

# Letters to the Fifth Estate

Various Authors

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## CHRISTIAN ANARCHY?

Fifth Estate:

People can call themselves anything they like but I would think the differences between Christianity and anarchism are so massive as to preclude anyone calling themselves Christian anarchists (see FE June 19, 1982 Letters column). There are similarities between the two doctrines which would lead someone to adopt such a label; they both speak of a love for humanity.

However, the manner in which that love is expressed and acted upon by Christians is a world apart from the anarchist position. I'm referring to beliefs that are inherent to Christianity; those aspects common to the whole religion in all its myriad manifestations.

Christians are cowards. Their faith in humanity is not strong enough to stand alone; humanity in itself does not warrant their support. No, they need a superior being in between themselves and everybody else to be a repository of their love. "I am third" read placards all over the Christian community near here. What a nonsensical hierarchy of values that places oneself after God and others!

How can I separate myself in such a way of sanctimonious humility? I'm part of everybody else—they make me with food, shelter, love, etc. and I do the same in return. People can be pretty fucked up but it is a weak response to misery or cruelty to seek solace in a mythical being who says everything is going to be alright in the end.

Conversely, belief in that Being can be an avenue for doing harm because of His supposed ability to absolve believers of guilt. Once the ground of sacrifice is set, the bridge between sacrifice of self to sacrifice of others is easily crossed. Responsibility to oneself and others is dissolved in the "oceanic feeling."

It is beyond me how an anarchist can profess to believe in one of the most megalomaniacal power figures of all time. No doubt Christ said some good things—as did all prophets—but he also wanted to convert everyone in the world. Jesus Christ is the prince of peace as much as the MX missile is a peacekeeper (or how about that nuclear submarine, the Corpus Christi?).

It is not so much the character himself that riles me but how his words have been used to create the present era. Many Christians are wont to separate Christ from all the evils that have been done in his name. Firstly, such a separation requires a leap of rational faith but that's a prerequisite for being Christian anyway. Secondly, once that separation is made, how does Christ differ significantly from any other prophet from Abraham to L. Ron Hubbard, a difference significant enough to live and die by?

We remember this one prophet because he was successful in creating the conditions that led to our present social order. He demanded everything of his followers and consequently was an ideal figure to be adopted by the emperors of a faltering Roman Empire once his religion had enough believers. Christianity represented a higher form of imperialism in which people were conquered in body and soul, not just a geographical area. Previous emperors didn't give a damn which gods their people worshipped or who slept with whom as long as the tributes kept

coming. A religion which knew no bounds was a wonderful precursor to an economic system that considered itself limitless.

The whole Judeo-Christian heritage belongs in the trash bin of history. We don't need any of that patriarchal, monotheistic clap trap anymore in whatever guise it may try to revive itself. Let's put Jesus Christ back in that tomb and let him rest in that peace which he has had bestowed upon so many millions in the past two thousand years. It's about time for a new age to begin.

Stu Vickars  
Dragonfly Farm, Ontario

## **LITTLE BOSSES**

Dear FE:

I'm writing in response to S. Colman's article in your Winter '82-'83 issue, "Fellow Workers as Cops, Guards & Censors." I've thought a lot about why so many people run senseless control games on each other, & I think Colman's missed an important point.

To be sure, many workers are put in the position of having to enforce bullshit rules on customers, visitors, patients, etc., because they'll catch hell from the boss if they don't. But beyond that, many people who have no real control over their lives try to make up for it by controlling others.

Every place I've ever worked has had its "lithe bosses." Some specialize in hassling new hires, inspecting and criticizing their work under the guise of "showing them the ropes." Some tyrannize all their coworkers. Then there are the snitches, quietly watching & listening for something to squeal to the boss about. Some of them may expect to score points which will add up to a promotion or a raise, but many just get off on identifying with management & feeling like a big shot, pretending that they're not just slaves. It's the only way they know to keep their self-respect.

Family life is probably the most common example of this delusion. Parents are obsessed with controlling their children. For one thing, they could go to jail if their kids break curfew, skip school, etc. But most of the constant commanding, hassling, & hitting are meant to break children to their parents' will, for its own sake. Children are the only people most parents can dominate so completely. It's the same for husbands bossing their wives. It's the only situation where they're not at the bottom of the pecking order, so they try to compensate for all the shit they take as workers, tenants, customers, etc. By passing it down the chain.

Colman says, "One further wonders if the current 10 million without-jobs is a curse or a blessing. These 10 million, after all, are no longer oppressing or badgering anybody—at least not routinely—no longer the self-appointed cops, guards, censors, even if they'd like to be." Yet from what I've read in the papers, the new depression has led to more wife & child abuse, more rape & gay-bashing & otherwise vamping on one's fellow man & woman for the hell of it. If you've got a job, you can kid yourself that you've got a place in the system. But take away the job, & you're nobody. The ruling class says you've got no right to live. Your (still employed) neighbors say you're a bum. If you were supporting a wife &/or kids, you've lost that source of control over them. All that's left is tradition and force. Authoritarian religions are gaining ground in part because some people are dealing with the fear & helplessness that goes with unemployment, the loss of their self-images as "good workers" by becoming "God's workers" & trying to force others to live by their rules.

Albert Camus said something like, "The struggle of life is to be neither executioner nor victim." There's no model under capitalism for free people who manage their own lives but nobody else's. It's eat or be eaten, slave or slaveholder. You know where you rank in the hierarchy by counting the people below you. Those of us who know it doesn't have to be this way can try to open other people's eyes, but simply getting sacked is not going to make people stop playing by the bosses' rules & enforcing them on others.

Yours in struggle,  
Laura Hathaway  
Chicago

P.S. Your "Tylenol Murders" (see FE Winter '82-'83) was terrific!

## WHO IS SANE?

Dear Fifth Estate:

I could swear that George Bradford (See “Norman Mayer and the Missile X” in the Winter 1982–83 FE) read the same book review as I did sixteen years ago of *The Boston Strangler* where it was pointed out by a psychiatrist that the mark of mental health was the ability to repress our knowledge of the world’s cruelty and to be able to live in peace though surrounded on all sides by horror, cruelty and violent death and unlike poor Norman Mayer who no longer had the “normal” illusions to keep him “sane.”

John Mayhew  
Chicago

## DEFINITIVE LEVIATHAN?

Greetings Primates:

I would like to discuss “Against Leviathan.” (See the Winter 1982–83 FE.) Its beauty approaches the definitive. A few lingering suppositions bear scrutiny though, and another dimension to the argument could be raised.

I always felt funny about the linear argument, almost taken for granted by everyone, that life started in Africa; or the first civilization in Sumer and spread throughout the rest of the globe. Remember, Anthroapology is based so much on accident. Where some bones HAPPEN to be found determines the latest theory of organization. Perhaps the first humans lived in Antarctica a trillion years ago but for poetic reasons the bones of the dead were eaten by survivors.

In fact, as Russell Means points out, many Anthroapologists speculate that humans originated in North America (not the other way around) and populated Asia, then Africa and Europe via the land bridge. I personally wonder why it had to happen in one place and not several. The idea that trees started in one place, frogs, etc. then spread over the rest of the globe is sort of Monotheistic. Such a ripe and delicious planet (I’ve been there) could give rise simultaneously (give or take a few million years) to many similar life forms if conditions are similar in wide geographic areas.

Also, Civilizations probably derived in various places independently as a tendency which occurs in MANY possible situations. Not uncommonly they were theocracies probably started by uppity medicine men with conspicuous consumption in mind. Actually, as with the affluent in present society, the motive for primitive accumulation of power was the fascination with power itself, quite likely.

The other dimension which I wondered about, which Fredy could probably address, but didn’t yet, was the cultural accumulation which some people use to judge the “level” of development that leads to civilization. It’s obvious, when a culture reaches the point that it produces an Aristotle, Plato, et al, it is a great civilization ready for empire. In this view, a mini-Plato on the banks of the Tigris, for instance, generates an, intellectual climate that paves the way for the eventuality of Greece. The fallacy that intellectual or cultural development mechanically elevates a people from the primitive to the civilized is easily demonstrated by the common puzzle of “how can a society that produced Mozart produce a Hitler?”!

I believe this is an example of literary prejudice of superiority over oral-based cultures. I think Fredy missed something when he poetically described how primitive “man” learned from the wolf and eagle how to hunt; from the birds how to distribute seeds. If man is indeed an animal, why should he have to learn from animals how to be? Also, who taught the birds how to distribute seeds, the wolves and eagles to hunt? Did they learn it from studying the patterns of arachnids?

Fredy Perlman is right though in dispelling so many glorious illusions of development and progress. He helps remind me that the origins of life, the primal pulse is right here beyond religion, beyond culture. Buddha once said that life never began, it always existed; therefore, in spite of the bomb, it shall always be. How do you stop something that never started?

Pat the Rat

*Fredy Perlman responds:* I'm grateful to FE friends for letting me respond to Pat the Rat in the same issue in which he chides me, a privilege not available to more distant contributors.

Pat the Rat is no stranger to me. He is in fact one of the many people whose names belong on the list of those whose lights I've borrowed. Pat the Rat writes plays, stages them, performs in them. He is a poet as well as a clown, a cab driver as well as a handyman. He can be scary but he's usually funny. He once discharged a pie into the face of a guru who pretended to be god.

I've learned much from Pat the Rat, undoubtedly more than he from me. That's why I remain convinced that we walkers and crawlers do learn from each other and from fliers and even from arachnids. But it well may be, as he says, that fliers don't need to learn from walkers and crawlers. The fliers hover above the crawlers, usually benignly, but sometimes they drop their pies in the faces of crawlers who pretend they can fly.

Consequently, when Pat the Winged Rat finds beauty in the ugly beast I've started to depict, and when he calls that beauty definitive, I can almost taste the meringue or frosting. And when he says the beast's traits—the linearity, the monotheism—are my traits, I know that the pie is intended for my face.

I can't stop the pie—it's already falling. But I can still try the old dodge of having my friends join me under it, and hope that most of the meringue falls on them.

The longish essay, actually half a book, which I shared with FE friends was not, by my intention, an autobiographical essay. Its title was not "I, Leviathan," and its content was not a depiction of the definitive beauty of the protagonist. Nor was its title "Against Leviathan. Community Vs State," words which were placed above the printed first fragment of my essay.

The title on the first typed page of my essay is "Against His-Story Against Leviathan," but the first half of it was omitted. From the first two words of my title, Pat the Rat might have guessed that the "linear" and the "monotheistic" were the villains of the piece.

The omission of half the title was to be mentioned in the FE's introduction preceding my fragment. I was actually asked to write this introduction, but I was tied up elsewhere and consequently I accept the blame for what appeared. The editor's introduction failed to mention that "Against His-story" was omitted from the title and then went several steps further in the same direction—in the direction of the Definitive.

The FE's introduction informed the reader that my essay began as a review of Turner's book. I actually said this to someone, jokingly. But I never began the review I happen not to like book reviews. I think they falsify visions by reducing and flattening them. And I obviously knew the moment I began writing my essay (and even before) that I was not writing a review. I should also have known that by publishing a fragment as an "article" I would be reducing, flattening and falsifying my own essay. Pat the Rat was unable to see how I had treated the questions he raised.

The FE's introduction referred to my treatment of "seminal and provocative problems," and to Turner's "historically solid interpretation." These phrases raise our essays to the status of the Definitive. These phrases—I hope my FE friends forgive me; they did a lot of careful typesetting, proofreading, layout, and I didn't help—these expressions, these pompous little statements are crap. They're stock phrases. They actually don't mean anything. But they happen to be among the stock phrases with which accredited Professors intimidate and silence storytellers not licensed by the State. If the phrases mean anything at all, they mean that the product in question is palatable to Leviathan.

My essay, "Against His-story" does not aspire to be an "historically solid interpretation." A few paragraphs into the essay, I praised Turner for letting himself go, for soaring out of the range of such academic crap.

Pat the Rat's pie can fall now. I hope it doesn't all fall on me! I didn't cast myself as Leviathan. I don't want to cast myself as the sacrificial lamb either. With apologies to meringue-speckled friends.

*FE Response to Fredy Perlman:* We are sorry, of course, when anyone who cooperates with us on a project feels their work has been treated poorly. We substituted our own sub-title to better indicate (we thought) to the reader what the subject matter under discussion was. Also, we felt (again, our decision) that since the section discussing "his-story" did not appear in our issue, the term might just come across as a feminist neologism having nothing to do with the text.

Our introduction to your essay was, unfortunately, a last-minute, one-in-the morning rush job when we were anxious to finish the lay-out and go home. The phrases you found offensive could perhaps have been better chosen,

but remember, the Rat was responding to your text, not to our introduction. Could the rendering of the title as you had penned it made him see the entire essay differently? Maybe, but just maybe.

We thought your essay was excellent, which is why we wanted to print it in the first place, but don't bridle so at the term "definitive"—there's no way for you or, for that matter, us to escape it; it's the pie you speak of. You engage in a process of describing, though speculatively—you define aspects of reality in this way for your readers. You, like us, use the methodology and language of the academy; we are not storytellers and it is Leviathan's ways—writing itself, linear thought, etc.—which destroys the validity of tales and visions. Even describing storytellers and telling of their destruction does not eliminate our role in the process.

You, like us, want to see visions, fill yourself with the spirit of the forest, sing with the birds and feel the magic of the shaman; instead you read and write books as we write newspapers. Nothing can change that contradiction except for us to renounce the ways of Leviathan and learn to speak in a language of our desires; for now, we're too much like those we despise.



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