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BOOKS

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SEX by Mary Whitehouse. Wayland, £4.95.

Mrs Whitehouse would be unimportant if she had not made herself the mouthpiece of a considerable faction. Her polemical book shows what liberals, humanists and others desiring a free society have to meet and overcome. She and her supporters are preservationists. They represent one side only of the two-sided human spirit—the side that desires certainty, a settled order, clear answers to eschatological puzzles and moral dilemmas, the comfort of an all-pervasive Father. On the other side are the innovators, who recognise the need to explore, to develop, to find truth and be satisfied with nothing less, to perceive and accept the diversity of human attributes.

I remember as a child singing with the congregation of our Anglican Parish Church the hymn that includes this verse:

The rich man in his castle
The poor man at his gate
God made them high and lowly
And ordered their estate

No doubt Mrs Whitehouse remembers singing it too. It is not sung nowadays because innovators, to constant protest from preservationists, did their work. And the odd thing is that preservationists now accept what they have done; for that is the nature of the preservationist. If she had lived a hundred years ago Mrs Whitehouse would have brought a private prosecution against Besant and Bradlaugh for publishing the birth control book *Fruits of Philosophy*. Today she demurely acknowledges that contraception should be widely known and available, adding 'It is not contraceptives that are immoral, but the exploitation of people in the cause of profit, which is.'

In her preservationist role, Mrs Whitehouse attacks in this book every target remotely connected with sex. The innovators, under the label of the counter-culture, suffer the main onslaught.

One wonders sometimes how many people have realised the significance of the actual meaning of the term 'counter-culture'. Is it simply a handy phrase to designate a group of people who are just being awkward and perhaps, in our view, childish? No. It is far more than that. Its aims, as Dr John A. Roward, President of Rockford College, Illinois, makes it clear, are: to defy all the judgments and habits of conduct of the dominant culture. If the accepted practice is for men to wear short hair, then it must be long. If modesty is good, be immodest. If it is assumed women's dress should be different from men's provide identical clothes. If patriotism is held to be a virtue, scorn and mock it. If neatness is prized, be slovenly. If premarital chastity and marital fidelity are advocated, opt for sexual freedom. And so on throughout the whole range of the prevailing expectations of society. The counter culture thrust is, in fact, a systematic rejection of the moral values of the society.

Predictable gibes are hurled at every aspect of the counter-culture. Unisex is rejected because, says Mrs Whitehouse, male and female roles must remain distinct if the human race is to survive. Women's liberation is out too.

We set a disaster course if, as the 'liberationists' do, we aim to eradicate the physical, psychological and emotional differences between men and women. Men and women *are* different and our world has no future if this basic fact is twisted and ignored. The woman is essentially the mate, the home-maker and the mother. What happens to her, how she sees her role, will determine the happiness, stability and creativity of society. Without a woman who is prepared to *be* a woman, to fulfil her role as child-bearer, a man can see no human fulfilment of his sexuality-he might as well be impotent.

It follows that Mrs Whitehouse rejects gay liberation. It is 'evil'. Its doctrine is an example of how abnormality has to justify itself by the denigration of normality, of how evil feeds on the body of crucified good. Inevitably she here quotes St Paul, with his talk of 'shameful passions'. People, she says, feel a 'natural repugnance' when homosexuality is even mentioned-though she ticks them off when this not unnaturally leads to an unchristian response. Clearly it is homosexuals' own fault for being that way. Says Mrs Whitehouse, quoting as usual no authority: 'In medical circles it is thought of as some probable hormone deficiency which delays the normal development between puberty and adult life, but psychiatric literature does record a 60 per cent rate of cure by one method or another.'

In the Whitehouse pages the counter-culture bears a nasty look because it is lumbered with almost every questionable feature of our modern society. It confronts innocent children with a nude pregnant woman in the name of sex education, even on occasion getting them to assess her weekly growth with a tape-measure. It makes the erstwhile dutiful husband thumb through piles of pornographic magazines while the neglected wife sobs in the spare room (in a grimmer setting it turns decent citizens like Brady and Hyndley into child murderers simply by letting them get hold of porno-

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graphy). It robs people of 'their immemorial rights to private repression and personal frustrations.' By its manipulation of the media it offends decent citizens through bad language, blasphemy, sexual innuendo and indecency. It degrades sex and extols violence. It undermines marriage and the family. And so on.

Who is responsible for all this? Why liberals, humanists, atheists, left-wingers, trendy priests, media barons (especially within the BBC) and others who form what Mrs Whitehouse likes to call the permissive lobby. Her wrath is flung at any who dare to stand in their company. She rails at the 'total self-absorption' of the permissive lobby, and its 'predatory emotional and intellectual clutches.'

In the name of 'compassion' it is cruel-but does not even know it! In the name of 'liberation' it despoils; in the name of its own 'freedom' it shackles other people. Humbug is its name. And blind unreality.

Worse is to come. Mrs Whitehouse calls libertarian orthodoxy the most heartless and aggressive philosophy since Fascism. She adopts the abuse uttered by her natural ally Ronald Butt, who gives liberals no credit and no mercy. Speaking of pornographic pictures originating in Asia and showing small children in degrading poses he asks 'Do our gallant and flippant upholders of freedom sleep easier when they defend such cases because they know that those who provide the material for such pornography live a long way off?' The charge against liberals gets more unrestrained (one is tempted to say hysterical) as the book proceeds. Their integrity has been totally destroyed. They no longer believe in right and wrong, purity or impurity, evil and good. They think there should be no standards of morality and integrity in personal and public life. They act for no reason but personal

justification, political advantage or hard cash. They have created a 'value-free society'. Their gods are those same pieces of silver which betrayed Christ.

She is no less harsh to humanists. There are outcries from them against religious indoctrination in schools 'but nothing, not anything, from them expressing concern about the indoctrination carried out by the contraceptive lobby.' Humanists tear off one Christian value after another (but all their best brains have failed to produce a substitute). Society is unlikely to allow the humanist experiment much more time.

This is a bad book for reasons almost too numerous to list here. It is uncritical and unscholarly, giving scarcely any authority for its statements yet criticising others on this very ground. How on earth does Bent Claesson know, she asks, that more than half of all men have at some time during their teens or early twenties taken part in communal masturbation with other boys or young men? 'No reference to research to support such a claim, but such invalid and sweeping generalisations have been the stock-in-trade of the permissive lobby.' It is vague, and wanting in argument. A sex education instructor holds up a sheath for the children to see 'Heaven help us-and them!' It is inconsistent. In one place Dr James Hemming is rebuked for saying truthfully that the only alternative to premarital relationships is very early marriage or years of fantasy and masturbation, both being undesirable; while elsewhere she complains that explicitness is a stealer of dreams, robbing the child of needed erotic fantasies. It is obscure. 'The so-called liberal response to laws, moral or otherwise, is surely the most reflex of any this side of the way your knee jerks when the doctor hits it with his little hammer! ' It is abusive. Statements disagreed with are 'blather'; liberationists are 'tyrants' and 'fascists'. It distorts facts about what it attacks, e.g. on sex education: 'A boy who has failed to relate to his father or who has become over-dependent on his mother is not going to be helped to develop his masculinity by knowledge of how to master sexual techniques' - one might as well argue that a boy who wants to learn French is not going to be helped by algebra lessons. It exaggerates, e.g. John Calder having been quoted as allegedly saying that books do not affect behaviour:

Strange that, as a publisher, he had not apparently heard of the Bible, *Mein Kampf* or *Das Kapital*. It is cliché-ridden, e.g. a reply from Sir Michael Swann 'raises more questions than answers.

There are more serious grounds for complaint. In several places Mrs Whitehouse gets the law wrong. For example, she says that if the GLC had accepted Enid Wistrich's proposal to cease censoring films for adults 'this would mean that any film, whatever its nature, would be free from control in the Greater London area'. This is quite untrue, and Mrs Whitehouse knows it is untrue. She is well aware that the common law rules punishing exhibitions outraging public decency apply to all public cinemas, whatever the GLC mayor may not do. When in 1975 the film *More About the Language of Love* was successfully prosecuted under these common law rules despite having received a GLC certificate she expressed herself delighted (*Guardian*. 11 June 1975). Another piece of dishonesty is revealed over the letter of complaint sent to Mrs Whitehouse by the Albany Trust at the end of 1976. In *The Freethinker* for May 1977 she clearly implies that she never received the letter. Yet her book equally clearly shows that she did receive it, and quotes verbatim from it.

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Bad though the book is, it is not wholly without merit. Clearly Mrs Whitehouse is sincere, and feels deeply about what she describes in such extreme and confused terms. Occasionally there is a gleam of insight. I ticked two statements I agreed with. Sex education should ideally be given at a time and in a way which is dictated by the needs of the individual child and not by the demands of the timetable. Parents and teachers should be aware of what children are being shown and told by sex educators, so that they can sensitively 'follow up' and be able to spot the child who might have

been disturbed by it. (But what of the child disturbed by playground tales or dormitory initiation?) The book parades before us many unpleasant features of our culture, though they are concerned more with violence than sex. There *are* brutalising trends in our society, and it would be foolish to deny it. The question is what to do about it. The preservationist way is to impose strict controls by use of the criminal law. This may be effective. Mrs Whitehouse tells us that in Japan sex crimes have been reduced of late.

How? The Japanese police authorities point to their very strict enforcement of the laws against pornography, which is quickly collected and burned, while any public display of indecency on posters and such like is immediately painted out. They have no doubt that their policy has been very effective in the fight against sex crimes.

One can always reduce crime, and indeed other undesirable features of modern life, by banning and repression. There would be less criminal damage if teenage boys were banned from football matches. There would be fewer deaths and injuries on the road if a universal 25 mph speed limit were rigorously enforced. There would be less disease if cigarettes were made unlawful. The list of such possibilities is endless. A benevolent dictatorship might on balance enhance human happiness, but one could never be sure. The missing factor is freedom.

Mrs Whitehouse's biggest offence is that in her haste to deny her opponents any integrity, unselfishness, or idealism, to twist their motives and to blacken their characters she overlooks important truths. Truth is indeed the biggest casualty of her campaign. The truth is that it is not, as she is so fond of proclaiming, pornography that does dirt on sex but the Judaeo-Christian religion itself. As E. M. Forster remarked, those who base their lives upon what they *are* rather than upon what some one thinks they *ought* to be always must throw that religion over in the end. It does dirt on sex by doing dirt on whole areas and aspects of human beings and human nature. People are entitled to lead their lives in accordance with their bodies and natures as they actually are, subject only to the right of others to enjoy their freedom too. The attempt to confine sexuality to what Reich called lifelong compulsory monogamous marriage is an impudent and insufferable interference with human freedom. For the millions who for one reason or another never marry it is a lifelong denial of a fundamental right. For the rest it is a waste of years of beauty and potency while the sensible age of marriage is impatiently awaited.

Whatever happened to sex? asks Mary Whitehouse. The answer is that nothing happened to it. It is there, waiting to give happiness to every human being who welcomes it, respects it, gives it fulfilment and does not fear it. When the sex-haters have passed on, it will come into its own.

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