a critical review

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The Sydney Push

Useful philosophy

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Editorial

James Watson, half of the team that discovered the double helix form of DNA, said recently (commenting on genetic engineering): "If we don't play God, who will?"

Maybe someone other than us should try. The irony of some of our attempts struck me recently, as I read a particularly angst-ridden newspaper column about a successful woman in her thirties bewailing the fact that her childhood dreams of love and marriage just didn't happen, and she didn't know why. While it's becoming very common for newspapers and magazines to trade bewildered opinions on motherhood, marriage, relationships and why the whole thing doesn't seem to be working, it seems in other ways that it's working far too well.

Working too well in output, that is. I have been reading a book by anthropologist Jeffrey K. McKee, *Sparing Nature: The Conflict Between Human Population Growth and Earth's Biodiversity*. McKee argues that human population growth in itself, regardless of how well and sustainably we use resources, will inevitably lead to loss of biodiversity and so threaten our survival (if loss of biodiversity itself were not enough of a threat). He supports conservation efforts, reduction in consumption, greener habits and all that; but he argues that without actual reduction in the number of humans on the planet, or at least a decrease in the rate of growth, ecosystems will fail.

Is there anything that we humans can do right? To quote a well-known tract, we fail to control the world, society, or ourselves. We can't work out how to build relationships and families with each other, but we're still (as some see it) overpopulating the earth.

And people *still* think we're qualified to 'play' God?

Kirsten Birkett
Editor, *kategoria*

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The Sydney Push

RORY SHINER

> When I first came to Sydney what I fell in love with was not the harbour or the gardens or anything else, but a pub called the Royal George. Or, more particularly with a group of people...these people talked about truth and only truth...[1]
>
> The Push fits a Sydney pattern; a city shaped and controlled by select groups that for the most part are unknown to ordinary citizens. There have been, and continue to be, many pushes. But this is the only one known with a capital letter.[2]

Introduction

The years between the end of the Second World War and 1972 witnessed an epic rule of conservative government in Australia, sustained by the votes of a deeply conservative society. Whilst radical cultural movements were gaining ground in London, Paris and San Francisco, Australia was singing 'God save the Queen', the pubs closed at 6pm, and the majority of Australians still lived their lives by an unchallenged, conventional moral framework.

However, outside that powerful mainstream, the inner city pubs of Sydney did play host to a radical alternative. Amidst the haze of smoke and that distinctive scent of barley and hops, there was a group of young people who gathered to discuss the merits of Freud and Reich, to expose faults in each others' logic, to discuss sex, and to pour over the form-guide for the Randwick races. People associated with this group have gone on to hold key 'gate-keeping' roles in Australian intellectual life. Germaine Greer, Clive James, Paddy McGuinness, Eva Cox, Wendy Bacon, Bob Ellis, Barry Humphries and Robert Hughes were all within its orbit at different times; institutions such as the

Council for Civil Liberties were born out of it; key moments in the history of Sydney, such at the 'Battle of Woolloomooloo', were intertwined with it. This was the Sydney Push.

The Sydney Push—a loose collection of intellectuals and free-thinkers that shared a common concern for Libertarian philosophy, and a common contempt for conventional morality—continue to hold interest for anyone interested in Australian culture and society. (Indeed, their influence is broader than just Australia; via figures like Germaine Greer and Robert Hughes, the ripples of the movement have been felt in the USA and the United Kingdom.) Much of the sexual revolution that occurred in the Western world in the 1960s had its forerunners in a previous generation of bohemians and freethinkers—Bloomsbury in London, the Existentialists in Paris, the Beatniks in the USA. In Australia, the Push is analogous; and yet they were a decidedly Australian phenomenon. They met in pubs, not cafes; went to the races rather than the opera and, when money was needed, were as likely to be found working on the wharves as at the university.

This was the Sydney Push.

In the last few years, a number of popular books about the Sydney Push have been published, such as Judy Olgilvie's *An Impressionist Memoir*[3] and more recently G. B. Harrison's *Night Train to Granada*.[4] Amongst these, Anne Coombs' substantial history of the group—*Sex and Anarchy: The Life and Death of the Sydney Push*—stands out as a sympathetic yet critical account of the group's lifestyle and philosophy. Tracing the group's history from its genesis at Sydney University in the 1940s to its death in the early 1970s, the book's generosity is undergirded by a feminist critique that is often enlightening and at times chilling. This paper is an account of the history and influence of this group, and Coombs' book is the major source. However, whilst *Sex and Anarchy* accounts for the Push's rejection of conventional morality, there is little on why they rejected *Christian* morality (which was, after all, the morality they were rejecting). Why did they find Christian belief so implausible? Why did they find Christian morality so objectionable? And to what extent has their protest been sustained over the years? It has been necessary to move beyond Coombs to try and find answers to these questions. What we discover is that their rejection of *Christian* morality was based on a now outdated empistemology on the one hand, and in a degenerate lifestyle that was bolstered by flimsy ideological justifications on the other.

History and Character

The life of the Push can be dated from the mid 1940s until the early 1970s; a timeframe in Australian history that is coincident with the long reign of the conservative Menzies government. Also known as The Sydney Libertarians, the

name 'Push' was originally a slang term for the criminal gangs that used to dominate areas of Sydney in the 1890s.[5] The term came to be applied, in the 1950s, to a group of friends who shared a common ideological committment to libertarianism, a common counter-cultural sexual ethic, and a common love of pubs, horse racing and argument.[6]

The Push was loosely centred around Sydney University. Coombs describes the University of the late 1940s as a place where—

> [t]he nineteenth century still dominated. On its wide green lawns and beneath its absurd Gothic arches academics strolled in cap and gown, while students, dressed sedately in suits and ties or neat shirts and sensible shoes, hid their cigarettes from sight. Each lunchtime, the church tower carillon played 'God save the King' and the gowned academics came respectfully to attention.[7]

The University did however, have a dissenter in its ranks. Professor John Anderson, Challis Professor of Philosophy and one of the most significant Australian philosophers in history, held a 'Socratic sway' over the minds of many students, providing a critical alternative to the prevailing conventions.[8] It was Anderson that established the *Freethought Society* in 1930, a group that gathered once a week in the Philosophy Room to give papers and scrutinize ideas.[9] And it was in this gathering that the seeds of the Sydney Push are found.

Coombs traces the beginnings of the Push to the mid 1940s, when Anderson, who had become increasingly conservative in his fight against communism, was waning in influence. It was at this time that a group of students, who had imbibed the spirit of Andersonism if not the current pronouncements of the man himself, were to mark the beginning of the Sydney Push. By 1951, students had become so disillusioned with Anderson's failure to support the more radical objectives of the Freethought Society that the group was disbanded. Darcy Waters, who was the last secretary of the former society, become one of the key founders of its replacement—The Libertarian Society[10]. Significantly, this new group did not meet at the university, but rather began its life downtown, in the Ironworkers Hall on George Street. The move was indicative of the new direction of the group: the elitism inherent in the university structure was rejected in favour of a society open to street intellectuals, drop-outs and dissenters—indeed, anyone who was prepared to argue, to scrutinise, and to adopt the lifestyle.

The elitism inherent in the university structure was rejected in favour of a society open to street intellectuals, drop-outs, dissenters.

The lifestyle was all-important. Pubs were the social venue of choice, not just because of a paucity of café life in those days, but as a deliberate statement of anti-elitist, democratic setting. The

aesthetic qualities of a particular pub were never in view. They only required a publican who would allow men and women to drink together (not done in those days), to be tolerant of their language, their conversations, and (in the early days) willing to stretch the prescribed opening hours.[11] When they weren't discussing philosophy, the Push passed their time by playing cards or going to the races—activities which, according to Coombs, had a working class, anti-establishment appeal.[12] The races were also a good way to make money, for the Push was decidedly anti-careerist. A Push member might take occasional work on the wharf or in manual labour. Some did work at the university, but discussing one's career was simply not on. And, "if you were broke, there would always be someone who had some dosh to spare."[13]

Probably the most consistent issue on which the Push made a stand was on the issue of censorship.

Promiscuity was also a calling card of Push membership—the Push freely fornicated with each other. Casual sex was mandatory; but, until later in the 1960s, contraception was not. When a member required an abortion, the hat was passed around, or the profits from a card game would pay for it.

Probably the most consistent issue on which the Push made a stand was on the issue of censorship. Throughout its entire life, the censorship of sexually explicit material was the number one activity on which the Push saw red. Earlier, in the 1940s and 50s, it was the literature of figures like James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence. By the time the Push was coming to an end in the early 70s it was the publication of pornographic magazines and journals. The issue came to a very public head when an offshoot of the movement—the Kensington Libertarians, centred around the University of New South Wales—became involved in a celebrated court case over the highly explicit publication *Tharunka*. In 1971—the same year that Richard Neville was being defended at London's Old Bailey (by Geoffrey Robertson) for his *Oz* magazine, Wendy Bacon (editor of *Tharunka*) was to spend a stint in jail.[14] Representing herself in court, Bacon had argued, along Andersonian lines, that the idea of 'community standards' was an illusion. In the year that followed the court case, the NSW state government passed a new Indecent Publications Act. Obscenity ceased to be a criminal offence, and a new system of classification was introduced—"the *Tharunka* case had succeeded in changing the face of obscenity law".[15]

If the Push began in the university with John Anderson at the Free Thought Society, it ended on Victoria Street in the 'Battle of Wooloomooloo'. In the early 1970's a Sydney developer proposed a massive redevelopment of Victoria Street, Wooloomooloo, wishing to knock down the crumbling Victorian

terraces that lined the street and installing a large high-rise block of flats. A group of residents—including some Push members—protested, and the protest has gone down in the history of the city. Communist Union leader, Jack Mundey, got the Builders Labourers Federation (a hard-left union) involved in a 'Green Ban' on the site—refusing to work on any building projects. Thus a strange alliance between intellectuals, unionists, aesthetes and down-and-outs was formed. The full story—which includes kidnapping, corruption and murder—is now a part of Sydney folklore.[16] For Coombs, it also marked the end of the Push as a movement.

This, then, is a sketch of the life and death of the Sydney Push—a laconic, iconoclastic, but seriously-minded movement that lasted over three decades of the twentieth century. It was a group who loved books and ideas as much as they loved drinking and horse-racing; a group who lived out sexual freedom twenty years before it was a popular movement; and a group whose members are now high-profile figures in the media, literature and academia. But what exactly did they believe? And where did their ideas come from?

Key Ideas

There are three areas to investigate in order to understand Push thinking: their basic philosophical stance, their concept of liberty, and their sexual ethics.

Philosophy

In a key Libertarian publication, *The Sydney Line* (published in 1963), A. J. Baker introduced the volume with a sustinct description of where the Libertarians stood in relation to John Anderson's philosophy:

> While critical of Anderson on a number of grounds, and themselves opposed by Anderson, libertarians have been influenced by parts of Anderson's philosophy, notably his criticisms of metaphysics, religion and traditional moral theories, and his pluralist social theory. They also inherit a critical interest in the works of Marx and Freud.[17]

The Libertarians inherited the Andersonian epistemology, his criticism of religion and morality, and his investigative ethos.

The Libertarians inherited the Andersonian epistemology, his criticism of religion and morality, and his investigative ethos. That is, the Push were basicially modernist, objectivist and empiricist in their outlook. They favoured rational argument, clear logic and empirically verifiable facts. Epistemologies involving intuition, authority and faith had no currency for them. In many ways, their philosophical stance is now outdated and of little influence. The objectivism of

Push epistimology, their stubborn belief in the dispassionate discussion of 'facts', has been rejected by postmoderns. (Interestingly, this stance lead the Push to a critique of religion that has much in common with Christian critiques. For example, the Push would have been as dismayed at the sheer absurdities of the horoscopes as Christians are now.)

The Push were not leftwing in any traditional sense.

Liberty

The Push were not leftwing in any traditional sense. Indeed, to many outsiders, their position actually appeared right-wing. This confusion is based in their understanding of what constitutes liberty. A.J. Baker outlines their stance in the introduction to *The Sydney Line:*

> Particular interest has been taken in anarchist ideas. Libertarians criticize the utopian and salvationist aspects of anarchist thought, but are sympathetic to the "spirit" or "values" of anarchism, in contrast, for example, to those of socialism.[18]

The anarchism of Sydney Libertarians was qualified by their belief in social pluralism (an Andersonian idea)—the belief that society is not a single thing, but a diversity of different and competing interests. In this understanding, notions like 'the common good' are never truly for the good of 'society', because society, by its very nature, cannot have a *common* good. Thus things such as censorship, Crime Acts, and even campaigns for clean air, are not for the common good but for the benefit of special interest groups.[19] These interest groups will inevitably seek their own interests, but will do so within the langauge of the 'common good' so as to beguile people into believing they are not in fact acting for their own interests.

This position explains part of the otherwise strange ambivalence the Push felt towards the 1960s generation. At one level, much that the 60s generation advocated was appealing to the Push—particularly the free love and the anti-authoritarian spirit. However, they were suspicious of the activism and optimism exhibited by the movement. (They also found much of the argumentation of the movement woolly and sentimental; they were rigorists.) Push slogans included phrases like 'anarchism without ends', 'pessimistic anarchism' and 'permanent protest'—all capturing the idea that a stance of protest would always be necessary, because society, by its very nature, would never cease to be a competition of interest groups. They even coined a word for this position—'Oblomovism', a name derived from a character in Russian literature whose response to the ills of the world was to never get out of bed.[20] (Incidentally, this is why Coombs dates the death of the Push to the protests at Woolloomooloo. Coombs describes the Push as a 'leftist movement that did not believe in the goals of the left'. At Victoria Street, the Push broke faith with

this position and actually got involved in fighting for a goal.[21])

Push eschatology was therefore very different to Marxist (or for that matter, Christian) eschatology. They did not believe in working toward a future in which their values would be accepted, because they were basically pessimistic about society ever changing. Instead, they chose to live out their chosen values in the present, without reference to a future vindication. A.J Baker summarizes the position:

> ... free or unauthoritarian activities are not future rewards, but are activities carried on by anarchist or libertarian-minded groups, here and now, *in spite of* authoritarian forces.[22]

This explains why censorship was the issue most likely to motivate the Push to social action, for censorship was a direct affront to them being able to live out their values *in the present*. Broader political issues of justice—even events like the Vietnam war—left them cold, for to protest about those sorts of issues would be an optimistic effort to affect the future.

Sexual Ethics

Sexual ethics were a key component of Push doctrine. As we have already noted, the Push lived lives of promiscuity and sexual adventure. Their attitude to sexual freedom was grounded in their broad rejection of morality. This too was argued for on the basis of their rejection of conventional moral reasoning. They were highly suspicious of moral imperatives, especially when couched in the language of 'the common good'. For them, to say 'If you want to achieve X, then you ought to do Y' was acceptable; to say simply, 'You ought to do Y' was not.[23] (Interestingly, when a Push member did begin to argue for a genuine morality based on the objective existence of good and evil, the argument came from George Molnar, a Jew who had witnessed fascism first-hand in Europe.[24])

The Push derived much of their thinking on sexuality from psychoanalysis, from Freud, and particularly from Wilhelm Reich. In *The Sydney Line*, Libertarian D. J. Ivison provides an example of their use of psychoanalysis. The article was a reply to some comments from the then Anglican Archbishop Gough, who had accused people like the Libertarians of corrupting the young by promoting freedom of sexual expression. In reply, Ivison argued that sexual repression of the type Gough was advocating could lead to only one of two outcomes. In the case of someone who was successful in controlling ('repressing') their sexual desires, it would lead to a neurosis. In the case of the one unable to sustain the repression, guilt feelings would follow from any lapse, feelings which "only the Blood of the Lamb, administered by the Christian

The Push derived much of their thinking on sexuality from psychoanalysis, from Freud, and particularly from Wilhelm Reich.

moralists" could wash clean.[25] Ivison argued that these guilt feelings were the fate of the immoralist—the immoralist being the failed moralist, the one who accepted the existence of morality but failed in its execution. The answer for the Push was simple—become an amoralist. By becoming an amoralist, one could bypass the dilemma of either repression or guilt that the morality of the likes of Archbishop Gough necessarily forced one into. What's more, the adopting of a sexually unrestricted lifestyle enabled many wonderful discoveries, like, for example, the discovery that sex can be enjoyable for women "…and not just something which one suffers in order to reproduce the race"[26] (notwithstanding St Paul's 'discovery' of this fact some 2000 years earlier; see 1 Corinthians 7:1-5).

They offered a tribe, a family, which declared itself to be non-judgemental, amoral.

The Push and liberty

The promises of Push philosophy and the promises of the Christian gospel intersect at a key point—for they both claim to offer *freedom* or *liberty*. And the Push offered nothing if it didn't offer freedom. *Intellectually*, they offered a world of free, unfettered inquiry: a world in which no subject was off limits, no fact barred, and a world in which no avenue of investigation was limited by the impositions of a divine revelation of Truth. *Socially*, they offered a liberty of association. In the context of a deeply conservative Australian mainstream, the Push held out a viable alternative. They offered a tribe, a family, which declared itself to be non-judgemental and amoral. Ever since their move downtown in the early fifties, they offered a context in which town and gown was no divider of persons; a group in which the merits of your arguments, and not the prestige of your training or the success of your career, were decisive in your ideas getting a hearing. *Sexually*, they offered a liberty of expression. Men and women alike were allowed to enjoy sexual engagement, without the onerous shadow of moral judgement, the threat of disapproval or the complications of committment to stand in your way.

A Christian analysis of liberty is very different. The freedom offered in the Christian gospel is a freedom found in submission to authority, not escape from it. It is a liberty derived from a return to the redeemed created order, not in bucking against it. In this way, Christian liberty is a liberty of paradox: an *intellectual* freedom through submission to relevant doctrines; a *social* freedom that includes being the disciple of the 'group'; and a *sexual* freedom that results from sexual expression in a clearly defined context. But our purpose here is not to commend Christian liberty, but to examine the alternative suggested by the Push. And it is to that task we now turn.

Firstly, as we have already argued, the epistemological basis of the libertarian

project is now seen by many to be dubious at best, and untenable at worst. Aside from the postmodern critique of objectivism, thinking Christians have also called the modernist epistemology to account. T.C. Hammond (Irish Theologian and then Principal of Moore Theological College), in a little booklet he wrote entitled, 'Abolishing God: A Reply to Professor Anderson', argued in the heyday of Andersonianism that the account of Christianity as a religion which functioned to limit inquiry is historically inaccurate.[27] More recently, Michael Polanyi, in his debates with logical positivism (a position similar, though not identical, to Anderson's) has demonstrated that submission to tradition and authority, imagination, tacit knowledge and faith are actually essential to the process of scientific inquiry.[28] More recently still, Peter Jensen has argued that it is precisely a robust Christian doctrine of creation that makes possible a truly 'secular' field of inquiry, for it divests the world of the onerous weight of religious description and therefore actually safeguards unfettered investigation.[29]

The extensive interviews with ex-Push people recorded by Coombs, far from describing an unrestricted intellectual environment, have revealed a world as burdened with heresies and orthodoxies as anything the Push members left behind. Certainly, at some levels, the social embrace of the Push was generous, and may in some ways stand as a rebuke to the more limited embrace of some churches at the time. However, the claims of a socially and intellectually free environment are ungrounded, for the Push finally failed in its efforts to be an amoral society. Rather, they ended up simply exchanging one set of values and rules for another. There was a very definite 'line' in the Push—on politics, on sexuality, on the right books, the right philosophers, the right topic of conversations and the right pasttimes—and adherence to that line was strictly enforced. For some, it was just as strictly enforced as the oppressive systems they had left behind. One member, who left Catholicism for the Push, says, "I really didn't notice leaving the Catholic Church. It was just the substitution of a new set of values that were just as rigidly adhered to as the Catholic ones I had left".[30] Some, like writer Frank Moorehouse, speak of the endless rules, customs and ways of thinking; the heresies and orthodoxies were finally stifling and overwhelming.[31] As Paul argues in his letter to the Romans, human societies can construct divergent accounts of the particulars of morality, but they are unable to escape the activity of moralizing itself (so Romans 2:14-15). The Push was no exception.

There was a very definite 'line' in the Push—on politics, on sexuality, on the right books, the right philosophers, the right topic of conversations and the right pasttimes—and adherence to that line was strictly enforced.

And the 'morality' expounded by the group—the values of free inquiry and the like—were not, at any rate, quite the

escape from conventional morality that they purported to be. In T. C. Hammond's little booklet, he demonstrates something of this with regard to Anderson's notion of the 'morality of investigation'. "What", Hammond states, "is the morality of investigation…except [that the] investigator is under the duty of abiding strictly by the conditions of truth?". Much of what the Push regarded as a breaking with morality was merely the old morality in a new and distorted guise.

The area of sexual liberty is probably the point at which the failure of the Push is at its most spectacular. For this, the feminist critique of Coombs is invaluable. The attractive camaraderie of Push relationships was seriously undermined by the devastating effects of their sexual ethics as they were played out in people's lives. As has already been noted, abortions were a persistent feature of Push life. Very often, the pressure for these abortions came from the men, while the wellbeing, and even the lives, of the women were put in jeopardy. Some of the stories of these abortions are simply awful.

Much of what the Push regarded as a breaking with morality was merely the old morality in a new and distorted guise.

> One young woman from a wealthy family had to have an abortion when she was fifteen. She went home afterwards and haemorrhaged all over her mother's plush carpet. She was thrown out of home. A couple of years later she was pregnant again and tried to induce a miscarriage by taking QES tablets, which contained quinine, ergot and some strychnine. She overdosed and died in her sleep. It was probably accidential...[32]

The apparent equality of men and women in the Push was an illusion. Women's access to the group was largely through sexual promiscuity. Women did the housework. They were often routinely abandoned socially after they had children ("The Push gave up on you if you had children"[33]). Many who did not have children for fear of being abadoned in this way now look back to that decision with deep regret.

Anne Coombs notes an interesting phenomenon in the pattern of Push membership. Over the years, the average age of the male members of the group would increase, whilst the average age of the women would remain fairly constant. Why? Because the women would get married and move on, and the men would be supplied with an ever-ready supply of young, fresher girls. Being increasingly older than the new women that joined, the power differentiation would increase over time, and the new women would have to be increasingly outrageous or spectacularly promiscuous to get the attention of the older and wiser men.[34]

Almost an entire chapter of Coombs'

book is given over to the subject of the intense jealousy and heartache that the sexual lifestyle adopted by the Push brought about in its participants. In the chapter entitled 'The Demons Within' Coombs notes,

> One of the biggest demons of all for Libertarians was jealousy ... Both men and women suffered from jealousy, and from guilt about the jealousy. The intense Push life, with its constant couplings and re-couplings, and the resultant sexual cross-connections between people, made for an explosive mix.[35]

And yet, despite the prolific rate of abortions, despite the inequality between men and women, and despite the jealousy and heartache the lifestyle brought about, "sexual freedom could not be questioned". Roelof Smidle, one of the central figures of the Push, made a telling remark as he looked back on this aspect of Push life.

> We had a theory ... that there was a very strong connection between social and political freedom and sexual freedom ... I don't think you can prove that. In fact, I don't even think it's true but we believed it to be true, and we put it forth as though it was true. And if you do that sort of thing you give yourself problems. We wanted to believe it.[36]

In his essay on Sydney Libertarianism, A. J. Baker approvingly discussed Marx's notion of *ideology* as being those theories or beliefs which are expressions of something else or that camouflage the promotion of special interests.[37] But that is exactly what this Push did with its sexual theories, for it was nothing if not a theory that camouflaged special interests, particularly those of the men. David Armstrong says straightforwardly, "It was a nice theory and they used it to justify the exploitation of women".[38] St John's somewhat earlier account of the relationship between behaviour and belief bears this out—"the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). "We *wanted* to believe it", said Roelof Smidle.

Many of its former fellow travellers, like Paddy McGuinness, Clive James and others, have moved to a far more conservative position.

In many ways, the world of the Push has gone. Many of its former fellow travellers, like Paddy McGuinness, Clive James and others, have moved to a far more conservative position.[38] The philosophy is now unfashionable, and the outbreak of STDs like AIDS has dampened some sexual excesses. Universities themselves have changed, becoming increasingly vocational and 'careerist' in outlook, and increasingly unable to cope with, much less to foster, counter-cultural movements. Perhaps ironically, with

the Push now gone, the only groups left at universities willing to challenge the idol of careerism, and to live out an alternative, are the Christian Unions.

And yet in many ways the ideas of the Push remain. Observe, for example, the outrage expressed in the Australian media whenever someone suggests that a viable defence against sexually transmissible disease is the promotion of chastity. Observe the incredulity of the press when someone in the public eye says that they have found true liberty in submission to God and his word. And observe the nature of the debates on those now very rare occasions when the authorities attempt to restrict or ban a particular film or stage show. Observe, above all, the irony of the deeply censorious attitude of the media to 'fundamentalist' Christians when their views attract public attention. For in these ways, the spirit of the Push is still with us. Ⓚ

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ENDNOTES

1 *Germaine Greer,* quoted in Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy: The Life and Death of the Sydney Push,* Viking, Ringwood, Victoria, 1996, p. 111. (This book is now out of print.)
2 Anne Coombs, *ibid.*, p. 118.
3 Judy Ogilvie, *An Impressionist Memoir: The Push*, Primavera Press, Sydney, 1995 is a novel based on the author's experiences as a member of the Push.
4 *Night Train to Granada: From Sydney's Bohemia to Franco's Spain—An Offbeat Memoir*, Pluto Press, 2002, is G. B. Harrison's recollections of his life in Sydney and Spain. He was involved in the Push in its earlier years. It is the most recent book published on the Push.
5 See Judy Ogilvie, *An Impressionist Memoir*, p. iii.
6 Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy*, p. 3.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
8 Anthony Quinton, 'Introduction' in A. J. Baker, *Australian Realism: The Systematic Philosophy of John Anderson*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. x.
9 Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy*, p. 8.
10 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 10
12 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 247.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 250.
16 For the details of this story, see Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Sydney: Portrait of a City*, Phoenix, London, 2000, pp. 121-123, 203ff; cf Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy*, chapter 13.
17 A. J. Baker, 'Introduction' in *The Sydney*

Line: A Selection of Comments and Criticism by Sydney Libertarians, Sydney, 1963, p. 7.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

19 A. J. Baker, 'Sydney Libertarians' in *The Sydney Line*, p. 28.

20 Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy*, p. 145.

21 Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy*, p. 54.

22 A.J. Baker, 'Sydney Libertarians', p. 32.

23 Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy*, p. 149.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

25 D. J. Ivison, 'Yet another outbreak of virtue', in *The Sydney Line*, pp. 15-17, p. 16.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

27 T.C. Hammond, 'Abolishing God: a reply to Professor Anderson', John Bacon Press, Melbourne, no date.

28 See, for example, Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, Routledge, London, 1962.

29 Peter Jensen, 'The theological implications of the universal lordship of Christ' (Audio Tape), Tape 7 in the series, *The Universal Lordship of Christ in a Pluralistic World*, in *The Moore College School of Theology*, 2002.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 191.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 203.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

36 A. J. Baker, 'Sydney Libertarianism', p. 28.

37 Quoted in Anne Coombs, *Sex and Anarchy*, p. 76.

38 Clive James' recent essays are worth reading in this regard. See, for example, his essay on Bertrand Russell where he roundly castigates the great philosopher for his sexual deviancies. Clive James, 'Bertrand Russell struggles after heaven' in *Even as we Speak: New Essay 1993-2000*, Picador, London, 2001, pp. 90-104

Books & Ideas


ROBERT SPENCER
ISLAM UNVEILED
DISTURBING QUESTIONS ABOUT
THE WORLD'S FASTEST-GROWING FA
FOREWORD BY DAVID PRYCE-JO
Islam in Australia
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MOSQUES & MIRACLES
Award Winner
Revealing Islam and God's Grace
Stuart Robinson
ISLAM, Europe's Second Religion
The New Social, Cultural, and Political Landscape
CSIS
Edited by Shireen T. Hunter

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Islam on trial

MICHAEL RAITER

Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions about the World's Fastest-Growing Faith
Robert Spencer
Encounter Books, San Francisco, 2002.

Mosques and Miracles: Revealing Islam and God's Grace
Stuart Robinson
CityHarvest Publications,
Mt Gravatt, Qld, 2003

Islam in Australia
Abdullah Saeed
Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2003.

Islam, Europe's Second Religion: The New Social, Cultural and Political Landscape
Shireen Hunter (ed.)
Praeger, Westport, CT, 2002.

Over the past 18 months, although I am a lecturer in a Christian theological college, I have received more enquiries from people as to where they can obtain a copy of the Qur'an than I have requests for a Bible! Interest in understanding Islam is, understandably, at a level unrivalled in recent times. Of course, people are curious as much about Islam's political implications for the world today as its religious teachings. Is Islam a religion of peace, as so many of its apologists and most world leaders maintain? Or is it a genuine threat to world stability? Is a commitment to violence intrinsic to the teachings of the Qur'an and the hadiths (the non-revelatory but nonetheless authoritative teachings and practises of Muhammad), or are such activities a wicked misinterpretation of Islam's sacred texts by those who have hijacked the faith for their own nefarious purposes? Does Islam treat women with dig-

nity and respect, or are they second-class citizens who exist simply to satisfy men's physical desires, both here on earth and later in heaven? Is the oppression of women (for example, honour killings), that we now hear so much about, more to do with the social order of certain eastern patriarchal cultures than the religion these cultures purport to follow? Finally, can the world of Islam live peacefully and tolerantly side by side with people of other beliefs in those societies which are becoming increasingly multicultural? Or do the teachings of Islam so commit its adherents to bringing the whole world into submission to Allah and his prophet, that ultimately any other political and religious movement must find its freedoms limited or suppressed altogether?

Can the world of Islam live peacefully and tolerantly side by side with people of other beliefs in those societies which are becoming increasingly multicultural?

Not surprisingly, publishers have been keen to capitalize on the interest in, and indeed deep concern about, Islam, by hurriedly publishing a number of books on the topic. Within weeks of 9/11 compendiums of sermons from the following Sunday were available for anxious, confused, and grieving Americans: *Restoring Faith: American Religious Leaders Answer Terror with Hope; Shaken Foundations: Sermons from America's Pulpits after the Terrorist Attacks;* and *9.11.01: African American Leaders Respond to an American Tragedy*. One could read responses from prominent Christian leaders as diverse theologically as Billy Graham and John Shelby Spong.

In America, in particular, many popular Christian writers published a more detailed response to 9/11. Once again, most of these books were available within a couple of months of the attack. John Macarthur (*Terrorism, Jihad and the Bible*), R.C. Sproul (*When Worlds Collide: Where is God?*) and D. James Kennedy (*Why was America Attacked? Answers for a Nation at War*) were just a few who sought to bring a Christian perspective to some of the questions raised for their nation by this terrible tragedy. Most of them dealt with the perennial problem of evil and suffering, and how Christians ought to respond in the face of tragedy and injustice.

Some of these writers also attempted an analysis of Islam. At times this resulted in overviews of Islam that were shallow and simplistic, and have done little to aid a proper understanding of this religion. John MacArthur's book contains a number of sweeping generalisations. For example, when he writes, "'Convert or die' has always been the most persuasive tool in the Islamic missionary's arsenal" one wonders how many Muslim missionaries he has engaged with, or indeed how widely read he is on Islam. While a compelling case can be made that *jihad* is fundamentally the physical, military struggle on behalf of Islam, it should at least be acknowledged that many Muslims do

not interpret it this way, and the issue is far more complex than such a broad statement suggests.[1]

Not surprisingly, most of the recent publications on Islam springing from the pens of Western, non-Muslim writers have been critical of Islam. They argue that, rather than being un-Islamic in their character, such attacks are both consistent with the teachings of the faith's sacred texts and, indeed, find their inspiration and mandate in these texts. At the same time, a number of Muslim writers have understandably felt the need to speak for the majority of Muslims who strongly wish to distance themselves from these extremists. These writings present a picture of what, it is argued, is the true Islam: peace-loving, just, and respectful of human rights.

This brief review article will examine just four recently-published books from both sides of the fence. Two of the books present a non-Muslim perspective on contemporary issues, presenting a critical analysis of Islam. The other two present a largely Islamic perspective, written by Muslims who are citizens of Western nations. Further, two have been published overseas, and two are written in and for the Australian reading public.

The case for the prosecution

Islam unveiled

Robert Spencer's *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions about the World's Fastest-Growing Faith*[2] is a book from an author who knows his subject well, has read widely, and is prepared to ask of Islam the hard questions. Spencer's challenge is encapsulated in this passage from his chapter, 'Is Islam a Religion of Peace?"

> For all too many being a serious Muslim means doing Allah's work by all means necessary. Of course, most Muslims will never be terrorists. The problem is that for all its schisms, sects and multiplicity of voices, Islam's violent elements are rooted in its central texts. It is unlikely that the voices of moderation will ultimately silence the militants, because the militants will always be able to make the case that they are standing for the true expression of the faith. Liberal Muslims have not established a viable interpretation of the relevant verses in the Qur'an.[3]

Spencer's book is a challenge to moderate Muslims to convincingly engage with those they describe as 'extremists', and to do so on their own terms, that is on the grounds of the right interpretation of the Qur'an and the hadiths. Spencer's premise is that Islam is, and always has been, a fertile breeding ground for violence because such aggression is enshrined in the religion's sacred texts. The book examines Islam's record

Of course, most Muslims will never be terrorists. The problem is that for all its schisms, sects and multiplicity of voices, Islam's violent elements are rooted in its central texts.

on human rights (chapter 3), its treatment of women (chapter 4), its engagement with democracy (chapter 5) and pluralism (chapter 6), and its engagement with people of other faiths (chapters 8 and 9). In each instance Spencer argues that Islam's poor record (and that, of course, is 'poor' by Western standards of measurement) is rooted in its injunctions as contained in its authoritative texts. He readily acknowledges that there are liberal scholars who argue that fundamentalists have hijacked the faith, but he challenges them to establish on sound hermeneutical grounds that the attitudes and behaviours of the fundamentalists are inherently unIslamic or unQuranic. Spencer readily admits that he is not optimistic that liberal Muslims can or will rise to this challenge.

The challenge Spencer presents to Muslims is for liberal Islam to exert the influence on their faith that has occurred in the Christian tradition. Since the Enlightenment, Liberals have sought to refashion Christianity in a way that they believe makes it appropriate and attractive to the modern, and more recently postmodern, Western mind. Liberals actively engage with Christianity's sacred text, writing commentaries which seek to ground their theories exegetically. Indeed, there is a tradition of biblical commentary writing which covers the entire spectrum of Christian theological positions. Spencer's challenge is for liberal Muslims to similarly, and convincingly, provide exegetically-based interpretations of the Qur'an that can persuade ordinary Muslims that the Islamists' understanding of the Qur'an is flawed.

The challenge Spencer presents to Muslims is for liberal Islam to exert the influence on their faith that has occurred in the Christian tradition.

Mind you, two qualifications need to be made about any comparison between liberalism in Christianity and Islam. Firstly, Christian liberal interpretations of the Bible generally emerge from an understanding of the authority of the Bible which is itself liberal. Many of these scholars would not hold to a doctrine of divine inspiration which sees each word of Scripture as God-breathed and holding a permanent validity; even less would they be inerrantists. This freedom from a commitment to a doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration has enabled them to abandon those aspects of the Biblical account which they consider unpalatable to the modern mind, for example a commitment to a belief in miracles, the incarnation, a belief in wrath and hell, and the condemnation of homosexuality. Few Muslim liberals, however, are as dismissive of the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the Qur'an.

Secondly, it should be noted that, outside the scholarly community, liberal interpretations of the New Testament have generally failed to persuade the majority of ordinary Christians. Bible-believing Christians generally remain unconvinced of readings of the New Testament championed by groups such as the Jesus Seminar. One suspects that should a robust Islamic liberalism

emerge then, similarly, it would fail to capture the hearts of the majority of Muslims. Spencer quotes Farrukh Dhondy who observed that, "When liberal Muslims declare that September 11 was an atrocity contrary to the Koran, the majority of Muslims around the world don't believe them".[4]

But, as Spencer points out, the question is not just *will* moderate voices within Islam speak, but *can* they. Christianity has allowed groups like the God is Dead movement, the New Quest for the Historical Jesus, and the Jesus Seminar to publish because Christian belief has always been a matter of the will, and not something to be coerced. For Islam such tolerance is tantamount to apostasy. Spencer cites the example of Christoph Luxenberg who has written a major scholarly work suggesting that the Qur'an has been mistranslated and misinterpreted by Muslims. While his work appears to be an Islamic equivalent to the Jesus Seminar, there is a crucial difference: Christoph Luxemberg is a pseudonym and his book has had trouble finding a publisher.[5] *Why I am not a Muslim* is a devastating critique of Islam by a lapsed Muslim, Ibn Warraq. (Ibn Warraq is also a pseudonym.) In the Qur'an it is said that "God does not love the transgressors" (2.190). There is ample evidence that there are limits of scholarly investigation that liberal Muslim interpreters may not transgress, and do so only at their own peril.

Spencer is not an alarmist. He is well aware that the majority of Muslims are peace-loving. He quotes Middle East analyst Daniel Pipes who estimates that between 100 million and 150 million people, or 10% of professing Muslims, are conservative, terrorist sympathisers. Mind you, that doesn't mean that the rest are *en masse* apathetic. Indeed, international crises like the current enforced 'regime change' in Iraq challenge many moderate Muslims to declare their allegiance, and while few will actively join in the struggle of their Muslim brothers, many will make a clear shift to the religious right. Spencer, though, remains pessimistic that Islam can or will rise to the challenge he presents in this book. Given his reading of both Islamic sacred texts and Islamic history his sober conclusion is that, "if anything is certain in the future, it is that these (conservative) elements will cause more conflicts, and that the West should be prepared for them".[6]

The question is not just will moderate voices within Islam speak, but can they.

Mosques and miracles

A much more ambitious book, *Mosques and Miracles: Revealing Islam and God's Grace*[7] by Melbourne-based pastor and ex-missionary, Stuart Robinson, is likely to find a wide readership in Australia. The book falls into three roughly even parts. In the first section, 'What's Happening' Robinson catalogues in country after country the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and its growing influence in public life. Of particular interest

are his comments on the growth of Islam in Australia. He notes that according to the last census, the number of Muslims in Australia has grown by nearly 36% in the past five years, such that now they comprise 1.5% of the total population. Such growth has been due largely to mass immigration and high birth rates. Robinson also notes the increase in the number of mosques and (partly government funded) Islamic schools in the country.

In the second section, "Why It's Happening" Robinson provides a basic history of the rise and spread of Islam, and he outlines essential Muslim beliefs. There is much in this section that those who know little about Islam will find very helpful. However, it is the final section of the book, 'Response—God and Us' which takes us to the heart of the book's purpose. Robinson's clear desire is to see the church's missionary inertia, fuelled by an unwarranted fear of Islam, turned around. Through recounting numerous stories of Muslims coming to faith, largely through dreams and miracles, he seeks to inspire a more confident Christian witness. Many of his comments reflect his years of missionary experience. For example, he wisely notes that "western Christian messengers to Islam need to understand that for Muslims it is more important to belong than to believe."[8] Robinson endorses, uncritically, the contextualised approach to reaching Muslims popularised by writers like Phil Parshall.

Robinson's book leaves one with the clear impression that Islamic dominance in post-Christian nations (like Britain and Australia) is, if not imminent, then frighteningly close.

While the books of Spencer and Robinson are quite different, with different aims, and to a degree, different target audiences, both present a critical perspective on contemporary Islam which is intended to provoke concern amongst the readership. However, while both foresee the growth of Islamism throughout the world, and argue that all people, Christian and non-Christian alike, ought to be concerned about this, Robinson's book leaves one with the clear impression that Islamic dominance in post-Christian nations (like Britain and Australia) is, if not imminent, then frighteningly close. Indeed, the tone is set by the quote with which the book begins: "In the next fifty years we will capture the Western world for Islam. We have the men to do it, we have the money to do it and above all else we are already doing it". He cites Australian Islamic leaders who, in the 1970s, forecast that Australia would be Islamic by 2000! While admitting this was overly optimistic, he notes that they have revised their estimate, and set it for 2020.

However, while Spencer's book offered a genuine challenge to Islam, *Mosques and Miracles* left me far less convinced. For one thing, it is remarkable how few quotes in the book are from Islamic writers. In a book on Islam one would have thought that the author

would have allowed Muslims to speak for themselves. If a Muslim had written a book about the nature and spread of Christianity, and the great majority of his sources were Islamic, we would soon dismiss such a book as biased propaganda. *Mosques and Miracles* is extensively researched and thoroughly footnoted, although most sources are Christian, and popular Christian magazines at that. Even the opening quote is attributed to Ron Peck from the Centre of Ministry to Muslims.

While there are undoubtedly deeply disturbing trends in the spread of Islam, notably in places like Nigeria and the Sudan, where in the book are the moderating voices of Islam? At the outset Robinson properly counsels that, "Non-Muslims must be careful not to misread extremist statements of a few leaders as being an accurate reflection of the sentiments of the majority". However, from that point on one will find very few comments that will reflect the attitudes of the moderate majority. The impression one is left with is an Islam far more monolithic and homogeneous than it really is.

The case for the defence

Islam in Australia

In response to the current interest in Islam, and the daily newspaper reports of the activities of Muslim terrorists, Associate Professor and Head of the Arabic and Islamic Studies Program at the University of Melbourne, Abdullah Saeed has written an informative and easy to read introduction to Islam in order to set the record straight.[9] Like the majority of Muslims, he believes that most people misunderstand the Islamic faith. He makes clear that, while there are certain fundamental beliefs that all Muslims hold in common, these fundamentals are in fact very few. Like every other religious tradition, Islam has many theological orientations, legal schools and religio-political divisions.

As we seek to understand contemporary Islam it is imperative that we listen to Muslim voices, and voices which span the theological spectrum.

Saeed outlines Islamic history, beliefs, and practises. Not surprisingly, we have here a thoroughly uncritical, indeed sanitised, account of the early origins of Islam. You won't find anything here of Muhammad's ruthless settling of old scores. No mention of the unsavoury traditions concerning his taking of wives and concubines. In its rapid spread across North Africa and into Asia, Islam is presented as the model of tolerance: "When Muslims conquered these regions, they allowed the inhabitants to remain faithful to their own religions" (p.27). Robert Spencer presents a very different picture in his chapter, 'Is Islam Tolerant of Non-Muslims?'

Nevertheless, Saeed's book is an important one. As we seek to understand contemporary Islam it is imperative that we listen to Muslim voices, and voices which span the theological spectrum. Saeed is a practising, conservative

Muslim, but he would not consider himself an Islamist, and would argue that the majority of Muslims in Australia (and the West in general) have no difficulty living in the West and adopting many Western values. They still follow Islam in the areas of worship and ritual, but enjoy, and approve of, the Western values of personal and religious freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Indeed, Saeed makes the point that it was these very values which attracted Muslims to countries like Australia. Why would they want to change them? He affirms "that a relatively small section of Muslims in Australia is likely to be hostile to the West and Western values, and by extension to fundamental Australian values".[10]

Is the unjust treatment meted out to women in many Muslim countries rooted in the sayings of Islam's sacred texts?

However, one feels at end of the book that Saeed has sidestepped the main issues. He has not really provided an answer to the sort of important questions that writers like Spencer (who really is speaking for many people) are asking. Throughout the book Saeed seems detached and objective, content merely to outline the different attitudes of the various sections of Islam, almost like that of an observer on the sideline. For example, he observes that all religious groups have their militants, and Islam is no exception. However, that is not really the issue. The question that writers like Spencer raise is, to what extent is Islamic militancy rooted and mandated by Islam's sacred texts? No-one would argue that acts of Christian militancy, such as the Crusades, are a justifiable reading of the teachings of Jesus, but acts of violence committed in the name of Islam are strongly supported with citations from the mouth of Muhammad. Saeed provides no answer. Saeed argues that Islam recognises the equality of the sexes, quoting one brief passage from the Qur'an which acknowledges that God is ready to forgive both men and women. However, what of the numerous references to men's superiority over women, and the Quranic permission granted to men to beat their wives? What of the numerous hadiths in which Muhammad speaks disparagingly of women? Certainly, many Muslims ignore these, but the question still remains: is the unjust treatment meted out to women in many Muslim countries rooted in the sayings of Islam's sacred texts?

Islam in Australia is well written, easy to read and very informative. I feel that I know much more about the customs and rituals of this religion. It should be read by any Australian with an interest in understanding Islam. But by the end of the book the deep questions which cause so much popular unease still remain.

Islam, Europe's Second Religion

In the search for a moderating voice on Islam, another recent publication, *Islam, Europe's Second Religion: The New Social,*

Cultural and Political Landscape is an important contribution. This collection of essays traces the character of modern Islam in ten European nations, and then addresses a number of issues such as Islam and multiculturalism, and Muslims and European foreign policy. In the introduction, editor Shireen Hunter notes that Islam has peacefully emerged as Europe's second largest religion after Christianity, and that relative to a dwindling and aging European population, the percentage of European Muslims is growing rapidly.

While not lengthy, each article provides a very useful description of the key Islamic movements and institutions throughout the countries of Europe. John Rex's broad description of Islam in the United Kingdom contains much that is helpful and is a necessary complement to Robinson's largely anecdotal analysis which focuses on the political manoeuvrings of the right-wingers. Of particular interest are his observations on the political ambitions of Muslims. He observes that increasingly young Muslims have a stronger sense of their identity as Muslim, more than being Indian or Pakistani or Bangladeshi. They are more politically active than their parents, although their main political ambitions seem to be fighting discrimination, rather than seeking to enforce an Islamic agenda. Rex observes that "they seem less concerned with attendance at mosques or regular prayers than with the public assertion of Muslim political values" (p. 71). In response to fears that the Islamisation of Britain is a clear and present danger, he observes that Muslims only comprise 2 or 3 per cent of the population, and there is still no Muslim representation in the House of Commons and only one member of the House of Lords.

In his article, 'Europeanisation of Islam or Islamisation of Europe?' Tariq Ramadan seeks to allay the fears of non-Muslims who ask, What do you Muslims want exactly? Do you want to Islamicise Europe and convert our people? Very helpfully Ramadan reminds us that between Europeans and Muslims there is *mutual* fear. Europeans (and Australians) fear the Islamisation of their countries, while Muslims fear the loss of their faith and identity as a consequence of assimilation.

Increasingly young Muslims have a stronger sense of their identity as Muslim, more than being Indian or Pakistani or Bangladeshi.

Ramadan's response is to firstly acknowledge that Islam is a universal religion, and that he will not accept the proposition that his faith should be considered a culturally relative creed or aspiration. Nevertheless, he argues that he has no desire to impose his ideas on others; in fact, the role of the Muslim is not to convert, but to bear witness. Ramadan is not a traditionalist. He believes that Islam's sacred texts are to be reread and reinterpreted. For example, he argues that he follows *shar'ia* law, but reinterprets the term to mean, not a penal code, but a "global perception of how to remain faithful to

God and his commands". He maintains that the essence of the *Qur'an's* message is the heart, spirituality and love.

What are we to make of perspectives such as those of Tariq Ramadan? We need to recognise that he speaks for a large number of Muslims, and it is important to hear his voice amongst all the others. At the same time, while he promises to allay our fears, in the end all I know is that I have little to fear from Tariq Ramadan. However, it is not the modern reinterpreters who are the cause of concern. There are many Muslims who would not articulate the essential message of the *Qur'an* as love and spirituality. It is encouraging to hear that he intends to reinterpret his holy books in the light of contemporary realities, but the questions still remain: will his reinterpretation receive any formal sanction from Islamic authorities, and will he be able to persuade the Muslim majority that his is a true reading of their Scriptures? When I visit the large Islamic bookshop in Lakemba in Sydney the more liberal interpretations of men like Ramadan are nowhere to be found. He may speak for the majority, but who's listening?

The printing presses of the world are churning out books on Islam at an astonishing rate, and there is little indication that the flood will abate.

A verdict

The printing presses of the world are churning out books on Islam at an astonishing rate, and there is little indication that the flood will abate. What are we to make of the very different perspectives on Islam presented by these four largely representative books?

It seems to me that we can fall prey to one of two extremes. Firstly, we can be unduly alarmist about the spread of Islam, particularly in the West. Notions that Australia may be Islamic within twenty years are patent nonsense. The growth of Islam here is comparatively small. Further, given Australia's present immigration policy there is unlikely to be a large increase in Muslims entering this country.

Further, the unwarranted fear of Muslims, which Stuart Robinson appropriately counsels Christians against, can lead to Christians being as unjust and coercive as the very Muslim regimes of which they are so critical. What exactly does Robinson want us to make of the growth of Islamic schools and mosques in countries like Australia? When he mentions that in 1995 British Prime Minister John Major officially opened a state of the art $US12 million multi media studio in the heart of London from which Arabic transmissions go around the world, how does he feel we should respond? Is he implying Major should not have done that? Is he suggesting that we should forbid Muslims opening Islamic schools and openly propagating their faith. Probably not, but in the context of the book's thesis I

was left wondering. I'm surprised and dismayed at how many Christians I meet who oppose the Australian government subsidising Islamic schools. We insist on government subsidies of Christian schools, but seem very happy to have these same rights kept from others who are equally citizens of this country. We abhor the attempts by some Muslims to coerce faith, yet fail to see the inconsistency of our argument when we want to deprive people of those very rights to which they are justly entitled.

However, the other error one can make is to be complacent and naïve about the political efforts Muslims will make to curb religious freedom and freedom of speech. Stuart Robinson perceptively draws a comparison with the Gay movement. Here are a relatively small group in society, and yet through clever political manoeuvring they have effectively silenced any public discussion about the damaging effects of the homosexual lifestyle. Christians will need to remain vigilant if they are to preserve their right to speak openly and honestly about Islam, or any religious world view, in the public arena. At the moment two Christians are being prosecuted under Victoria's Anti-Vilification Law for speaking publicly and critically of some aspects of Islamic teaching. There are moves to have Muslims recognised as a race, so that any public comments which might "insult or offend" could be rendered unlawful under the Racial Discrimination Act. Should such an amendment be passed it would prove the death knell to genuine and open discussion about Islam. Christians must remain alert, informed and active. The times demand an honest, but critical, public examination and discussion of the teachings of Islam and yet, as is the case throughout much of the world, there are efforts being made to silence such discussions. By all means allow Muslim women to wear the *hijab*, but today Islam must be unveiled. K

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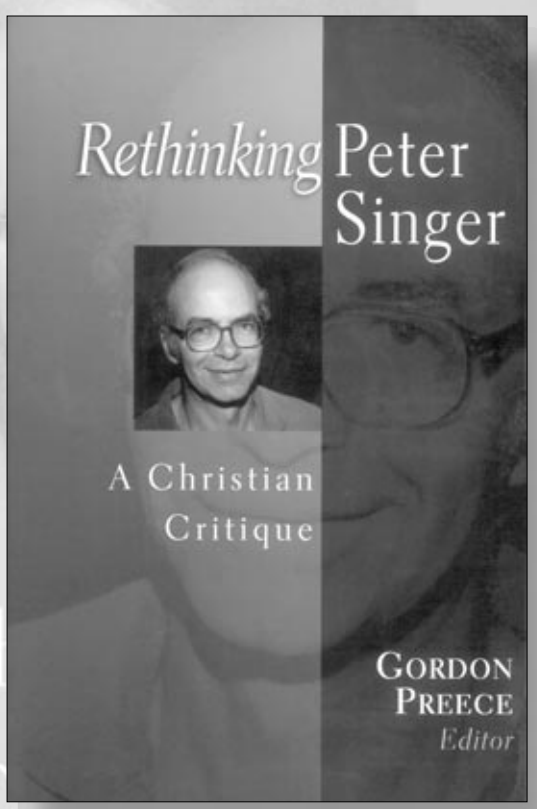
ENDNOTES

1 See Michael Raiter, *Contending for God: Holy War in Islam and Christianity*. BCV, Melbourne:, 2002.
2 Robert Spencer, *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions about the World's Fastest-Growing Faith*, Encounter Books, San Francisco, 2002.
3 *Ibid*., p. 37.
4 *Ibid*., p. 37.
5 *Ibid*., p.4.
6 *Ibid*., p. 176.
7 Stuart Robinson, *Mosques and Miracles: Revealing Islam and God's Grace*, CityHarvest Publications, Mt Gravatt, Qld, 2003.
8 Robinson, *Mosques and Miracles*, p. 265.
9 Abdullah Saeed, *Islam in Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2003.
10 *Ibid*., p. 205.

Rethinking Peter Singer



A Christian Critique

Gordon

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The strange world of Peter Singer: a hitchhiker's guide

ANDREW CAMERON

Rethinking Peter Singer
Gordon Preece (ed.)
IVP, Downers Grove, 2002.

Imagine a world where it is wrong to kill mice, but acceptable to not want children.

In this world, there are no butchers' shops, fish markets or hamburgers. There are no beef cattle or battery hens, and restaurants are basically vegan. Sports shooting and fishing are illegal, for shooters and fishermen are murderers.

But disabled embryonic, fetal and newborn humans are generally all killed, along with many more that are not disabled but are simply unwanted. Such killing is a legal and uncontroversial sector of the health industry. The only ongoing discussion concerns the age at which a child is sentient enough to have a say in the matter. Some argue that one month of age is a conservative upper limit for infanticide. Others believe the decision to be open until about one year of age, since it might take parents some time to decide if the child is wanted, and small children are not so aware of their ongoing existence as to prefer its continuation.

The people of this world also engage in lively discussion about the keeping of animals. Some are against pet-keeping, since it reduces animals to the status of a slave. But others live with an animal as their 'significant other', and love and respect between sentient beings can validly take the form of interspecies sexual love.

This world seeks the maximization of preferences for the greatest number of all rational, choosing persons, and the minimisation of pain for as many sentient beings as possible. (In this world,

we must always qualify 'persons' or 'people' as either human or animal, since some intelligent animals are also regarded as 'persons'.) Mutual cooperation is encouraged between human people, in order to maximise the preferences of as many human beings as possible. Many human people therefore deny themselves luxuries and channel excess wealth toward the poor and toward suffering animals, and the government taxes anyone who indulges in excessive personal spending.

Legal euthanasia is also central to the happiness of this world, since it maximises the preferences of those who wish to minimize their own pain. Anyone who is terminally ill and prefers treatment in a palliative care hospice has difficulty in finding such places, and payment for treatment there is coming under scrutiny as a candidate for the luxury tax. The many medical personnel needed for all the daily euthanasias and abortions wear plastic shoes and travel by public transport, since leather is no longer produced and too much private transport ruins our overall quality of life.

Anyone who is terminally ill and prefers treatment in a palliative care hospice has difficulty in finding such places, and payment for treatment there is coming under scrutiny as a candidate for the luxury tax.

Disabled people are a curious oddity, for serious disability is generally euthanased or aborted. The disabled who remain are treated with care and respect, since they are sentient and have preferences too. But a moral cloud of sorts hangs over them, since in a world of need, extra resources are required (nurses, caregivers, equipment) to realize their preferences. Some disabled people are wearied by repeatedly having to justify their preference against euthanasia. They find it hard to explain how for them, their own lives are not of lesser 'quality'. This is a world where the disabled find it hard to persuade others that they are not inherently 'worse-off'. Meanwhile, some non-disableds wonder if in a world of need, the extra resources required by the disabled should also come under the luxury tax.

This is a world where the thought of Moses, Christ, Paul, Augustine, Aquinas and Kant are all museum pieces, the detritus of a world long-forgotten. But people here are rigorously impartial. The good of the many, including mice and pigs, is to be preferred against the good of the few, such as family and friends, unless it can be shown that to act for the few will ultimately assist the many. A thought can only be considered 'rational' in this world if its origins are in Darwin or the British Empiricists. Any other politically influential beliefs and ideas are rigorously debunked and discredited.

Welcome to the strange world of Peter Singer, the Australian ethicist now teaching at Princeton University. My description of Singer's world comes in part from his writings, although I

have thrown in some of my own speculations about the shape of his world were his vision to be realized.

I don't call his world a 'strange' world in order to be rude. It is simply that: strange, as compared to our current world. Indeed, Singer knows how strange his world must seem to the uninitiated. Nonetheless, he is committed to making the strange familiar, and is equally committed to sinking, collapsing, discrediting, debunking and making irrelevant the Judeo-Christian ideas which gave us our current view of things. I do not mean to express this as a fear of mine. I do not write as a paranoid Christian with a conspiracy theory. Rather, Singer himself is quite clear and explicit about his project, and takes every opportunity to state and explain his intention. "The question is not whether [the old ethic] will be replaced, but what the shape of its successor will be."[1]

Of course, there are many non-religious opponents to Singer and his world. For example, Harriet McBryde Johnson, a disabled lawyer and an atheist, argued against Singer in a recent public debate at Princeton University.[2] My speculations about the thoughts and feelings of disabled people within Singer's world are based upon her responses to Singer.

Yet oddly, one point of deep agreement emerges from the total opposition between Singer and Christian ethics. This point of deep agreement was identified in the course of another recent public debate in Oakland, California, between Singer and Christian bioethicist Nigel M. de S. Cameron.[3] Cameron reminded the audience of how, in Christian anthropology, humanity is made in the image of God and thereby possesses inalienable and sacred dignity. Although there might be more to a Christian anthropology (for example, the person and work of Christ should be its key referent), Cameron's main point is what follows.

Singer's argumentative strategy is to claim that Christianity is a fiction, and therefore so is the 'dignity' and 'sanctity' of human life.

Christian anthropology "is the common inheritance of us all, and as legatees of the so-called Enlightenment, believers and unbelievers remain its beneficiaries whether or not they acknowledge its source."[4] Therefore, when the moderator asked at the end of the debate whether Singer and Cameron could agree on anything, Cameron's reply was instructive:

> Oh yes, I said, and I turned to face Professor Singer and gestured at the 10-foot gap between us: 'Almost every bioethicist lies somewhere between us', I averred, 'and you and I both agree that they are all quite wrong'. He did not disagree.[5]

That is, both agree that without Christian anthropology, the 'dignity' and 'sanctity' of human life is a delusion. Singer's argumentative strategy is to claim that Christianity is a fiction, and therefore so is the 'dignity' and 'sanctity' of human life. By contrast, Cameron accounts for

the 'dignity' and 'sanctity' of human life only by reference to its Christian origins, and he accepts no substitutes. Singer and Cameron both agree that anyone in the 'ten feet between' who does not accept Christian teaching, has no proper basis for believing that humanity possesses sacred dignity.

It would seem, then, that Christians have a special role in the debate with Singer. Although there is no shortage of opponents to Singer in those 'ten feet' between him and the Christian, the Christian has a special task to explain and defend the Christian ethical heritage of the modern west. At last, then, we come to the Hitchhiker's Guide to Singer's strange world—a recent attempt by four Christian scholars to step up to the plate and accept the challenge.

Consequentialists are not interested in rules or laws or a person's character, or whatever other non-consequential considerations sometimes govern ethics.

In *Rethinking Peter Singer: A Christian Critique,*[6] editor Gordon Preece gathers new and existing Christian responses to Singer. The book acquaints readers with Singer's strange world, and offers some ways forward to oppose it effectively. The volume is packed with quotations from Singer's own writings and with references to a variety of his respondents. (This strength becomes a weakness when we discover that the book lacks a bibliography. Arduous trawling through footnotes is required for anyone who wants to read further.) Hence it is an invaluable aid for any of those who want to 'train' for a better response to Singer. It may be a slim book, but it is deceptively dense and complex. In this article, I will review each of the book's chapters in the sequence in which I think is most helpful for those chapters to be read.

The editor's introduction gives a helpful and respectful overview to Singer's personal and intellectual history. Preece also summarises the contributions found in this book, and draws upon one contributor to helpfully explain Singer's particular way of thinking, called *preference utilitarianism* (PU).

It is helpful to locate PU in relation to its Enlightenment forebears. PU is an example of *consequentialism*, where acts are good in virtue of, and *only* in virtue of, their results. Consequentialists are not interested in rules or laws or a person's character, or whatever other non-consequential considerations sometimes govern ethics. Rather, consequentialists seek only to enact good results.

The general idea is refined in *utilitarianism*, a consequentialist approach where acts should bring the greatest amount of *happiness* to the largest number of human people. Singer's PU is a further refinement—a kind of utilitarianism that consists in the maximization of preferences or choices for the greatest number of all rational, choosing persons (including higher animals), and in the minimisation of pain for all sentient,

feelingful life forms. The appeal of PU lies in (i) its appearance of scientific objectivity; (ii) its supposed simplicity for measuring the good of social policies; (iii) the way it highlights our responsibility for the consequences of our actions; (iv) its promise to arbitrate across pluralism for an ethic agreeable to all; and (v) its straightforward practicality, which gives easy media sound-bites.[7]

Rethinking Peter Singer offers an overall evaluation of Singer's system, and then responds in particular to Singer on animals, infanticide and euthanasia. But the first stop in *Rethinking Peter Singer* should be Graham Cole's contribution in chapter 3, 'Singer on Christianity: characterized or caricatured?'. Singer's prosecution of Christianity is based on a caricature, by omitting major elements of Christian teaching. Certainly Singer's life-history does not seem to have given him much exposure to it, but it is odd that such a high-profile academic has apparently devoted so little time to his main opponent.

Lindsay Wilson's chapter 4, 'Human beings—species or special', illustrates the point. For Singer, Judeo-Christian thought mandated the West to exploit and abuse the natural world and its animal populace. Hence human beings are 'speciesist' which, by analogy to 'racist', errs in its fundamental discrimination against sentient beings. But Singer's charge is only based on a few texts, and Lindsay responds with a biblical theology of animal life. (I was surprised to learn that only one of the Bible's sixty-six books makes no reference to animals). The very high view of animals that emerges blunts Singer's attack, and helps to sustain the claim of Christian anthropology for humanity's special place in the universe.

Andrew Sloane's chapter 4, 'Singer, preference utilitarianism and infanticide', is the most closely argued section of the book. By giving a detailed philosophical analysis and critique of PU, Sloane shows that we remain entitled to our 'traditional' views against infanticide.

In chapter 5, 'Rethinking Singer on life and death', Gordon Preece is in dialogue with Singer's *Rethinking Life and Death*. Preece evaluates Singer's promotion of euthanasia, and blunts Singer's 'exposure' of the incoherence in 'sanctity of life' ethics. There are a number of struts to Singer's and Preece's argument.

The very high view of animals that emerges blunts Singer's attack, and helps to sustain the claim of Christian anthropology for humanity's special place in the universe.

I have deliberately left Preece's chapter 1 until last ('The unthinkable and unliveable Singer'). The chapter is important and helpful, but I have some reservations about it.

Some of my complaints are minor. For example, Preece's occasional lapse into polemical rhetoric[8] is jarring, given his overall respect and courtesy toward his opponent. Also, the extensive use of long footnotes develops tangential points in interesting ways, but I would prefer to see them worked into the main

text, for the many side-discussions make it difficult to grasp the overall argument.

Singer's ethic is unthinkable and unliveable, Preece claims, because it is hard to sustain its central tenets, and harder to puts its results into practise. To illustrate the case, Preece points to Singer's choice against euthanasia for his Alzheimers-affected mother. Singer was unable to live out his own ethic, presumably because that ethic has missed something.

Preece has impressively collated much opposition to Singer, both secular and religious.

Preece is employing one of two kinds of *ad hominem* argument here. *Ad hominems* are suspect when they seek to undermine an argument simply by slandering the arguer. But Preece's *ad hominem* is generally considered admissible. It undermines his opponent's argument by showing that if his opponent cannot even live what his own argument entails, then perhaps his opponent's argument has not adequately accounted for all the facts of the case.

Preece has impressively collated much opposition to Singer, both secular and religious. Extensive quotations and footnotes make the chapter a vital compendium of such opposition. However, I worry that the various kinds of argument against Singer do not always sit well with each other. Preece knows that his argumentative strategy might seem like an "each way bet":

> I will claim not that *only* a Christian view can support the sanctity of human life, persons and relationships, but that it *best* supports it. Though Christians advocate a specifically Christian narrative ethic, we need not see this as necessarily in total opposition to a rational ethic based on universally recognizable principles, rules and virtues. Rather the two can work in tandem, as they often do in Scripture, given that God is Creator as well as Redeemer … Fortunately many, on seeing how high the stakes are, such as the sacrifice of the young and old, intuitively reject them, though not necessarily knowing why.[9]

Preece, it seems, would not agree with Cameron that anyone in the 'ten feet between' Singer and Christianity is simply wrong. Preece's 'each way bet' liberates him to draw upon these others sympathetically, as he does.

Christians differ philosophically and theologically over people's access to the created order. On the one hand, some people discover that babies and the elderly are precious, and that humans are special. These people are amenable to a 'rational common ground' approach, such as Preece's. On the other hand, other people (such as Singer) believe that intuitions such as 'special' and 'precious' are simply mistaken. 'Rational' argument cannot make them budge. All we have in reply are the declarations of Christian revelation, coming as they do

from a different and unanticipated rational ground. Such declarations are central to Cameron's strategy.

The bottom line is that a great deal of information and argument takes place in Preece's first chapter. It might be overwhelming for the uninitiated, and will require careful processing. I would recommend it to be read last, and with a pen in hand. Such an approach would make it most rewarding.

My comments on *Rethinking Peter Singer* probably indicate that it is, in the first instance, best as a sourcebook for Christians. It certainly gives a great deal of detail for navigating Singer's strange world, and will be an excellent anvil upon which to hammer out our own thoughts and arguments in reply. *Rethinking Peter Singer* might work well for intellectual non-Christian readers who are already familiar with Singer's ethic, but it should not be used to assist the average casual enquirer.

Rather, Christian readers of *kategoria* are the ones best placed to reformulate *Rethinking Peter Singer* into sermons, tracts and booklets for a popular audience. We would all be well advised to do so, rather than leaving the task to a handful of 'professionals'. Or, over the next few decades, we will find Singer's strange world becoming increasingly familiar. K

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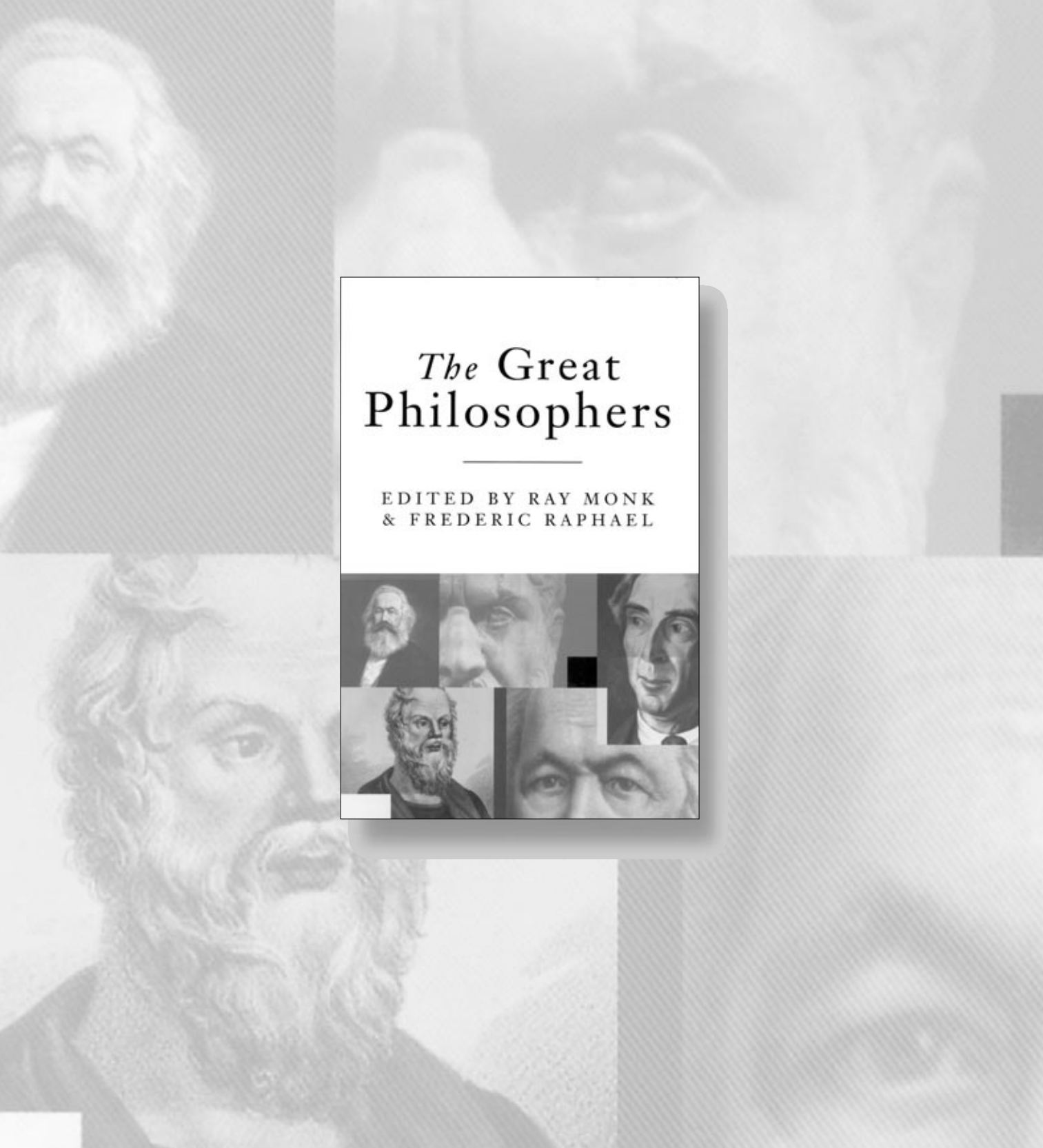
ENDNOTES

1 Peter Singer, *Rethinking Life and Death*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1994, p. 222.
2 Harriet McBryde Johnson, 'My Right to Life', *Weekend Australian*, May 2-4 2003, pp. 18-23.
3 Nigel M. de S. Cameron, 'Podiums on Different Planets', *Crux* 2, no. 3, 2002, pp. 1 & 4. *Crux* is the newsletter of the Center for Bioethics and Culture, and is available on the internet at http://www.thecbc.org/crux_newsletters.php. The edition includes Cameron's account of the debate and a response from Peter Singer. The debate itself is available from the Centre on video.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
6 Gordon Preece (ed.), *Rethinking Peter Singer*, IVP,Downers Grove, 2002.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 19. Point (iv) is my addition.
8 *E.g.* Singer conducts a "political-pollster approach" to ethics (p. 25); cf. Singer was 'spawned' (p. 17).
9 Preece, *Rethinking Peter Singer* p. 66.


The Great
Philosophers
EDITED BY RAY MONK
& FREDERIC RAPHAEL

KATEGORIA **2003** NUMBER **28** PP. **43–48**

Useful philosophy

JAMES PIETSCH

The Great Philosophers
Frederic Raphael and Ray Monk (eds)
Routledge, New York

Have you ever been faced with comments such as "Nothing is certain", "There are no moral absolutes", "Religion is a matter of faith in contrast to scientific theories based on fact" or "Human beings are just machines programmed by society" when talking to friends about the truth claims of various religions? Such questions have been around for thousands of years—even Pontius Pilate responded to Jesus with the question "What is truth?" in John 18:38. In the current climate of postmodern uncertainty about truth and metanarratives concerning morality, such questions are very likely to arise when talking with people who have grown up maintaining epistemological doubt about Christianity or God. A working knowledge of some of the philosophical issues surrounding questions of truth, morality, thought and reality itself can be useful, therefore, in framing a response to these questions.

Reviews of philosophical ideas, writings on different philosophers, and introductory texts on philosophy represent valuable resources for developing such a working knowledge. *The Great Philosophers* represents one such resource that may assist the reader to become familiar with the arguments presented for and against different views on such matters.

The Great Philosophers is a collection of essays on twelve philosophers—Socrates, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Berkeley, Hume, Marx, Russell, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Popper and Turing—each of which initially appeared in a series of

monographs also titled *The Great Philosophers*. Rather than provide the reader with a summary of western philosophy, or even a summary of the philosophical thought of these twelve philosophers, it aims for depth rather than breadth in most chapters by inviting various authors to focus on a specific aspect of each person's philosophical writings. Berkeley's thoughts on scientific method are explored rather than the more well-known discussions of absolute idealism, for example, and Russell's mathematical investigations are the focus of another chapter. Popper's arguments against historicism receive considerable attention rather than his better known ideas on what constitutes science, and the chapter on Wittgenstein is dedicated to his later work *Philosophical Investigations* rather than the earlier *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

The first two chapters on Socrates and Plato, for example, are excellent examples of philosophers engaging with the ideas of each philosopher within the context of their lives and historical setting, demonstrating philosophy in action and presenting these ideas as viable perspectives rather than outmoded ways of thinking.

Some of the chapters, however, aim for a more comprehensive view of the thinking of each writer. The chapter on Hume, for example, outlines his thoughts on cause and effect, the existence of the material world, his sceptical outlook, morality and the passions and religion, including his discussion of the necessary conditions for believing that a miracle has occurred. Spinoza's philosophy is summarised in another chapter in a similar fashion.

For each essay three objectives were set out for the authors by the editors—to present the ideas of each person with relevant biographical and historical information, to engage with these ideas providing examples of "philosophy in action" (p.1) and to treat the twelve philosophers "… as proponents of ideas which retain their vitality, not as the sources of antiquated curiosities" (p.1). The first two chapters on Socrates and Plato, for example, are excellent examples of philosophers engaging with the ideas of each philosopher within the context of their lives and historical setting, demonstrating philosophy in action and presenting these ideas as viable perspectives rather than outmoded ways of thinking.

The first chapter on Socrates represents a solid attempt to disentangle Socrates' philosophy from the philosophical writings of his followers. The author, Anthony Gottlieb, amasses considerably more sources of evidence for Socrates' ideas than other summaries of Socrates' philosophy drawing solely on Plato's dialogues. In particular, Gottlieb identifies the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon and Aristophanes as the four principle witnesses to Socrates' philosophy as well as recognising the influence of Socrates' thought on the philosophy of his disciples—Diogenes the Cynic,

Antisthenes, Euclides, and Aristippus. From this evidence Anthony Gottlieb provides a thorough description of Socrates' life, his philosophical method, his desire to know what would constitute the virtuous life, his views on how knowledge is acquired, and his ideas on justice. In doing so, the reader is challenged to respond to Socrates' questions in much the same way that Protagoras, Callicles, Critobulus and others do in the dialogues written by Plato. Socrates' desire to know what constituted a virtuous and just life and his inability to develop sound arguments in favour of promoting different virtues receives the bulk of Gottlieb's attention. Gottlieb suggests that Socrates' discussion of these issues resulted in little more than "…faltering steps on this road to expert moral knowledge" and yet Socrates, desire to know and live the virtuous life remained the principle motivation driving his philosophical musings.

Of particular interest is Socrates' thoughts on the gods and divinity, described by Gottlieb as "… largely a gloss, which serves to mark Socrates' high moral purpose and to win the approval of his hearers" (p.16). From Gottlieb's analysis, there is little support for theism in Socrates' philosophy—it is left to his follower Plato to develop a metaphysic that would become foundational for many early Christian thinkers.

In his chapter on Plato, Bernard Williams is faced with the far less daunting task of identifying Plato's philosophy from the *Dialogues*. Plato wrote with Socrates as the main character. The dominant theme of Plato's philosophy which Williams draws out is the distinction between the real world which is constantly changing (as suggested by Heraclitus), and the eternal world of the Forms which was unchanging—sometimes equated with heaven by Neo-Platonic theologians. However, the difficulty with this metaphysic identified by Williams is the ethic which such a view encourages. The "good" is only to be found in the perfect world of Forms, and there seems to be no guiding principle for administering justice in the real world. Gnosticism and Docetism have obvious sympathies with Plato's conception of reality.

The "good" is only to be found in the perfect world of Forms, and there seems to be no guiding principle for administering justice in the real world.

The chapter by Terry Eagleton on Karl Marx's dialectical materialism represents a valuable contribution to this collection, presenting the case for reading Marx from a philosophical perspective as well as from the perspective of a social scientist. Consistent with Marx's desire to combine theory and practice, Eagleton focuses on Marx's economic theory—his ideas on capitalism, the division of labour, the relationship between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie and the social circumstances required for revolution. In contrast to more typical descriptions of Marxist

theory, however, Eagleton also presents a critique of Marx's theory which incorporates discussion of the underlying philosophy of dialectical materialism—the dynamics of revolution driven by growing contradictions, Marx's view of human nature, the linking of consciousness and the material world and Marx's historicism.

In doing so, Eagleton provides a valuable grounding for understanding post-Marxist theories such as Habermas' and Adorno's critical theory emphasising emancipation, and, more recently, post-modern theories of knowledge. Raphael's chapter outlining Popper's attacks on historicism represents a counter view in which Popper's criticism of Marxist historicism is linked with current debates about democratic systems and Fukuyama's claims about the "end of history". In doing so, the debate over historical processes and the inevitablity of social change remains an open question which the reader is invited to form their own opinions about.

The debate over historical processes and the inevitablity of social change remains an open question.

As with all collections, some chapters manage to present the ideas as valid contributions to ongoing debates about truth, being, justice, morality, the nature of thought, history and humanity. Others merely present the ideas. Take, for example, the chapter on David Hume. Anthony Quinton's discussion of Hume is more akin to a commentary than an example of philosophy in action. It reads more like a potted summary of his major works rather than an engagement with his ideas. Slabs of text are lifted from his main works—most notably the *Treatise of Human Nature,* with passing comment from the author on each section. While such a chapter has its uses in introducing the reader to the work of Hume, the ideas themselves are presented as no more than philosophical history.

However, there exist several discourses across the different chapters of the book which provide the reader with opportunities to examine arguments and counter arguments regarding a wide range of issues that are of interest to many people today. As mentioned previously, Marx's historicism is outlined in one chapter and Popper's attack on this approach to understanding history is outlined in another. Turing's optimism regarding the possibility of intelligent machines is set out in one chapter while another chapter spends considerable time detailing Wittgenstein's objections to the notion that machines can think. Descartes, Spinoza and Hume's disparate attempts to capture the nature of emotion within their respective philosophical frameworks are also outlined in separate chapters.

Even this particular strength of the book appears to emerge by chance rather than design. As the editors state in their introduction

> Our tally of philosophers … was deliberately eclectic. We had, of course, to include the indisputably great names whose canon is

> uncontested: Socrates, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Berkeley and Hume … however we also wanted to include those such as Alan Turing and Karl Marx (p.1)

It would almost seem that the authors who were able and prepared to contribute determined such a choice, leading to several glaring omissions from the 'canon' alluded to by the editors. Any discussion concerning 'great philosophers' seems incomplete without acknowledging the work of Immanuel Kant, George Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche and Aristotle—each of whom have every right to be included in such a collection. The inclusion of these philosophers would also enrich the intellectual counterpoint that stands out as one of the strengths of a work of this nature. Kant's reasons for rejecting ontology would provide an alternative perspective to Heidegger's focus on ontology in *Being and Time*. Aristotle's re-interpretation of Plato's forms would complement the discussion of Plato's philosophy and Nietzsche's "anti-philosophy" (as Eagleton refers to it in his chapter on Marx), rejecting rationality and the moral categories of good and evil, and would present a radically different perspective to that provided by Hume, Descartes and Spinoza.

The depth of each chapter on the particular philosophers is another strength of this book. I look forward to re-reading many of the chapters, particularly those on Wittgenstein and Heidegger which manage to simplify without reducing the complexity of linguistic philosophy and Heidegger's main work *Being and Time*. In discussing the ideas of each philosopher, the authors also provide appropriate biographical information for each philosopher to assist the reader to make sense of these ideas within a historical and personal context. In a sense, each chapter represents an intermediate discussion of the thinking of these twelve philosophers—more detail than what is available in Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy*, for example, but less than what might be available in texts devoted to one of these philosophers.

Any discussion concerning 'great philosophers' seems incomplete without acknowledging the work of Immanuel Kant, George Hegel, Friedrich Nietzsche and Aristotle—each of whom have every right to be included in such a collection.

As a reference book, however, *The Great Philosophers* has a significant weakness in regard to the bibliography and further reading section. Further reading is only provided for three of the twelve philosophers—Plato, Popper and Turing. Also, there is no author index assisting the reader to make further links between each of the different chapters. Several other summaries of philosophical ideas represent more valuable resources in terms of bibliographic information. For example, Colin Brown's *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* written in 1969 provides the reader with considerable notes on each of the main texts discussed through the course of his book which

spans the philosophical ideas of over two thousand years. A more recent work by Colin Brown is *Christianity and Western Thought Vol 1* which is equally useful, although this book only covers philosophy up until the Enlightenment and has just been supplemented with *Faith and Reason in the Nineteenth Century* by Alan Padget and Steve Wilkens.

The Great Philosophers, however, complements these works in many ways, being more thorough in its treatment of each philosopher and by providing an alternative perspective to that given by Brown, Padget and Wilkens. Each of the chapters in *The Great Philosophers* is written by an expert on the life and ideas of each philosopher, who do not share Brown's interest in how these ideas relate to the Christian gospel. For the reader who is hoping to develop a deeper understanding of the works of these twelve philosophers, therefore, *The Great Philosophers* represents a useful resource for understanding many famous philosophical works and the ideas of these influential thinkers. Used in conjunction with other texts previously mentioned, this book provides the reader with further opportunities to understand the life and work of philosophers whose influence is very apparent in this postmodern age.

Is it possible, therefore, to use some of the ideas in this book when responding to such comments as those outlined in the introduction? I think this book can provide a framework within which to understand different perspectives and that such a framework is always useful in developing one's ideas. By developing one's own responses to the issues raised in *The Great Philosophers*, the reader is more able to engage with other people who may hold similar views. *The Great Philosophers* might not be the first book one should read as an introduction to philosophy, but it will certainly challenge one's perspective regarding a wide range of philosophical issues including the potential truth claims of mathematics, the possibility of artificial intelligence, the impact of language on thinking, miracles, morality, the existence of mind, and the existence of God. K

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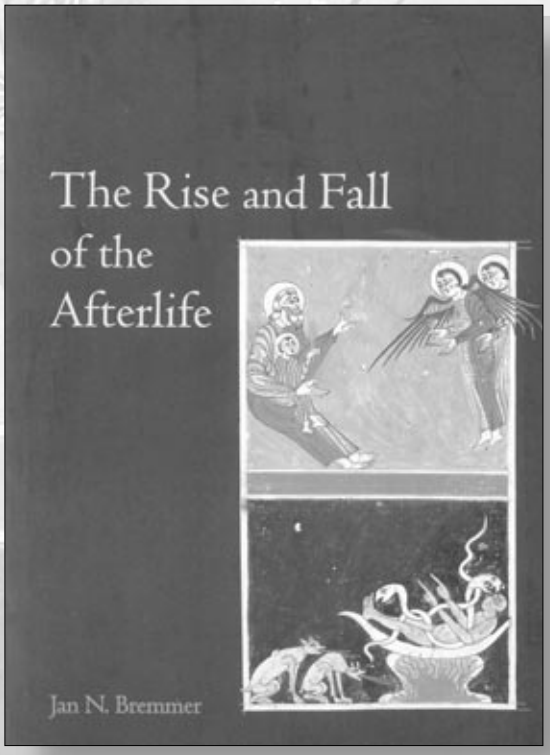
life



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Souls, ghosts and resurrection

PETER BOLT

The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife
Jan N. Bremmer
Routledge, London & New York, 2002

Our view of the afterlife profoundly affects the way we live in the here-and-now. The gospel of Jesus Christ promises a future resurrection to eternal life, a promise that is firmly grounded upon Jesus' own resurrection from the dead. This view of the future clashes with the many other views that have existed throughout history and exist at the present time. It is therefore vitally important to continue to reflect upon the various ways the people around us conceive of the ultimate future.

This book contains the text of the Read-Tuckwell lectures delivered in the University of Bristol in 1995. Jan Bremmer, Professor of the History and Science of Religion at Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in the Netherlands, provides an analysis of views of the afterlife from ancient through to modern times. While delving into ancient and murky places, Bremmer has an eye on current issues. When it comes to the afterlife, in many ways, 'there is nothing new under the sun', even if the packaging might change with time.

Bremmer begins with a 'panoramic' view of Greek ideas of the soul and the afterlife, in order to compare them with what is found in the Old Testament. The older Greeks, such as Homer, used a variety of terms for the seat of our psychological and emotional attributes. There were two 'souls', a free-soul which is inactive when the body is active, but is manifest in dreams, swoons, and at death; and a body-soul,

which endows the body with life. This dualistic way of thinking is especially famous in Plato. Other Philosophical schools, however, such as the Epicureans and Stoics, as well as influential physicians such as Herophilus and Erasistratus, believed that the soul did not exist independently from the body. The vocabulary of 'soul' (*psyche*), entered the Jewish (and, later, the Christian) world through the translation of the Bible into Greek (3rd c. BC), although the Old Testament itself did not have a body/spirit dualism. Later, philosophically trained Greek theologians would introduce Platonic thought into Christian theology.

Psuchai was also used for 'the souls of the dead' (cf. Rev. 20:4). There were elaborate views of the underworld, and others spoke of an astral immortality, where the souls of the dead lived amongst the stars. The predominant attitude, however, appears to be a resignation to the fact that death was the end.

The Shamans of the archaic period were purifiers and healers who were also reputed even to be able to fly.

Bremmer discusses several particular developments in a surprising amount of detail for what are fairly slim chapters. Chapter 2 deals with the rise of the immortal soul and notions of reincarnation, under the influence of Orphism and Pythagoreanism. Bremmer argues against the suggestion that these ideas originally derive from Indian or Bhuddist religion, in favour of the development arising from "a combination of political and psychological developments … in Greece itself" (p. 26). These ideas would be taken over by Plato, who, in turn, would influence early Christian theologians.

Chapter 3 discusses Greek Shamanism, which has also been mooted as a possible influence on Greek ideas of the soul and afterlife. The Shamans of the archaic period were purifiers and healers who were also reputed even to be able to fly. They were said to go into trances, separate their souls from their bodies, and allow their souls to travel. Some archeological evidence suggests the use of hashish to facilitate such an enterprise (pp. 30–31). Bremmer outlines previous discussions on these figures, and concludes that a more careful assessment of the evidence indicates that the stories of the so-called 'Greek shamans' were infected with later philosophical views. They, in fact, "were no shamans and they practised no psychic excursion" (p. 40).

Moving a little closer to views dear to the message of the New Testament, Bremmer then discusses the development of the idea of resurrection. Those who are far too familiar with the New Testament's teaching on the resurrection should recapture some of the wonder expressed by Bremmer: "Undoubtedly, the most spectacular religious doctrine regarding the body is resurrection" (p. 41). He correctly observes that this was "an unthinkable idea" for Greeks and Romans, yet the

New Testament put forward the hope of resurrection to that world. It has long been known that Pharisaic Jews shared a hope in resurrection, but it is only recently that this hope has also been discovered in the writings of the Qumran community. The fact that this hope is amongst these famous Dead Sea Scrolls, indicates that Jews just before the time of Jesus shared this hope, confirming the New Testament picture. Despite opinion to the contrary, Bremmer argues that there is little reason to derive this belief from Persian ideas, in favour of an intra-Jewish development. He also argues that it was the success of Christianity, which proclaimed a hope in bodily resurrection, which caused other groups to either revalue their belief in resurrection (Zoroastrianism), or to imitate that of Christianity (Mithraism, Attis).

Chapter 5 examines the development of afterlife ideas in early Christian theology. Many of these ideas were lifted from the New Testament, but others were influenced by contemporary views of the afterlife found in the contemporary environment. Persecution and interaction with heretical groups forced a clarification of ideas. Here Bremmer draws upon some fascinating ancient material, such as the prison-diary of Perpetua, a high-born twenty-year-old who was executed in North Africa on 7th March AD 203. After her death, this young woman's diary was incorporated into the document now known as *The Passion of Perpetua*. This book records her vision of the afterlife, as well as that of her spiritual advisor, Saturus. Both potential martyrs expect to ascend to heaven immediately following their martyrdom, as do other martyrs, such as the famous Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who was executed in c. 155 AD, and also a man martyred in Scillium in AD 180. In AD 259, witnesses reported that two Spanish martyrs were seen rising up to heaven, still bound to the stakes at which they were being burned. These various reports testify to the belief that martyrs, and indeed all Christians (according to *the Shepherd of Hermes,* ca. AD 140; see also Hippolytus, Clement, Origen), enter heaven immediately after death. Such a view finds New Testament support in Paul's words: "my desire is to depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1.23); and perhaps also Jesus' words to the dying thief: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23.43).

It was the success of Christianity, which proclaimed a hope in bodily resurrection, which caused other groups to either revalue their belief in resurrection (Zoroastrianism), or to imitate that of Christianity (Mithraism, Attis).

But not everyone shared this view. Others, such as Tertullian, Papias and Irenaeus, probably influenced by the Jewish apocalyptic tradition as found in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, spoke of the dead being detained beneath the earth until the resurrection and the 1000 year reign of Christ. The subterranean abode of the dead was also a common idea in Greek thought. Still others thought that they

would sleep until the resurrection (thus our word 'cemetery', derived from a word meaning 'sleeping place').

Perpetua also spoke of climbing in person to heaven, whereas Saturus speaks in a dualistic manner: "we had died and left the body". This body-soul dualism, however, is not a marked feature of the earlier writings, but it is introduced by Justin and Tatian, who were influenced by Greek philosophy. Origen even espoused the Orphic view that the body was a prison-house for the soul, although Bremmer argues that he is an exceptional case. Even at this stage (around AD 250), other evidence indicates a firm belief that the 'soul' dies with the body, and will be revived in the resurrection along with the body.

The denial that the dead immediately entered heaven also led to the doctrine of purgatory.

The denial that the dead immediately entered heaven also led to the doctrine of purgatory. Some early Jewish and Christian literature had suggested that the prayer of exemplary figures (such as Ezra or Paul) could intercede on behalf of the damned. Gradually, as the Christian church was battered by persecution, these exemplary figures were replaced with the martyrs, who were expected to intervene with Christ on the last day. Later the doctrine of purgatory would enable such intervention in the lifetime of the person requiring their help. Clement of Alexandria and Origen, both deeply influenced by Greek thought, introduced into Christian thought the notion of purification of souls in the afterlife, but we have to wait for about the twelfth and thirteenth century for the full blown doctrine of purgatory as a subterranean place in which this occurred.

The final two chapters deal, respectively, with 'ancient necromancy and modern spiritualism', and 'near-death experiences'. Here two issues which still provoke discussion in the current environment are examined in the light of ancient parallel phenomena. Ancient necromancy was a mainstream practice and has many points of difference to the phenomenon of spiritualism which began in 1848 and was tremendously popular in Britain and USA, reaching its heyday between the years 1850 to 1870. This movement attested to an interest in the afterlife, devoid of the traditional Christian beliefs of heaven and hell.

In chapter 7, Bremmer argues that the next period showing a fascination with the afterlife can be dated to 1975 when Raymond Moody published a book analysing 150 reports of people who had been on the brink of death. The age of the 'Near Death Experience' had been born, so firmly entering popular culture that Hollywood appropriated the theme in the 1990 film *Flatliners*. Moody argued that these experiences have a similar shape to them, and that they

were positive. Subsequent research has expanded upon Moody's model description, and has also documented cases of NDE in which the person has a greatly distressing experience. Rather than providing material evidence for a particular shape of the afterlife, Bremmer wishes to use these experiences as indicators about how modern people *imagine* the afterlife, and to compare them with similar phenomena in the medieval (a number of descriptions) and ancient (five descriptions) periods. Once again, Bremmer argues that such experiences in the modern West indicate that we still believe in an afterlife, but one that no longer echoes the Christian scriptures. As such, the NDE does not so much confirm the existence of the afterlife, as it testifies to the continuing decline of the afterlife. What is seen in the NDE seems to be a clear reflection of the modern world. Bremmer concludes his book with the wry comment that 'every age gets the afterlife it deserves'.

The book also contains three appendices, useful notes and indices.

If there is 'nothing new under the sun', then afterlife beliefs will persist. Sometimes they will be explicitly articulated; other times they will just be imbibed from popular culture and mythology. Either way, afterlife beliefs are part of the environment in which the Christian gospel of resurrection is proclaimed. Bremmer provides a good model of someone who learns from the past in order to better understand the present. Those who trust in the Resurrected One for their own future resurrection, as well as those who do not, will profit by following Bremmer on his journey. K

Peter Bolt lectures in New Testament at Moore Theological College.

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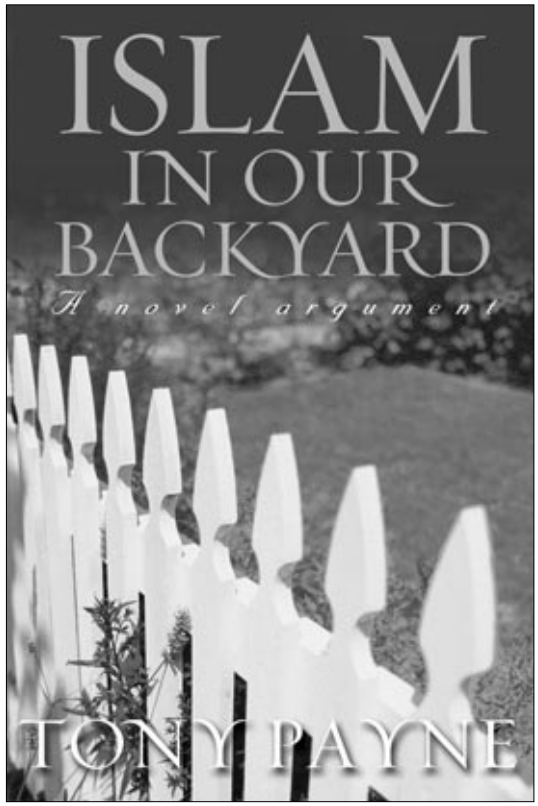

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READER REVIEW: "I bought and read your book *Islam in Our Backyard*. Thank you for your careful thinking and presentation of this topic. Your format was excellent and very helpful for me as I continue to minister to folk like 'Michael'." *Ken Noakes, Sydney.*

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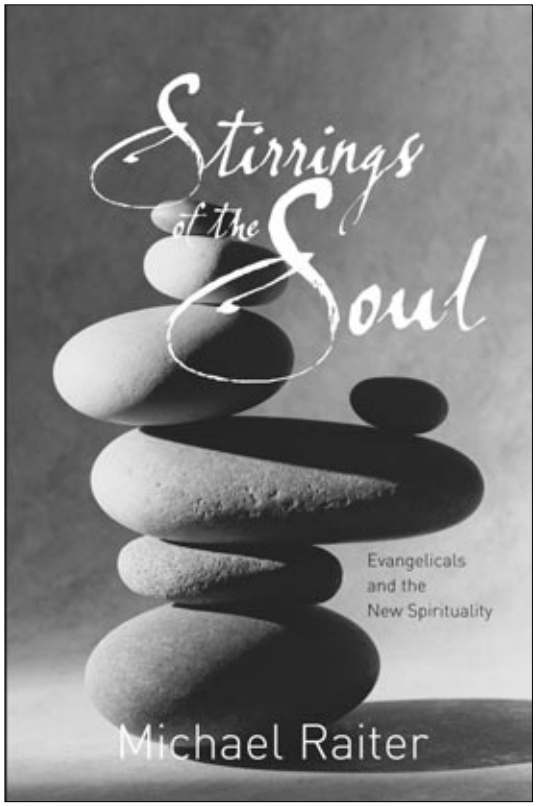

Evangelicals and the New Spirituality

The explosion of interest in spirituality in our society is nothing short of phenomenal. Among Christians, too, there is a flourishing interest in developing a greater 'spirituality'. Many who love the Lord Jesus Christ and long to please him seem frustrated that their spiritual lives—and the church services they attend—are too often dry and lacking in vitality. There has been a turn to the charismatic movement, and to forms of mysticism, and even monasticism, in search of a way to 'practise the presence of God'.

In this book, Michael Raiter surveys contemporary spiritualities, highlighting both their enormous variety and their common features, and tracing their historical, cultural and social roots. He then addresses a range of important questions for Christians: What is true spirituality? If we were to meet a 'truly spiritual' person, what would he or she look like? How do we respond biblically to our longing for spiritual intimacy? And is evangelicalism, in its current expressions, contributing to an atmosphere of spiritual dryness?

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