

international superagency to provide the necessary leadership, direction, and coordination of efforts.

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Economic Snake Oil

To the Editors: Excursus I ("The Ethics of Economic Ignorance") of *Worldview*, April, 1975, is a statement by one PLB, who must be the Peter L. Berger whose name appears upon the back cover of the issue. Mr. Berger states that there is disagreement between two groups of economists regarding treatment of the current economic crisis. The classical group, the adherents of "the old time religion," favor allowing recession to take its course. The Keynesian group, the "purveyors of snake oil," wish to relieve the growing unemployment by deliberate inflation.

PLB proclaims that he, like the ordinary citizen, is an economic ignoramus. But, by implication, he does admit to mastery of ethics, and states an ethical championship of inflation by an ethical maxim: "If one is ignorant of the consequences of two possible courses of action, one should take the course that is less cruel now. This is a rather elementary maxim of medical ethics. It is no less applicable to economic policy."

I cannot subscribe to Mr. Berger's analogy. By extension I question whether his espousal of the short-term good as against a more important longer-term evil is ethically sound.

A patient has a severe abdominal pain of unknown cause. Short-term, his pain (evil) can be relieved simply and easily by an adequate narcotic injection. Everyone, including the patient, can happily go to sleep. Meantime, masked by the narcotic, the distended appendix which, by increasing distress could have been diagnosed and removed, ruptures. The short-term good has resulted in a prolonged and serious illness, or death.

Another patient has accidentally found a painless lump in her breast. It could be an innocuous collection of fluid. It could be a potentially fatal cancer. Why not avoid the cruelty of a

surgical violation of the body's integrity and a possible permanent mutilation? The less cruel course has often resulted in much more serious evil and, depending upon the real character and extent of the disease, has robbed this patient of at worst 30 per cent and at best 85 per cent of her otherwise normal life expectancy.

There is a more cynical viewpoint which should appeal to Mr. Berger. It is conceivable that a few of his liberal inflationists are hoping that their remedy will lead inevitably to the chaos of total collapse and a probable Marxian solution. They are Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll would favor the short-term cruelty of the knife.

PLB indulges in another misleading appeal: "8 per cent unemployment represents a mass of human misery far greater than that represented by 11 per cent inflation." In the first place, 8 per cent unemployment is a fact that exists in the present actuality of 11 per cent inflation. A therapeutic dose of short-term narcotic obviously must be far greater than 11 per cent. And, second, the misery of the unemployed 8 per cent should not be measured against the mathematical abstraction of 11 per cent inflation, but against the equally nonmeasurable misery of a group much larger: the aged, the pensioners, those who depend upon insurance measured in dollars of vanishing value, the credulous savers who had hoped to provide for their nonproductive years.

I suggest an alternate conclusion to Mr. Berger: that he refrain from ceding his case to the liberals until he can refrain from equating apples with numbers instead of turnips; that he re-study medical ethics, and even ethics.

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To the Editors: Professor Peter Berger's attempt to be ethical in his economics while being ignorant of economics fails. His effort fails because his solution assumes the knowledge he admits to lack.

Berger would exchange government spending in an attempt to reduce unemployment in exchange for more inflation. The justification of this moral preference requires scales on which to

weigh the relative miseries produced by unemployment and inflation. No one has such scales.

The physiologist Claude Bernard once told us that in ignorance it is wiser to refrain than to recommend.

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Kurdish Refugees

To the Editors: A number of *Worldview* articles have been devoted to the plight of refugees, but there has been almost no reference to the Kurds. This four thousand-year-old race of people has been sold out, betrayed, and defeated in their fight for survival as an autonomous nation. Hoping to achieve self-determination, as promised to them in the Treaty of Sevres after World War I, the Kurdish people have instead become victims of the brutal politics of an aggressive power struggle. As their refugees die by the thousands at closed borders and their very existence faces annihilation, the silence of our press and our news networks is not only puzzling, it is an outrage to our pretensions to conscience and consciousness.

This is not a civil war; nor can these people be brushed off as "dissidents" or "rebels." The history of Kurdistan goes back to the Sumerians in 2000 B.C., since which time the Kurds have occupied some 150,000 square miles. After World War I that area was divided between Turkey, Persia, Syria, and Iraq. At the same time, the Kurds were promised the right of self-determination as were Jews and Arab successor nations to the Ottoman Empire. But imperialistic power struggles and oil fields darkened the future of the estimated ten million Kurds in this area. In Iraq the two million Kurds, a nonaggressive people by nature, have been fighting somewhat successfully in their attempt to hold their homes, their lives, their culture. In 1974 the Shah of Iran gave full support to the Iraqi Kurds. Iraq's adventurous foreign policy and growing links with the Soviet Union made the Shah fear for his own
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bailiwick of practical men, who will have no truck with metaphysics, hard-headed realists who can "think about the unthinkable" in Herman Kahn's tendentious phrase. Is it really too much to ask, as Hoos does in her book, that they ponder for a moment the thinkable, the tangible, effects of their arrogant myopia? And for the rest of us with public and intellectual responsibilities, isn't it time we called a halt to the incursion into every aspect of our public institutions of this malignant cancer? Its only contributions to the commonweal appear to be employment for industrial engineers and economists in areas for which they have little competence and a theoretical gloss for mean-spirited and reactionary decrees from a discredited administration.

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Briefly Noted

Ecology and Human Need by Thomas Sieger Derr (Westminster; 174 pp.; \$3.45 [paper])

If you teach anything related to environmental studies, or even just social ethics in general, make this book assigned reading. Give it to eco-conscious friends on birthdays or on the next Earth Day. Hawk it on street corners. Thomas Derr has written a much needed, well-informed, straightforward, and altogether admirable tract on the connection between environmental concerns and social justice, both global and domestic. One small part, on the religious roots of the environmental crisis, appeared as the cover article in January's *Worldview*. That quality of insight and liveliness is sustained throughout. In short, *Ecology and Human Need* is warmly recommended.

The Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr edited by Nathan A. Scott (University of Chicago; 124 pp.; \$6.95)

A special issue of the University of Chicago's *Journal of Religion* now put between hardcovers. Those who do not subscribe to the *Journal* will want to look especially at the essays by Martin Marty ("Public Theology and the American Experience") and Langdon Gilkey ("Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology of History"). Other contributors are Robert McAfee Brown, Franklin Gamwell, Roger Shinn, Kenneth Thompson, and the book's editor, Nathan Scott. Altogether a sober and yet provocative assessment, with some revisionist angles, notably in the two essays singled out above.

Correspondence

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borders, and so he hoped to divert their forces. By late 1974 it appeared the Kurdish Nationalists were going to be successful in their fight to exist as a nation.

On March 6, 1975, however, the Shah sold out the Kurds in the Pact of Algiers. Iraq conceded a considerable amount of territory to Iran, and the Shah in return withdrew all aid from the Kurds to halt the Kurdish resistance to Iraqi rule. Those Kurds who made it across Iran's borders before they were closed recently are now treated more like prisoners of war than refugees by their former trusted ally. Some 200,000 refugees have fled to the Turkish border, which has been closed not only to them but to the Red Cross in its attempt to administer humanitarian aid. The long trek through Iraq's winter mountains has taken its toll, and an estimated two thousand have just died of starvation at this border.

Considering Iraq's recent history of broken promises, brutality, and torture of the Kurds, and its present refusal to accept aid for their Kurdish refugees, what will happen to these people? In order to make the Pact of Algiers work, the Iraqis must eliminate their Kurdish problem. But what of the Kurdish people? It takes one back to the plight of other peoples, including the Jews in Germany, and to the fear that once again we may witness what may be more than full consciousness can bear. The fate of the Kurds now seems to be out of their hands, and as they watch their people dying in such large numbers, their only hope seems to be that the world will care. Why are we so silent?

I am a native American, formerly in foreign service, and along with others I have had the personal good fortune of experiencing the outstanding generosity and unique charm of these gentle people. I feel great anxiety at the loss that threatens this portion of our humanity, and us. Can we tolerate such sacrifice to the power struggle?

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