

ARTS & LETTERS

dorsed political gadfly Jeremy Rifkin's proposal to clamp down on biotechnology research: "Resolved, that efforts to engineer specific genetic traits into the germline of the human species should not be attempted." *Algeny*, the far-reaching moral and ecological argument behind this limited statement, should be required reading for all clerics.

Algeny is analogous to alchemy. Alchemy harnessed fire, enabling man to transform nature. Algeny applies cybernetics, allowing humankind to manipulate even living beings for its own purposes. Biotechnology marks a watershed as dramatic as the Industrial Revolution in which, according to Rifkin, organisms will be visualized as mere programs, "desacralized" along with the inanimate universe.

In Rifkin's view, to justify biotechnology as the next natural stage in evolution is to repeat Darwin's error of creating a model that simply rationalizes the evils of society. Darwin allegedly imposed his vision of competitive forces in England on the ecology of the Galapagos Islands. Rifkin attributes the acceptance of Darwinism to the eagerness of laissez-faire capitalists to certify their own morality, rather than to scientific evidence. In his murky theorizing about the origin of species, Rifkin postulates that species are "inviolable," thereby flaunting his ignorance of bacteriophage and other viruses, from which we learned about the transfer of genetic material from one species to another.

Although Rifkin's attack on evolution may appeal to fundamentalists, he has no more in common with creationists than evolutionists do. The Biblical story and the tree of life sketched by evolutionists both have the human species at the pinnacle, with nature organized hierarchically. Rifkin, however, believes that "all of life begins...[in] the place...where there are no hierarchies; no pecking orders, only relationships and mutual dependencies." Rifkin does like one idea from the book of Genesis—man must not try to become godlike by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. However, he sees in knowledge only the evil, not the good.

Like many who oppose research in biotechnology, Rifkin cites a parallel with the discovery of the atom's secrets. In his earlier book, *Entropy*, he explained persuasively why nuclear power is needed to support current population levels, while rejecting it all the same. Rifkin forgets that we don't need nuclear

energy to level cities: Genghis Khan, the Roman legions, and the Royal Air Force did just as much damage as the Hiroshima bomb, though with greater human effort. Similarly, we don't need genetic engineering to have eugenics. Plato, Campanella, and Hitler were ignorant of gene sequencing. Their schemes required only an omnipotent government.

We do, however, need biotechnology to help feed the world, to develop bacteria capable of detoxifying wastes,



Jeremy Rifkin

and to manufacture monoclonal antibodies or superior vaccines. But all of these activities, like livestock breeding in Darwin's day, are profitable, not sacrificial.

Implying that he favors diversity and democracy, Rifkin raises the specter of an evil power engineering the human race, eliminating "undesirable" traits like problematic behavior. Someone who undertakes to advise Congress, as Rifkin has set out to do, ought to understand the difference between curing sickle cell anemia (an excruciatingly painful, hereditary disease caused by the substitution of a single amino acid in a single protein) and influencing complex characteristics like behavior. The still-speculative ability to do the first by no means guarantees the feasibility of the second. Nevertheless, Rifkin is willing to sacrifice the victims of genetic diseases, lest we risk extinction due to a germline that is too perfect; at the same time, he is supposedly opposed to "physical perpetuation at all costs." In seeking to halt advances in knowledge, not just specific applications of technology, what kind of government must Rifkin really support? Even the Spanish Inquisition failed to prevent the discoveries of Galileo and Columbus.

Jeremy Rifkin is no secular humanist. Possibly, that explains his appeal to religious leaders. Yet he is no Christian, either. Rather, he is the prophet of a new religion. "The resacralization of nature stands before us as the great mission of the coming age," he intones. We must acknowledge our debt of existence to the cosmos, by "sacrificing to the cosmos the measure of the sacrifices the cosmos made for us." Rifkin is not speaking of burnt offerings of pigeons and bullocks. "Pure sacrifice, collectively expressed and generationally sustained, has never yet occurred anywhere on earth." Even the Canaanites' sacrifices to Moloch had an ulterior motive, providing security for the future, which we must renounce. Furthermore, throwing a few babies into the maw of the idol would not suffice—Rifkin states unequivocally that a vast reduction in population is required for the "low entropy" age. The specific method is to be determined.

What apocalypse awaits us if we fail to give up the benefits of science? Our physics would hasten the heat death of the universe. As Rifkin cautions against hubris, he worries about fission reactors and forgets about stars. Our biology would make the world lonely "by stripping one living thing after another of its identity." Fulminating against Darwin's anthropomorphic "cosmology" early in the book, he ends with the immortal line, "The cosmos wails."

The plaudits of today's churchmen notwithstanding, a prophet of Israel would have recognized Rifkin as the idolater he is: "They prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart" (Jeremiah 14:14).

Jane Orient is a medical doctor practicing in Tucson, Arizona.

Bridge to Freedom

Double Crossing

By Erika Holzer

New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1983.
291 pp. \$13.95.

Reviewed by Barbara Branden

Over the story of *Double Crossing* and over the lives of its protagonists looms the steel span of the Glienicker Bridge, a span that links—and divides—two worlds and three people. On one side of the bridge flicker the lights of West

AN UNDERGROUND LEGEND

VONU:
The Search For
Personal Freedom
By Rayo
Edited by Jon Fisher

VONU
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VONU
By Rayo

Rayo was an early pioneer of libertarian theory. He coined the term "vonu" (invulnerability to coercion), and discussed non-political ways and means of achieving freedom here and now. His writings appeared in the late 60's and early 70's in obscure underground journals like *Libertarian Connection*, *Vonulife*, *Protos* and *Innovator*. Now Jon Fisher has collected together the best of Rayo's articles in one easily-accessible volume. *VONU* is an excellent example of the type of thinking necessary to break free and live your own life.

1983, 5½ x 8½, 112 pp, illustrated, soft cover.

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REA93

THE RIGHT TO BE GREEDY

"The present forms of greed lose out, in the end, because they are *not greedy enough*."

"Intelligence ends where morality begins. Morality ends where intelligence begins. Every moral is a psychic totem, a mental fetish-object, before which the moral fetishist subordinates himself, bows down, and offers sacrifice — indeed, offers *himself* in sacrifice. Every ideal is separated subjectivity; a part of the self separated off, ejected, frozen, and held over the rest of the self."

"In the end, egoism is our only friend; in the last analysis, greed is the only thing we can trust. Any revolutionary who is to be counted on can only be in it for *himself* — unselfish people can always switch loyalty from one projection to another."

The Right To Be Greedy
1974, 5½ x 8½, 94 pp, soft cover.

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REA93

Berlin, beckoning between the concrete mounds of the Glienicker's watchtowers; on the other lies the gray, desolate terror of Potsdam, East Germany. On one side are hope, and freedom, and life; on the other, despair, slavery, and the blood-stains of murdered men who had dared attempt to escape their captors.

Moving inexorably toward the bridge, and toward the final confrontation that will be the climax of their lives, are: Adrienne Brenner, American, medical journalist—a woman to whom the issues of freedom and human rights blaze with a consuming intensity; her husband, Dr. Kurt Brenner, world-famous cardiac surgeon, sophisticated, opportunistic—a man terrified of the emerging secrets of his past; and Dr. Kiril Andreyev, citizen of Moscow, whose 47 years have been a single, patiently plotted, impassioned thrust toward freedom—and who will find, when he meets Adrienne Brenner, that his passion has intensified but his patience has burned itself out. It is on the Glienicker that Adrienne, Kurt, and Kiril will create the meaning of their pasts and seal their futures, as Kiril involves all three in his last desperate hope.

Erika Holzer has written a brilliantly suspenseful novel that lives and breathes her own passion for justice and the passion of totalitarian subjects everywhere for the freedom they are denied. *Double Crossing* is much more than a suspenseful political adventure, because it is told in intensely personal, human terms. In too many novels of East versus West, the reader feels he is reading a cops-and-robbers tale that could have been set in any place and at any historical time; but in *Double Crossing*, we see the souls of men and women who are free and the souls of men and women who live under terror.

We see those who have given in to slavery and given up, crushed by a system they cannot comprehend. We see those who embrace the system, choosing to create anguish in a vain effort to avoid suffering it. We see the brutes who willingly obey because they cannot conceptualize a different life. We see the day-by-day nightmare of life lived in a society in which even those most beloved cannot be trusted, in which even one's most private thoughts cannot be trusted. We see the gallantry of those who stand against the terror, clinging to the spirit of freedom. And, in the East-West medical conference that sets the stage for the story's final events—a conference that, like all such "exchanges," is staged for Soviet propaganda purposes—we see the

treason perpetrated by free men when they appease totalitarian regimes and so strengthen the fist that hammers at human lives and hopes.

Impeccably researched, fast-moving, intricately plotted, *Double Crossing* (an alternate selection of the Literary Guild) is an important novel. I recommend it to all those who are concerned with liberty and to all those who seek fiction that translates the ideas of liberty into character, story, and suspense.

Barbara Branden, a former associate of the novelist-philosopher Ayn Rand, is currently writing a biography of Rand.

Water—An Impending Crisis?

Water Rights: Scarce Resource Allocation, Bureaucracy, and the Environment

Edited by Terry L. Anderson
Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger; San Francisco: Pacific Institute for Public Policy Research. 1983. 348 pp. \$35.00/\$10.95.

Water: The Nature, Uses and Future of Our Most Precious and Abused Resource

By Fred Powledge
New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux. 1982. 423 pp. \$14.95.

Reviewed by Steve H. Hanke

We have all heard about the nation's impending water crisis. Now we have two books that address this topic. Although both volumes deal with water, they do so with dramatically different styles and substantive arguments. Powledge's book is laced with analytical nonsense, but it is well written and retains the reader's attention. By contrast, Anderson offers a technically sound anthology that is, unfortunately, more powerful than most sleeping pills.

Let's first examine the arguments. Powledge opines that we are "running out" of water because we are either polluting what we have or wasting it. "Exploiters" are the problem. Of course, private industry is on Powledge's list. He characterizes the captains of industry as being, at best, amoral on the subject of water. Powledge leads us to believe that Love Canal was a typical private vice. (Absent from his references is REASON's careful dissection of government's role in