

## Letter to the Editor

EDITOR:

While I want to thank Professor Leon Bouvier most sincerely for his very generous review of my new book\* (*The Social Contract*, vol.IX, no.2, Winter 1998-99) — together with *The Social Contract* for commissioning it — I believe that two points criticized by him need a little more elaboration. Leon takes me to task for noting, in passing, that the Roman Catholic rite of the Eucharist — said to function through the mechanism of transubstantiation — involves “symbolic cannibalism,” and for advocating the population optimum concept as a “panacea.”

As I understand it, cannibalism proper — fortunately a rather rare phenomenon in our species these days (many others still go in for it on a large scale, as we may have done in the distant past) — involves the actual consumption of human flesh or blood. Symbolic cannibalism, on the other hands, relates to the eating or drinking of substances — in this case bread and wine — which are *intended to represent*, i.e., symbolize, elements of a human body. These issues — admittedly not pleasant thoughts for any of us — appear to me to center on simple questions of fact and logic and there are respectable scholarly precedents for the usage adopted in my book. (See, for instance, Dart, 1959, pp.127-8, & Cipolla, 1962, pp.113-4).

While I had, and still have, not the least wish to offend the susceptibilities of believers, I do believe that scholarship implies a right to analyze and offer comparative comment on beliefs and practices in the religious sphere, as in all others. On the topic of the efficacy of miracles I respectfully decline to comment.

The second point concerns Leon’s firm assertion that I am “convinced that the concept of ‘optimum population’ can save the day.” This is very far from my belief. In writing this book I tried hard not to sit on the fence, not to clutch at facile optimism, not to slump into dysfunctional pessimism, but instead to stick resolutely to practical realism. It follows that panaceas — certainly including the concept of the optimum as a panacea — were rigorously eschewed.

The world is so complicated — countries vary so much in where they have come from, where they have

got to, and where they want to go in the future — that no solution could possibly have more or less universal or permanent relevance. Certainly, all socioeconomic systems have to operate within ecological parameters — there is no doubt about that — but within these limits there is an infinite range of possibilities regarding cultural, political and economic arrangements.

The nearest I come to panaceas is to advocate: (1) much greater justice and equity for all disadvantaged individuals and groups to discourage them as far as possible from “breeding for victory” and other destructive behavior patterns; (2) far greater honesty in the academic, intellectual, political, and media worlds in facing, communicating, and discussing the facts of population, resources, and the quality of life, and; (3) much more democratic involvement in the exploration and resolution of these onerous problems.

Insofar as population policies are needed to keep numbers and resources in balance with each other at an acceptable quality of life, then the concept of the optimum population is a useful tool for focusing thought and action in practical and rewarding ways. Population and development policies need goals. What can these be but some approximation to what a particular society thinks (for the time being — things can always change in the future) is the right number of people in the right kind of economy and society?

The standard objections to the optimum concept I deal with at length, and roundly dismiss. These are that an optimum number can never be calculated with precision, and, even if it could, the situation would change and render it invalid. I point out — with concrete examples — that these alleged objections to the optimum population concept apply to all policies in all countries at all times so that it is an especially disreputable example of special pleading to apply it solely to the sphere of population control policy.

Thank you, Leon, for your overall commendation. I hope you can accept these amplifying notes.

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\* *Human Population Competition: A Study of the Pursuit of Power Through Numbers* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press)

# Two Cultures and the British Education System

by Antony Flew

When, on its first publication in 1959, I first read Charles Snow's Rede Lecture I was head of the Department of Philosophy in the University College of North Staffordshire (UCNS).<sup>1</sup> This institution had been founded in 1950 both as a reaction against the narrow specialization of most existing courses in British universities and as an attempt to bridge the gulf between what Snow was later to distinguish as *The Two Cultures*. For at least the first two or three decades from its foundation UCNS was, therefore, more like such U.S. liberal arts colleges as Swarthmore and Oberlin than it was like anything in the UK.

Like all my English colleagues on the faculty of what has since become the University of Keele, I had previously been educated at an English secondary school<sup>2</sup> in which there was a sharp separation between studies and students on the Classical or Arts "side" and those on the Modern or Science "side" — although some subjects such as Mathematics, French and History were, in fact, studied on both "sides." Normally at the age of sixteen all pupils in such schools took a School Certificate examination covering all the subjects previously taught them on their chosen "side."

After that they either left school or, if they were hoping to proceed to university, concentrated for the next two, or at most three, years on not more than three of the subjects which they had previously been studying on their "side." It was presumed they would

further pursue one or two of these subjects at university. Anyone attending such a school who ever wanted to do any science had to start on the Modern or Science "side" at, typically the age of twelve; and no one who had been on one "side" at secondary school expected, if they went on to university, to be required to do any work on any subject peculiar to the other "side."

Professor Flew indicates that his "...background was closest to that of Sir Charles Snow. On our afternoon walks my father used to point out to me the house in which [physicist] Lord Rutherford lived."

For Snow these were the English "educational and social idiosyncrasies" which led to a "slight exaggeration here"<sup>3</sup> of what he saw as the deep and wide gulf which is to be found everywhere between the two cultures. Thanks to my own earlier experience of that "intense specialization, like nothing else on earth"<sup>4</sup> and to my later involvement in an attempt to

bridge it, I was strongly sympathetic with Snow's emphasis on the importance of this gulf. I was also in agreement with his diagnosis of "the three menaces" then facing humanity, "H-bomb war, over-population, the gap between rich and poor."<sup>5</sup> (My own concern, however, was, as it still is, not with *inequalities* between the tax-maintained worst-off and the very rich in the First World, but with Third World hardship, causing poverty.)

Snow went on to say that "Whatever else in the world we know survives to the year 2,000, that won't. Once the trick of getting rich is known, as it now is, the world can't survive half rich and half poor. It's just not on."<sup>6</sup> According to Snow, the trick was both to provide abundant capital to Third World countries in order to finance the establishment of industries and to lend them scientists and technologies to start things off. They would then pass their knowledge on so that Third World people would become able to run these industries themselves. Snow went on to say that the

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