

### 3 OPEN FORUM

made, not by hiding behind superstition and religious incantations, but by doing good because it was right on the basis of morality. We should be responsible for our conduct without wanting religious promises of reward or fearing punishment. The first essential of the good life is to free your mind of ignorance and superstition.

Religious teaching encourages a desire for easy answers to difficult questions and reliance on a superpower to conduct our affairs on earth. Humanists do not base their beliefs on a fantasy, but follow the course of reason.

Do any of your readers believe with Torrey that a Single-Tax Society will see a revival of religious institutions? The idea that the economic prosperity of such a society might enable the churches 'to provide complete educational systems' is anathema to me. Christianity has no monopoly on morality, and its ethics existed long before Christ. Einstein wrote:

A man's ethical behaviour should be based effectively on sympathy, education and social ties; no religious basis is necessary.

Every bit of progress in humane feeling, every improvement in the criminal law, every anti-war effort, every step in better treatment of coloured races or the abolition of slavery, all moral progress has been opposed by the churches. If these reborn churches of the Single Tax Society use the Holy Bible as a handbook, they will have to be very selective about what they take from that collection of books. I know from my own experience that teachers (often compelled to teach RE against their better judgement) and clerics who have the right to teach in CE schools are all very selective. Otherwise one could easily pass on to children the picture of a merely punitive tribal god.

It is difficult to know what principles of morality might be instilled into pupils by reading the full awful truth

about our biblical heroes.

I trust that if ever a Single Tax Society is achieved, we shall not return to religion - which is the tragedy of mankind; instead we must deal with moral issues from a non-religious viewpoint and help to achieve a more open, just and caring society.

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Leek, England

Sir,

I could not agree more with John Hatherley (Winter 1996 Land and Liberty) when he says that the educational system needs to be changed away from its present obsession with academic excellence — although not quite for the same reason as his own.

My understanding is that numerous studies (notably in America) have confirmed the fact that academic ability is the *least important* factor in career success (the ability to get on with other people being often quoted as the most important).

This is not to knock academic ability in any way; it is always useful and sometimes vital, but sitting supinely in a classroom trying to soak up 'infinite' amounts of academic knowledge is positively debilitating to the person concerned and not the way to develop the essential qualities for personal success, such as initiative, enthusiasm, confidence, courage, imagination, understanding...and the ability to get on with other people!

On another topic, I am appalled by Ronald Banks' suggestion on page 7 of the same issue that some taxes should be kept. As far as I am concerned, all taxation that is properly so called is wrongful, and concern for individual personal health and for conservation of energy resources is not an excuse for state immorality in this matter.

Going on yet again, the answer to Sir Kenneth Jupp's question at the end

of his quite dreadful essay on the meaning of land, "Would it be better to adopt the ordinary meaning of the word land?" is clearly "No", since this would exclude from the system such things as fishery and undersea oil and gas rights, a circumstance which would have very harmful consequences.

Finally, with regard to the same gentleman's concept of 'pure land value', mentioned in the book review by Nick Dennys on page 12, I would say that no such value does, or can, exist in economic practice - land has no economic value in the absence of people to value it, i.e. in the absence of community!

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#### TREE

*Continued from page one*

Aldo Leopold preached the land-ethic approach - the extension of the social conscience from people to land. We are not only our brothers keepers, but the keepers of grass and trees, oceans, stones and microbes. Only proper taxation can bring this about.

The moral obligation to land is real!

Ashworth concludes: "I think we have the root of the problem. What conservation education must build is an ethical underpinning for land economics and universal curiosity to understand land mechanisms. Conservation will then follow."

Let's start thinking like a forest in recyclable circles: an economy that is sustainable, an ecology that is reconciled to Earth's limits, a land-value tax for government. Only this kind of effort can move people and their reluctant legislators to act - for the common good.

#### REFERENCES:

*For the Common Good*, Herman E. Daly and John Cobb, Jr. (Beacon Press, 1989)  
*The Economy of Nature*, William Ashworth (Houghton Mifflin, 1995).