other food available, no one dies of not eating pork. Pig organ transplants could save lives by the millions. The first is extra to survival, the second essential. All difference is surely for the better. Three minutes' thought would suffice to prove this. But, as A.E. Housman noted, thought is hard and three minutes is a long time.

* "Pig transplants 'by year 2000'", The Times, 20th August, 1994.

Sean Gabb is the Editor of "Free Life".

REVIEW OF PROFESSOR ANTONY FLEW'S *SHEPHARD'S WARNING: SETTING SCHOOLS BACK ON COURSE*

Sean Gabb

Shephard's Warning: Setting Schools Back On Course by Antony Flew. [Adam Smith Institute, London, 1994, 161 pp, ISBN 1-873712-47-2. The exact price is not known at the time of this review, but copies will be available from Libertarian Alliance, 25, Chapter Chambers, Esterbrook Street, London SW1 at a substantial discount]

The chief message of this book is that our system

of state education is, and has been — for at least the past generation — a disaster. This is not for me either a new or a controversial message. I have long since ceased to be astonished by the illiteracy of many of my students, for whom spelling is the job of their spell checkers, and grammar is as mysterious as modern physics. It is, however, a message that benefits from constant repetition — and that is here communicated with all the moderation of tone

and overwhelming demonstration that we have come to expect of its author.

A good example of this is Professor Flew's reply to what has become the standard defence of the present system. Though the hard evidence was hidden from us or tampered with, it had become clear by the 1980s that the state schools were producing a generation as illiterate and innumerate as any in the past 200 years. When forced to recognise this fact, the bureaucrats in charge of the system excused their failure on two grounds. First, there was a "chronic underfunding" of education. Second, the children in state schools were often unfitted by their backgrounds for any kind of education. Professor Flew replies thus:

First, in 1987, the same reading test was given to black children in a South African school as to students at a sixth form college in the Home Counties. The South African children did better — even though English was in every case their second language, and incomparably less was spent on their education, and they came from incomparably poorer backgrounds (pp. 77-78).

Second, despite all the rhetoric about the "Thatcher cuts", education spending per child increased by 47 per cent in real terms between 1983 and 1993 (p. 12).

There is then no simple proportionality between input of money and output of educational quality — at least, as measured by objective testing. This is a simple truth of economics, stated in any

textbook. Indeed, for state education, the only apparent proportionality has been of the inverse kind. And this decline in standards Professor Flew blames firmly on the educational bureaucrats. They have systematically diverted funds from the education of children to the expansion of their own numbers and salaries. Worse than this, they have imposed teaching methods that manifestly do not work, and a syllabus that is often worthless.

I do not see how anyone who reads this book with an open mind can fail to agree with its chief message. I am less sure about Professor Flew's recommendations. These seem rather gentle in the light of what he has described. There are some disasters so complete and inevitable, that it is pointless to talk of reforming the system responsible for having produced them. State education is an example of this. Opting out and vouchers sound attractive, and ought surely to bring some improvements. However, this disaster is one not only of systems, but also of people. And so long as they continue in place, the people who run our educational bureaucracies will find ways to prevent working-class children from getting a sound education.

But this is not the place for me to sound off about the abolition of state education. It is enough for me to congratulate Professor Flew for a really excellent analysis, and to urge anyone reading this review to buy a copy.

(Sean Gabb is visiting lecturer in Politics, University of London. He also edits "Free Life", the quarterly magazine of the Libertarian Alliance.)

**REVIEW OF ROBERT WHELAN'S (ed.)
*TEACHING RIGHT AND WRONG: HAVE THE CHURCHES
FAILED?***

Paul Anderton

[IEA, Health and Welfare Unit, 2, Lord North Street, SW1P 3LB. 44pp, £5]

This is a short book by six authors with positive religious convictions, five Christian, one Jewish. The topic is the teaching of morality and civilised behaviour which is accepted as being in crisis at pre-

sent.

David Green, Director of the Health and Welfare Unit, points out in his foreword that F. A. Hayek recognised that appropriate values and habits essential to a free society 'are not transmitted automatically'. They have to be positively taught and the

Churches have traditionally played an important part in this.

The authors have various suggestions about this. Jon Davies wants many more (if not all) schools to become church schools and for childhood to be both re-sacralised and re-criminalised — right and wrong inculcated positively and wrongdoing firmly disapproved of and punished. John Kennedy suggests that the Church should accept the modern desire for hedonism rather than asceticism and try to work out some public ethic recognising the difference between serious and responsible hedonistic pursuits and simple self-indulgence.

Bishop Michael Adie points out that, contrary perhaps to the assumption of the conservative government in its call for more positive moral teaching, the Church's commitment to values such as justice, compassion, forgiveness and truth might just as likely stimulate criticism of present-day society as endorse it. Rabbi Dr Julian Jacobs insists on individual personal responsibility and that asking 'have the Churches failed?' cannot be a means of suggesting Churches are to blame for the ills of society. David Konstant, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Leeds, is very certain of the Church's mission to proclaim, teach, and itself set an example of Chris-

tian virtues in practice. William Wallace draws attention to the economic and social cost of ignoring the Christian values of honesty, abstinence, and fidelity in terms of crime, substance abuse, and AIDS.

In all, a comprehensive brief survey of present religious thought on contemporary moral problems and their practical consequences.

However, there are two serious omissions which make this survey incomplete. One is the Muslim view which is significant for an important minority and, in its fundamentalist form, of potential serious practical significance (e.g. the Salman Rushdie situation).

Even more important is the absence of any humanist or atheist comment. All the contributors are ordained ministers, with the exception of Jon Davies who is in some ways the most reactionary, who insist on the significance of faith in God for moral behaviour. This is, however, by no means certain, as suggested elsewhere in this issue of 'The Individual', and some recognition of the completely non-religious position would have been welcome in the interest of true balance.

REVIEW OF JONATHAN KINGDON'S *SELF-MADE MAN AND HIS UNDOING*

Michael Plumbe

[Simon & Shuster Ltd., West Garden Place, Kendal Street, London W2 2AQ £9.99 (Paperback) ISBN: 0-671-71260-8]

Most of this book is, to quote the cover, 'The radical reworking of evolution theory'. For those interested in the development of modern mankind from, literally, Eve (one mother in Africa), the book is bound to be most interesting. I myself kept getting confused between the different types of man, in trying to keep some track of the long timescales, and in mapping ancient places against the present world. This masterly work draws together threads from many other studies (as well as those of the au-

thor) and presents a convincing history of how different 'races' come to be where they are now.

For members of our Society, the last part of the book is, I suggest, compulsory reading. It demonstrates graphically how man, in his selfishness, is destroying his environment, in terms of both natural and human resources. Whaling, farming (of animals and crops), deforestation, mining, climatic changes, governments, high finance, waste disposal, and trade agreements (especially GATT), all receive critical and damning examination. This is a disturbing book which needs to be read by all who are interested in man's survival.

REVIEW OF CHARLES MURRAY ET AL'S *UNDERCLASS: THE CRISIS DEEPENS*

Paul Anderton

[IEA, Health and Welfare Unit, and Sunday Times, 2 Lord North Street, SW1P 3LB. 69pp £5.99. ISBN: 0-255-36355-9]

This short book is one result of Charles Murray's second visit to Britain at the invitation of the Sunday Times. On both occasions he was looking at the developments in social conditions and how they compared with similar situations in America.

His first study suggested that Britain was mirroring America in the development of an 'underclass' of largely welfare-dependent people, concentrated in ghetto areas, and prone to economic decline and moral disintegration. This conclusion was based on the study of the measured values of, and trends in, three key symptoms — crime, illegitimacy, and economic inactivity among working-aged men.

The conclusion is that changes have taken place which have led to nothing short of a revolutionary change in social habits and expectations, particularly the demise of the two-parent family. This is not confined to the lower classes; the upper classes are also involved though for different reasons. The main traditional strength is in the upper middle class and here it is likely to get better. *But the result will be the development of a new class system drastically different from the old one and much more hostile to free institutions.* This last point makes this work particularly interesting, and disturbing, for the SIF.

Mr Murray proposes reforms, the main ones being full employment and a return, with appropriate adjustments for inflation, to the benefit structure much as it was in 1960.

As something of a political activist and mathematician, this book is particularly interesting and satisfying to me. Observing the huge areas of council estates and tower blocks of a large provincial city over the past two decades has provided direct graphic evidence of what Charles Murray has deduced from the statistics. The difference is that personal observation and anecdote can always be dis-

missed as biased or unscientific, but the numbers are definitely objective.

Nevertheless the IEA invited four commentaries on Murray's research and conclusions from Pete Alcock, Miriam David, Melanie Philips, and Sue Slipman. They struggle hard to discredit the analysis and maintain the politically correct view that the situation is not as serious as made out, or, alternatively, solvable by more government action (and taxpayers' money) on the lines that have obviously failed already. The reader must of course judge this for himself, but in my opinion (and experience) the evidence is definitely in favour of Charles Murray.

As an example of the desperation of the critics, Sue Slipman challenges the idea, of Murray's, that rapid social change cannot be the prime cause of social breakdown because during the Victorian era of rapid industrialisation illegitimacy actually declined, by asserting that this was because industrialisation created large numbers of jobs which paid for marriages. So the political left's conventional wisdom that 19th century capitalism caused misery and degradation for the working classes is quietly abandoned (at last) in the attempt to refute Murray!

Read this book (about right for a shortish train or plane journey or a spare couple of hours) both for information and as an exercise in critical judgement.

REVIEW OF AVEDON CAROL'S *NUDES, PRUDES, AND ATTITUDES*

Pauline Henry

[New Clarion Press, 76, Rosehill Street, Cheltenham, Glos. GL52 6SJ. This is one of the 'Issues in Social Policy' series, ISBN 1-873797-13-3, and is available at £9.95 paperback, £23.50 hardback, from bookshops and the publisher.]

This book should be read by anybody who wants to know the facts about censorship in general and particularly that related to sexual information and so-called pornography. It is well and interestingly written, and includes actual information on some sexual activities which might be presently unknown to some readers.

The main argument is that the recent increased tolerance of censorship and fear of the supposed ill-effects of pornography, by media, politicians, and the general public, is the result of misinformation — much of it from allegedly feminist sources. This is presented clearly and in detail. The idea that pornography 'causes' violence against women is

convincingly refuted, and a coherent alternative explanation given of the alleged facts used in this argument. In particular Avedon Carol points out that the actual content of so-called pornographic material is rarely sadistic or violent. In fact it is much more likely to depict ordinary (i.e. not stereotypically 'attractive') women enjoying themselves and adopting a positive role in sexual relations. This is probably the real source of the objection to allegedly corrupting and subversive material by the so-called 'moral' Right.

This book is essential reading for anybody who needs confidence in countering the largely media and politically supported arguments in favour of censorship — particularly the 'protection of children' trick. It is particularly recommended to liberal feminists who feel uneasy in defending the no-censorship position because of the supposed harm to women's interests resulting from pornography.

ADVERTISEMENT FOR PROFESSOR D.R. MYDDELTON'S *THE POWER TO DESTROY*

THE POWER TO DESTROY: a study of the British tax system, by D.R. Myddelton, is a devastating analysis of how taxes reduce the freedom of the individual and the creation of wealth. Published last year, it offers radical proposals to reduce taxation and public expenditure so as to increase freedom, wealth and welfare.

"I strongly commend Professor Myddelton's stimulating review of the continuing, widely damaging cost of government as the starting-point of a long-overdue national debate on the urgent need to restore wealth-creation above sterile 'redistribution' as the only lasting remedy for the most pressing economic, as well as social, problems." *Lord Harris of High Cross.*

"In 1950 as an average taxpayer you worked for two and a half weeks each year to pay your income tax. Today it is two and a half months. That's called progressive taxation. David Myddelton shows just how damaging the tax structure is to our economy: stifling incentive and growth; channelling our money into all the wrong things. This book should be read by everyone who has received either a pay slip or a tax demand and fumed about the amount being grabbed by the taxman." *Teresa Gorman MP.*

The 112-page book carries a foreword by our President, Lord Monson, and is written in a clear and witty style. It is completed with notes, references, a name index and a subject index. For further information on availability, please contact the Society for Individual Freedom at its contact address.