

BOOKS

STRATEGIES OF POLITICAL EMANCIPATION

by **Christian Bay**

(University of Notre Dame Press; xii+247 pp.; \$18.95)

THE PURSUIT OF INEQUALITY

by **Phillip Green**

(Pantheon; x+320 pp.; \$14.95)

EQUALITY

by **William Ryan**

(Pantheon; xiv+239 pp.; \$14.95)

Berel Lang

The signers of the Declaration of Independence did not linger over its phrases, and the gathering revolution surely was not the only reason for their haste. Three hundred years later the United States has yet to decide the meaning of "All men are created equal," and the turns and twists of American history as a whole can be read as a gloss on that simple statement. The ideal of independence itself, the conflicts over slaveholding (a practice that for the Founders was quite consistent with their proclamation of equality), the drive for the frontier and national expansion, the complex history of labor unions and of social legislation more generally—this itinerary of the American consciousness also constitutes a short history of how equality is pursued in America.

The three books considered here launch a common attack on what they hold to be the most persistent view of equality represented in the American tradition. Its roots are in the doctrine of "possessive individualism" elaborated first by Hobbes and, more immediately for Colonial America, in the writing of John Locke. On this view, the private activity of the individual citizen is at once the occasion and the goal of political organization. Equality turns out to be the equal right of all citizens not to be hindered by others, and the state is then a guardian of the life and property that the individual, left to his own devices, manages to develop or accumulate. Unfortunately—as each of the present authors points out—this

doctrine presupposes a mythical starting place where everybody is equally free from external constraint. In Locke's lovely phrasing, "In the beginning, all the world was America." To proclaim the ideal of equal opportunity as if we were still "in the beginning" is simply to conceal the inequalities that history inevitably accumulates behind another "equality," the equality that Anatole France satirized as the equality that "forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under the bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread."

Though it is from the accumulated inequalities of history that we all start out, the more naive or cynical assumption that we are still "in the beginning" has had a vogue recently in the work of American neoconservatives. Against them Phillip Green and William Ryan direct their books, and they are the occasion for Christian Bay's more general indictment of the American political tradition. The current inegalitarian view, which draws evidence from a variety of sources in the social sciences and sociobiology, holds that far from being a defect, or even a necessary evil, social inequality is both natural and desirable; any attempt to diminish or eliminate it is misconceived.

The logic of the inegalitarian argument here is nothing if not simple. According to the first premise, whatever equality means, it surely does not mean equality in individual ability or will, since human beings demonstrably are *not* equal in these respects. Moreover, equality *should not* mean equality of reward, since that would at once stifle initiative and be morally inequitable. Therefore, all that the claim for equality reasonably can propose is equality of personal freedom to do whatever one is able to do by oneself and then to enjoy the rewards those abilities produce. Hard luck for the loser, though he has the consolation of knowing that the best man has won. The winner, by definition, *is* the best man.

Green's *The Pursuit of Inequality* mainly attacks the first premise of this argument, in particular the

efforts made recently by a number of social scientists to prove that inequality is built into the natural order and therefore is not to be tampered with. Why this conclusion should follow even if the premise were true is clearly a multifaceted attack. Arthur Jensen, the psychologist, argues for a biological connection between race and intelligence and finds for the intellectual inferiority of blacks. Richard Herrnstein argues that social class correlates with genetic endowment: Intelligence is heritable; social achievement is a function of intelligence; therefore social rank is also heritable. Steven Goldberg, among others, attempts to demonstrate that the assertiveness and dominance of males is explained by hormonal differences between men and women. At a more general level the economist Milton Friedman and the philosopher Robert Nozick argue that political felicity is possible—indeed inevitable—as we limit government to the "minimal state" (finance our own schools, build our own roads, etc.) and recognize the kind of equality that underwrites the moral directives of ethical egoism.

Green's criticism of these positions and of the fetishes they depend on (such notions as I.Q. and the "free market") is earnest and cogent. Moreover, it is useful as a summary of the inegalitarian positions themselves, although it also needs to be said that there is little startling or original in his critical arguments. Other writers, such as Stephen Jay Gould and Robert Heilbroner, have pursued the same arguments more vigorously. Still, it is refreshing in a serious book to hear the ethical egoism of Friedman and Nozick simply called "silly." A useful sociological study could be made of why those writers have been taken seriously. Certainly the explanation must include more than intellectual reasons. But the theoretical context in which the neoconservatives write impinges on the larger themes of political theory. Green's concern with the practice of the inegalitarians rather than with these broader theoretical issues is another limitation of his book. Two questions in particular that are slighted in Green's account seem important to his own line of argument.

The first question asks what would follow *if* the evidence claimed by the

inegalitarians should prove to be everything they say it is: Green himself, and many other writers both for and against Jensen, Herrnstein, et al., seems to assume that if there were correlations between intelligence and race or economic status, this would establish a legal or even a moral sanction for racial and economic discrimination. Now it is undoubtedly true that racists or laissez-faire economists would put such findings to work, though it is also clear that they have not waited for this evidence. More notable than this, however, is the fact that, logically, nothing at all would follow from these findings unless it was further demonstrated that the differences among races or classes were radical enough to constitute a distinction between human and non-human beings. In other words, it would have to be shown that individual members of a racial, sexual, or economic group were incapacitated *only by reason of that membership* for certain important social functions. Barring such an extravagant conclusion, all discussion of the rights and wrongs of inequality, whether for or against social legislation, remains unaffected.

Ryan, in *Equality*, further points out that even the fact of individual excellence does not "naturally" entail rewards, since a social decision is required to determine *which* excellence should be rewarded and, even before that, whether excellence should be rewarded at all. If these qualifications apply to individual accomplishments, they hold even more certainly for qualities attributed to an individual by virtue of his or her membership in a group—assuming that we first had overcome the objections to doing *this*.

The second question concerns the general concept of equality. Green devotes the largest part of his book to showing that the biological correlations alleged between social achievement and race, sex, or economic class are suspect on scientific grounds. But he also sees that one reason for this deficiency is intrinsic to the question itself. Since social influences are always present, how then is it possible to judge human capacities in their "natural" or essential state? How would one define, let alone test, intelligence apart from the context of a specific culture or a specific system of education? Of course insofar as this

argument holds, it applies to the position of the egalitarians as well as to that of the inegalitarians. The contention that the sexes or races are "naturally" equal thus faces the same objection on the grounds of methodology as does its denial. Once more Ryan ventures further than Green and emphasizes a point too little recognized in recent debates about sociobiology and even in the otherwise quite thorough criticism by Green, namely, that defining the concept of equality is, in the last analysis, not a "scientific" matter at all. Even more fundamentally it presupposes a moral judgment about which qualities are to be tested for equality and about what should be done to enhance or diminish those qualities.

Christian Bay's *Strategies of Political Emancipation* calls attention to the latter issue by shifting the focus of discussion from equality to freedom. It is no doubt true, as Ryan suggests, that the character of a society in which the highest income exceeds the lowest one by a ratio of three or four to one will differ significantly for the better from that of a society like our own in which the ratio is on the order of a hundred to one. But we hardly can assess these differences unless we know what the possibilities of existence are in either of these systems, or what the ideal of equality, if implemented, actually would produce there. Bay thus grounds his analysis in the question of human needs, suggesting that unless we understand what humans require in order *to be* human, talk about equality and even about freedom remains a mere abstraction. We have to know first what the equality is *between* and what the freedom is freedom *for*.

To be sure, there are difficulties in determining human needs, and Bay complicates this problem by first objecting to Marcuse's distinction between "true" and "false" needs and then returning to a distinction that is virtually identical. Political theory from its origins in Plato and Aristotle has returned continually to this distinction, and the reluctance of such "liberal" thinkers as Isaiah Berlin and John Rawls to accept it produces, as Bay points out, a political theory forever in search of its characters. Bay's analysis of human needs is subtle and not easily summarized beyond

the basic three-part distinction he draws among physical needs, community needs, and subjectivity needs. (The second of these reflects Bay's conception of the social self—what he takes to be an unacknowledged side of human nature in the liberal ideology.) Freedom is realized as these several levels of need are met; and the ideal of equality, then, for the continuing difficulty of saying *how* it can be realized, is simplified at least in the sense that we discover what it ought to be. Equality is not an end in itself but a means to freedom.

This strategy in Bay's argument seems not only sound but unavoidable. Thus his book is an important complement to the work of both Green and Ryan and to the current political discussion that focuses on how the goods in our society should be distributed. Is affirmative action, as the inegalitarians contend, only a type of reverse discrimination? Bay provides a broader basis for what Ryan and Green argue narrowly: that affirmative action is warranted if the principle of equality is even *to begin* to be realized. Unless the ideal of equal rights (to vote, to acquire property, etc.) is merely symbolic, the possibility of actualizing that ideal ought itself to be both real and equal—and this is exactly what the temporary expedient of affirmative action programs is meant to achieve. Such programs "discriminate" no more than do firemen who pour water on only those houses that happen to be on fire.

All three books, then, are timely and pertinent. Ryan's is more engaging than the others' in its account of the *appearances* of inequality, but Green's is no less aware of the defenses that have been offered for those appearances and is more systematic in analyzing them. Bay's book is more sophisticated than the other two in defining the theoretical grounds for the position to which the three writers themselves incline. Each of the authors has kept in mind the reader who may have initially only a general awareness of what the problem of inequality amounts to. Each intends to persuade readers that there really is a problem here—a matter finally of political life and death—but that purpose is stated openly and the arguments offered are not tenden-

tious. The writers are all academics: Bay is professor of political science at the University of Toronto; Green is professor of government at Smith; Ryan is professor of psychology at Boston College. Unlike much writing from the academy, the authors neither patronize nor obfuscate. Perhaps, beyond their immediate purpose, the books also foretell a renewed awareness by the university of its role in public life. [WV]

EASTERN POLITICS OF THE VATICAN 1917-1979

by **Hansjakob Stehle**

(Ohio University Press; 466 pp.; \$20.00)

Gordon C. Zahn

Those Catholics who have come to regard anticommunism as an article of faith will be disturbed, even shocked, by some of the things reported in this book. The idea of elaborately secret negotiations between the then Nuncio Pacelli (Pius XII) and People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Chicherin is a theme worthy of some literary master of international intrigue; yet they occurred, and similar efforts were being made even as Rome expanded its public "hard-line" against the atheist threat of World Bolshevism. Nothing much came of these negotiations, of course. A lack of good faith on both sides probably doomed them from the beginning.

Stehle brings impressive credentials as editor/correspondent for leading German newspapers and radio; and they have given him access to a wealth of sources, private as well as public, enabling him to produce a study compelling in content and style. One assumes that part of the credit for the latter belongs to Sandra Smith, the translator. As the title makes clear, Stehle covers the full sweep of relationships between the Vatican and the USSR — and, after World War II, the satellite nations — detailing the shifts from early stumbling efforts at dialogue to underground maneuvers to outright denunciations and finally, in more recent times, to ecclesiastical détente and experiments in coexistence. At the earliest stages the Vatican apparently had a

dream of co-opting the Russian Orthodox faithful (exploiting the vulnerability of the Russian Church because of its previous association with the czarist order). This soon became a desperate effort to salvage some sort of continuing presence for the Latin Church in the face of a concerted Soviet effort to negate, if not eliminate, all influence of organized religion in the realm of public affairs.

In the process of holding on to what it could and exploiting every slight opportunity to better its situation, the Vatican played the diplomatic game with all the skill at its command. And let it be acknowledged that, however much deceit may be a normal component of diplomacy, the level of duplicity achieved in this instance bordered on outright scandal at times. Both parties engaged in a strange and perilous dance, with all the cunning of serpents and none of the innocence of doves.

Stehle would insist that this is the way the game had to be played. And pragmatically speaking he is probably right. Surely there is little disposition on his part to criticize the adversarial posture taken by the popes toward Communist ideology and practices even when, as now, the objective is clearly one of establishing some kind of *modus vivendi*. If anything, he sometimes seems overly willing to grant the popes and their diplomatic corps too free a hand in defining Church policy. Such great latitude does he allow in the name of political prudence that the counterbalancing value of moral fortitude is pushed into the background, if not dismissed altogether.

Indeed, the author strikes a troubling note already in his introduction. In my own work as a sociologist of religion I have consistently upheld the too easily discounted contributions of the "institutional" structure of the Roman Catholic Church; but even I find it excessive to hold that "...without a Pope no bishop, without bishops no priests, without priests no sacraments, without them no eternal salvation." Similarly, an assertion that "catacombs are no religious home for the masses—at least not for Roman Catholics" is grievously out of place in a serious study of a political situation in which "the Church of Silence" has a real, if often exaggerated and

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