In the meantime one might as well admit that the very fact that Human Sexuality is close to the spirit of the age makes it hard to argue against. One must concede to it that it takes a stand against traditional Catholic attitudes (toward masturbation and homosexuality, for instance), which, if they are not exactly static, certainly need rethinking. The study also has the familiar capacity to suggest that those who cannot accept it suffer from the misapprehensions it sets out to correct. It may prove to be a needed working out into sexual morality of the personalist emphasis that was part of Vatican II. In its very extremity it demonstrates the extent to which the empirical data can be irrelevant or obfuscatory to the basic concerns of Catholic moralists. If it inspires an opposition that has more closely examined its own position, the study may itself be redefined in the dialectical fires, and so prove to be a historically important document that future data-gatherers will have to take into account.

In Search of the Common Good: Utopian Experiments Past and Future by Charles J. Erasmus

(Free Press; 424+ viii pp.; $15.95)

Berel Lang

Utopian thinking has understandably fallen on hard times. The ideals of social progress and human perfectibility that underwrite the classic Utopias of Plato or Francis Bacon or Sir Thomas More become increasingly problematic when placed against such indices of human nature as concentration camps, hydrogen bombs, and a startling variety of totalitarian governments. Intellectually too, the current prospect is thin: The traditional sources of Utopian thought—philosophy, political theory—have set themselves firmly against normative recommendations, even against admitting the speculative impulse that the latter require. Daniel Bell’s announcement of The End of Ideology was, in this respect, as much symptom as prescription.

Professor Erasmus writes in a skeptical vein that reflects this immediate past, but he also sees in that skepticism a reason for near-Utopian optimism. That combination both distinguishes his work and anticipates its basic weakness. The great Utopian visions, Erasmus argues, never could or should be realized, and “Eutopian” experiments (Utopian proposals that have been acted on—the nineteenth-century communes, the kibbutz) have invariably failed. But the flaws, he contends, have been in the experiments, not in the Utopian ideal of “provisioning the common good.” Together those efforts have pursued the common good by imposing external structures, by treating the people whom they are intended to benefit, not as “subject-players,” but as objects. In the smaller Utopian communities political conformity is enforced simply by proximity and visibility; in larger structures like “socialist” Russia or China the organizing ideals have required despotic governments. The failures of these projects, then, turn out to be both just and inevitable. Human nature (“‘set’ for Erasmus at the time at which language emerged”) is self-seeking, directed to individual wants as the individual himself defines them. It follows from that nature that what can reasonably be proposed in Utopian planning is no large or total organization but a version of “mutual altruism” in which individuals, encouraged by incentives to aim at their private goods, sometimes—that is, when it is to their advantage—work together. That situation, it turns out, already exists in the author’s own society (I take Erasmus to mean the U.S.): “I invite the reader...to ask where or the face of the earth any great society has ever come closer to ‘Utopia’ than the one—despite its many faults—in which we are privileged to live.”

Now there is nothing intrinsically tendentious in a finding that history culminates in the society of the “finder,” or even in the assertion that a society may be more humane than its own members have recognized. But such claims obviously have a special burden, and it is not clear that Erasmus carries it well. What emerges in this work by a distinguished anthropologist with expert knowledge about the actual development of communities (especially in Central and South America) and with the intellectual boldness to address the fundamental Utopian and moral question of “How ought one to live?” is a mixture of indiffere science and careless theory.

The larger part of In Search of the Common Good is a sequence of four chapters devoted to Utopias and Eutopians and especially to their principal common feature, which is failure. The proof that Eutopias did fail is that, with the exception of the Hutterites, the nineteenth-century communes such as the Amana and Oneida colonies, the Shakers, the Rappites, and the Zoarites have all died out. This is also true, although metaphorically, of the kibbutz and the socialism of Russia and China, since in these the communal ideal has given way to a rising individualism and meritocracy. That displacement is, in fact, natural, inevitable, and ought to be accepted as the basis for any political program. (This approach even provides Erasmus with a solution to the cold war: If the primary human motive is economic self-interest, then “materialism...tends to have the same liberating consequences in socialist eutopias that it has had in the West. Russians and Chinese belong to the same reciprocally altruistic species that we do.”) In other words, help the Russians and Chinese to economic prosperity, and the demise of their political ideal is, inevitably—a considerable inversion of Marxist prophesies about the death of capitalism.)

A host of questions might be directed against this line of reasoning and even against its empirical base (it is doubtful, for example, that the Israeli kibbutz is turning into the more “subject”-oriented moshav). I call attention to only two theoretical issues, the first because Erasmus (like most writers on Utopia) proposes to answer it without recognizing the issue itself. Erasmus assumes a criterion of success for Utopia that insists on its perpetual survival: If it changes, certainly if it dies out, we may infer that it was not really Utopia. But this assumption is neither self-evident nor necessary. Utopia
might well function in history in much the way that the people who live in it do, altering in form or even disappearing as the relationship between it and the context alters. It is no accident that Plato himself builds into his Republic the source of its degeneration.

A second issue is raised by Erasmus's economic model of human nature, which so strongly resembles the "possessive individualism" of Hobbes and Locke. Erasmus distinguishes his own "humanistic behaviorism" from the "utopian behaviorism" of B.F. Skinner. Both types presuppose the desirability of affecting human behavior (this makes virtually every political thinker who ever lived a behaviorist), but humanistic behaviorism holds that the incentives meant to influence behavior should be directed to the projects of individuals, not to another more inclusive goal. The incentives, of course, are based on self-seeking and -serving impulses, for which Erasmus provides no more evidence than does such a Utopian individualist as Adam Smith. Here the acquisitive-aggressive-possessive theory of human nature in fact shapes the evidence meant to support it. Erasmus's history of the kibbutz, for example, considers only its economic and military functions and ignores the strong ideological and, in some ways, disinterested emphases on socialism and working the land. The Republic is represented primarily as an economic establishment—with the implication that Plato's metaphysical interest in the Good is an incidental feature. Hardly acknowledging what this commits him to theoretically, Erasmus simply assumes a conception of human nature in which the individual (like the body he inhabits) "possesses" fixed and given boundaries. Whatever the individual does can be reduced again to that source. Other writers have made the same argument, of course (about as many, perhaps, as have denied it). Whatever the tradition behind it, however, the claim is clearly only the beginning of the argument—not, as Erasmus would have us believe, its conclusion.

Poetry and Politics/
Poesia y Politica
by Heberto Padilla

On March 20, 1971, Heberto Padilla, a prize-winning and popular Cuban dissident poet, was arrested by the security police of Fidel Castro's regime. A month later Padilla was brought to the office of Cuba's Union of Writers and Artists to appear in front of newspapermen and other fellow intellectuals. Without a pause Padilla read a confession in which he admitted to "slandering the Revolution."

Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Alberto Moravia, Susan Sontag, and many other internationally celebrated intellectuals sympathetic to Castro's revolution protested the Stalin-era treatment of Cuba's best-known poet, charging in an open letter to Castro that Padilla's abject confession "could only have been obtained by methods which are the negation of legality and revolutionary justice."

It was perhaps this kind of protest that saved Padilla. Nevertheless the poet became a "nonperson" in Cuban intellectual circles. Ever since his release in 1971 he has had to earn his living as a translator.

The Padilla affair was not an isolated incident. His "confession" was followed by new purges and harassments of other intellectuals not previously blacklisted, including, among others, José Lezama Lima and Antón Arrufat. Belkis Cuza, Padilla's wife and a poet herself, also had her works banned. "Enemies of the people," "decadents" and "parasites" are among the new distinctions applied by the Cuban press to these poets and writers.

Poetry and Politics contains forty-two of Padilla's works, all in facing Spanish and English translations. The

CONTRIBUTORS

JOHN P. SISK is Professor of English at Gonzaga University. BEREL LANG is a member of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Colorado, Boulder. JOSE CORRALES wrote drama reviews in Havana for Bohemia, a weekly literary magazine, and for La Gaceta de Cuba, newspaper of the Union of Writers and Artists. ENRIQUE ENCINOSA has been editor of Abdala, a Cuban social democratic newspaper, for the last three years, and writes often about Cuban dissidents. Both men have poems and plays among their credits.