

Reviews

The Naked Ape. By DESMOND MORRIS. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967. 252 pages. \$5.95.

If books, like people, can suffer from schizophrenia, then I would nominate Desmond Morris' *The Naked Ape* as a classic case. Toward the end of this intriguing and controversial essay, the author confesses that he wrote it to prevent the human species from becoming extinct by pointing out to us the hard, cold facts of man's biological ancestry and the limitations this imposes on us. But seldom does the temper, tone, or content match that dignified intent.

Behind this quite serious purpose lurks the author's demiurgic presupposition that "we find the contemplation of our humble [animal] origins somehow offensive." How this statement fits in with the attitudes of twelve thousand children surveyed is a puzzle, for among the "top ten in animal loves" of these young humans are the chimpanzee and the monkey! The contradiction is obvious, though the author does not seem to take it, or many others in the book, seriously. Perhaps this is because the incubus behind this book is the writing of a best seller rather than a solid scientific commentary of man's origins and their implications. An indication of this is the candid admission that in choosing a cheeky title Morris "deliberately" set out to insult us. If he had settled for "The Hairless Ape" as a title—the adjective "hairless" is more accurate as a scientific description of man than is "naked"—Morris might have been influenced to carry out his proposed purpose. But then he might not have written a best seller.

As it is, *The Naked Ape* has all the "qualities" needed to make it a best seller. The author, the British complement of our Marlin Perkins of television's "Zoo Parade," took his doctorate in animal (fish reproductive) behavior at Oxford. After some postdoctoral work at the same university, Morris moved to London as head of the newly established Granada television and film unit of the London Zoo. Three years later, in 1959, he became curator of mammals for the Zoölogical Society, where he continued to explore animal behavior, particularly in the reproductive area. His scientific publications tell of a gradual shift in his interests from the lower vertebrates, in the early 1950's, to the new discipline of ethology, the study of the life and habits of primates in relation to their environments and each other. Editor of a 1967 compendium on *Primate Ethology*, Morris is well versed in the scholarly research into the behavior of subhuman primates. This background, combined with the incubus of writing a best seller, has made of *The Naked Ape* a tantalizing collection of scientific minutiae extracted from their academic roots and woven, sometimes forcibly, into a "portrait of man the animal." The result is frequently amusing, often disgusting, sometimes just plain strange, and not too infrequently enlightening as the author explores human behavior in terms of the social organization, sexual signals, grooming, mother-infant relationships, facial expressions, feeding, fighting, and inquisitiveness of our "cousins."

Writings that claim to be scientific should possess a certain objectivity and balance, especially when they are meant to brief the man in the street on the latest discoveries and insights of the laboratory. Ordinarily, the layman finds it difficult to criticize and evaluate scientific popularizations. But fortunately, in the present case, simple common sense should lead the reader to suspect, if not be convinced, that *The Naked Ape* is a selected compilation of bits and pieces of scientific information carefully woven into a construct biased along certain lines congenial to teleological and Freudian interpretations.

The slanted character of *The Naked Ape* is most apparent in the dedication of more than a fifth of the book to sexuality, when the impression is that the book deals with the whole range of human behavior. This suspicion is confirmed when the reader finds constant references to sexual interpretation in the other four-fifths of the book.

The Freudian and teleological bias of the author can be seen in countless instances. The development of more sensitive and flexible hands, for instance, has, according to Morris, "given us much greater scope for sexually stimulating body-to-body contacts." No mention is made that man's sensitive and flexible hands evolved in conjunction with a change from arboreal to terrestrial habits, binocular vision, the opposable thumb, and toolmaking rather than primarily in response to man's lovemaking habits. The evolution of the fleshy nose, ear lobes, and lips in man are likewise attributed to a teleological function in human relationships in a sexual context. The breasts are also supposed to have evolved primarily as a substitute for the sexual stimulus of the buttocks, since man commonly mates face-to-face.

Sweeping generalizations abound, and many of them have little or no foundation in scientific evidence. The author, for instance, claims that nursing precludes conception (p. 104), that a colicky baby is produced by a nervous, agitated mother (p. 120), that the rhythmic whipping of students by a teacher is a substitute for the pelvic thrusts of coitus, a ritual copulation of teacher and student (p. 168), and that the delayed orgasm of the human female has evolved to foster retention of the semen after mating (Morris claims that the semen would be lost if the female were to walk around soon after intercourse) (pp. 74-78), etc.

Nevertheless, *The Naked Ape* is worth reading, if not worth the investment of \$6.00. It does offer a provocative mirror in which daily human behavior takes on a new light. Occasionally that light has all the unreality of a psychedelic illusion, but at other times it does put certain actions in a new and instructive setting. The wheat is there among the chaff and worth digging for, though one can continue to hope that more scientists will in the future try their hand at informing the public of new developments in the scientific world without falling victim to the demiurge to create a best seller.

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Life or Death, Ethics and Options. By DANIEL LABBY *et al.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968. \$4.95.

To review a book of this caliber is not an easy task. Although the book

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is short in terms of pages, each essay is fully packed with problems and questions which are stimulating and raise further questions on the sanctity of life. According to Kaplan, they are problems for which no solution exists, but problems we can cope with.

Each author has attempted to express his own personal opinion on some of these issues, and each one has in his own right attempted to cope with them. Since each chapter is in itself a unit, I will attempt briefly to review each one separately.

The only missing aspect of this very valuable contribution is perhaps the opinion of a psychologist or psychiatrist. Should we not ask ourselves why it is necessary now to have symposiums on the sanctity of life? Why it is now that we are in increasing conflict with the values of human life and the questions of prolonging life, altering it, or replacing parts of the human body? It cannot merely be that our belief in the Creator has changed so much over the past centuries that we have to bring it back to the awareness of people in science and humanities. The answer also cannot be as simple as to say that we have reached a crossroad in science and technology where we human beings are creating new things which formerly have not been dreamed of. We are aware that this rapid progress has dehumanized some aspects of patient care; that the increasing number of medical students in the classrooms has contributed to a more depersonalized teaching of the future physician, who is taught more about RNA and DNA than about respectful, human, interpersonal patient care.

What is not mentioned in this otherwise intriguing and stimulating book is the possibility that we are so concerned about the sanctity of life because of our increasing inability to face and accept death. In our unconscious, death is not conceivable with regard to the self, and if it does occur, it is always conceived of as a malignant intervention from the outside. We all believe as the psalmist does that a thousand shall fall on my right and ten thousand on my left but it shall not happen to me. If we cannot deny death, then we challenge it. We can fight a war and come back from it uninjured, which proves to us our own immortality. We can race down the highways and survive and, unconsciously, rejoice when we read the number of fatalities over a memorial holiday weekend—another proof that “it happened to thee and not to me.” These are the reasons for increasing aggressions, gangs, murders, wars, and highway accidents in the United States—a society which spends billions of dollars not to emphasize the sanctity of life, but to deny the reality of death. The age of the nuclear war and the increasing possibilities of a catastrophic destructive death to thousands of innocent lives require increasing defensiveness, denial, and search for meaning in this life, no matter how transient it may be.

Maybe it is this increasing inability to cope with death that has contributed to the creation of such an outstanding book, which deals mainly with the maintaining of life, no matter how unpromising.

Daniel Labby describes the genesis of this interesting and stimulating first Sanctity of Life symposium. Based on the awareness that our technology has outpaced our understanding and our cleverness has outgrown our wis-

dom, it hoped to seek wisdom by conferring with well-known scientists, philosophers, and specialists in law and religion.

The humanities are, in Robert Graves' terms, compared with "the steady-tail of the technological kite now being carried up far out of sight on an endless, weightless irrefragable string." Reading this book makes one aware once more of the enormity and possibilities of this kite, but also of the importance of the endless string without which the kite will be of no use.

Professor Edward Shils explores man's life as a sacred entity with consideration of those who do not believe in a God, immortality of the soul, a divine creation, or redemption. He uses the Nazi destructiveness and the dropping of two nuclear bombs after World War II as sad examples of the epoch in which we live. He describes the abhorrence and apprehensions of people who, he feels, have a conception of normal and natural which centers on heterosexuality, lineage ties, and the integrity of the human organism and its memory. He is opposed to what he calls "contrived interventions." It is difficult to comprehend at first his statement that life is sacred because of life itself, by the primordial experience of being alive, the sensation of vitality, and the elemental fear of its extinction. Would a little colt not experience the same sensation of vitality when out in the fields for the first time? Does an animal not share the elemental fear of its extinction?

Shils states that "man stands in awe before his own vitality, the vitality of his lineage and of his species. The sense of awe is the attribution and therefore the acknowledgment of sanctity." Does this mean that *because* he has the knowledge it is sacred? If I understand him correctly, the prerequisite for sanctity includes the conscious experience of vitality and an appreciation of the continuity of the vitality of one's own breed and progeny. What about the child, then?

Later on he says that "if life were not viewed and experienced as sacred, then nothing else would be sacred," which seems to be less limiting, although he also refers to human life here. He discusses eloquently the problems of artificial insemination, which affects the process of procreation and the continuity of the lineage as well as the values of genetic engineering, which would increase and enlarge the vitality of oncoming generations.

Since he regards the fetus as still organically part of the mother and not started on the path of individuality, he sees no conflicts in an abortion as an infringement on the sanctity of life.

He describes both the problems of euthanasia and the increasing difficulties with the enhancement of the capacity to keep the organism alive far beyond what was known. It is less a problem of the affirmation of the sanctity of life, he feels, than a question of finding the consensus of responsible medical opinion which can attest that individuality has ceased to exist and cannot be restored.

His final plea for an intellectual rehabilitation and a deeper understanding of the proto-religion or "natural metaphysic" is appreciated but may find more followers if it could be presented more convincingly.

Norman St. John-Stevas, a member of Parliament when the death penalty in England was abolished, is perhaps best authorized to speak on the legal

aspects of protection of life, born or unborn. He makes a beautiful study of the origin of these laws—the changing moral consensus which follows conservatively the changes in society. He stresses that the law cannot guarantee ultimate rightness and that it is not more or not less than the collective conscience of the community on those issues which cannot be left to the individual choice. He discusses the problems of abortion, the Vandeput case, the killing of a deformed eight-day-old child, compulsory euthanasia—all involving a violation of the rights of others. He contrasts this with suicide and voluntary euthanasia, which are examples of voluntary surrenders of an individual's own right.

St. John-Stevas' conclusion is a reaffirmation of his own faith in the Christian doctrine when he states that man is not the absolute master of his own fate but holds his life and body in trust for other purposes. For modern secular man who does without faith, he recommends that he be guided by the wisdom of the common law, the centuries-old recognition of man's dignity and freedom, and the respect for the sanctity of human life.

Professor Ramsey's "Morality of Abortion" gives the Christian view on this topic. He believes that microgenetics has resolved an ancient theological dispute, namely that of traducianism. Genetics has shown that we are unique, never-to-be-repeated individual human beings from the time of conception. The question discussed is when a human being originates and thus becomes the subject worthy of respect, rights, and sanctity. Animation—the moments when fetal life becomes an independent source of movement in the womb, more often referred to as "quickenings"—has been regarded as the crucial moment when extinction of the fetus is regarded as murder. Ramsey then describes the more philosophical theory of animation as the formation of the soul, which was believed to take forty days for male and eighty days for female. (As a female, I have some feelings about that!)

The third possibility is to take viability as the moment when the offspring approaches sacredness, another one when the fetal brain begins to function.

Not surprisingly then, he dismisses those differences as not very relevant for the truly religious man. Ramsey regards every human life as an ordination, a loan, and a stewardship, and man's dignity as an alien dignity, an evaluation that is placed upon him by the divine decree. Taking this view, it becomes obvious that there is no distinction between nascent, living, or dying life; he rather emphasizes that it is the little ones with hardly any human claims who are sought out and covered especially with God's mercy.

His elaborations of Protestant and Catholic viewpoints on abortions and his distinctions between direct and indirect abortions are revealing and should challenge more interdenominational discussions. "The stopping of materially aggressive action is the highest possible warrant for the killing of men by men, not the aggressor-innocent distinction"; this he finds equally applicable "when the fetus is aggressing upon the life of its mother" or when the combatant is incapacitated in wartime. It is needless to say that he has no empathy for those who advocate the abortion of a fetus likely to be damaged. He recommends, as others have before him, that every girl child should be exposed to German measles as a choice-worthy "interims ethik."

The two preceding, very Christian points of view are then followed by a discourse of the scientist. Professor Medawar speaks on positive and negative eugenics and gives examples of "piecemeal genetic engineering" in an altogether different language from that of the preceding speakers. His elaborations are down-to-earth, practical examples which reflect his belief in man and the scientists of now and tomorrow. His view that the product of conception is a matter of luck (or chance happening, should I rephrase?) is quite a contrast to that of Barth, who says "This child is a man for whose life the Son of God has died . . .," and other contributors who regard the nascent life as a unique if not miraculous predetermined creation of God. He gives an elaborate and, for the layman, understandable exploration of positive eugenics. His examples of recessive defects and the recommended solutions for their elimination are matter-of-factly and unemotionally presented.

He sees science clearly as a liberator from confinements of ignorance and superstition and as the great contributor of evidence on which opinions and decisions should be based. He also allows for mistakes and errors in foresight and recommends a flexible attitude, being quite aware of the threats to the sanctity and dignity of life if eugenic policies were to be mistakenly applied. Throughout his whole essay, however, is a sense of confidence that man is basically sound enough to make horrible mistakes; where the previous speakers expressed their faith in God and his creations, Medawar conveys the same faith in man, especially the scientists.

Henry K. Beecher elaborates on the ethical problems arising from experimentation in man, an especially relevant area of discussion since clinical research has recently become a profession and almost a must for any ambitious young physician if he is interested in academic tenure. Beecher regards voluntary consent of the human subject as absolutely essential, although he is quite aware of the inability of many investigators to know the full risk of their investigations. He feels that great risks should be accepted only if the individual can profit directly from the experiment, though at times benefits *post hoc* seemed to justify *post hoc* the unknown risks, as shown in cardiac catheterization. Beecher describes the difficulties in communicating the risks to children, the mentally disturbed, and even the layman with insufficient understanding of the problems involved. He quotes Edmond Cahn in a brilliant chapter on "Engineering of Consent" that every investigator should read. He believes—as most of us will with him—that the most dependable safeguard for such patients is the conscience of the intelligent, informed, responsible, and compassionate investigator. He emphasizes that the end never justifies the means and that an experiment has to be ethical at its inception or it is not ethical at all.

The differentiation between British and American laws is most interesting. More surprising perhaps are Beecher's peculiar groups of unacceptable subjects, captive groups in which he includes one's ward patients and dying patients because "the death casts an unmerited cloud over the investigator." His reasoning for the captive group is that any possibility of coercion may violate the requirements for valid consent. Whoever has done clinical research will agree with him basically but will also know that there is always a subtle, though unintended, degree of coercion by the mere fact that a physician is asking a

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patient for a favor, and the patient feels either indebted to the profession or in need of care and can hardly afford to reject such a request.

After giving twelve shocking examples of unethical research projects, Beecher raises the question of editors' responsibility to publish the results. He advocates denial of such publication in order to deter other irresponsible investigators, arguing that the real loss of specific material is far less than the moral loss to medicine if such unethically obtained data were published.

Like many of us, he regards the guiding principle "publish or perish" in the leading medical schools as partially responsible for the scramble to make new observations in man, a milieu where the individual's rights are sometimes ruthlessly ignored. This excellently written chapter on an increasingly relevant issue is recommended for all people interested and involved in research in human beings. It is as unemotional and objective as anything that has been written in recent years on this topic, as far as I know.

The book is completed by Abraham Kaplan's thoughtful and critical summary commenting on both the spoken and the unspoken issues on the sanctity of life. The latter include questions on war, supply for the living, and last, automobile safety or, rather, the lack of the same and the dramatically high rate of accidental death in the United States.

Kaplan makes a strong point of the moral responsibility of science, for it needs to be accepted by all or it will be acknowledged by none. Those readers who are concerned that this is a moralizing book derived basically from a religious premise will be refreshed to read his opinion on moral sensibility and his emphasis that moral problems are essentially and inescapably contextual in character. He says—as it has been known since Kant—that the moral judgment must accord with the principle of moral autonomy. He also points out that the sanctity of life is not an invention of the Western World or its religions. His examples of Hinduism and Buddhism show clearly that morality is prerequisite to the religious experience rather than the other way around. Examples of Jain religion underline perhaps strongest how others adhere to the principles of the sanctity of life in extremes. He concludes with the Judaic tradition and Hillel's school of thought that we might as well make the best out of our lives, since we were created. His wish to the reader, "a long life to you," can only be returned—and not out of a selfless motivation.

A man who can write in such a thoughtful, articulate, and witty fashion should have a long and productive life indeed—this is the writer's personal opinion.

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