

tists, microscopes, cell cultures, and biochemistry are in for a surprise.

He then explores how the dominant powers and pervasive concepts act as central dogmas for those working in laboratories.

I was reminded of another person of vision and integrity, the late Barbara McClintock, who said, "Everywhere in science the talk is of

winners, patents, pressures, money, no money, the rat race." (Quoted in Evelyn Fox-Keller, *Feeling for the Organism: A Biography of Barbara McClintock*, W. H. Freeman and Co., 1983). Hearing of her death while reading Klein's book touched me deeply, and made me realize what these two biologists had in common: a sense of true devotion, of decency, foresight, and integrity which sprang from the same root—a strong sense

of empathy—and which nourished their passionate commitment to science. Klein calls this "pieta" and McClintock "the feeling for the organism." Not many intellectuals, not even social thinkers, have "the one-another" deep insight that Klein has. Certainly not many laboratory researchers have this. His gift of emotional *tuning* would have made him as outstanding a figure in the social sciences as it has in his own. ●

---

## Searching for an Answer to Suffering

### Timothy J. Madigan

*Pieta*, by George Klein (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1993) 297 pp., cloth \$24.95.

George Klein is a respected biologist at the department of tumor biology at the Karolinski Institute in Stockholm who has spent years immersed in the often hermetic world of scientific research. But he is also a brilliant essayist, well versed in poetry (with a special affinity for Edgar Allen Poe). And in his latest collection of essays, *Pieta*, he uses his scientific and humanistic learning to address the age-old question: Why is there suffering?

But Klein is no penitent Job, bowing his head before the awesome powers of the Almighty. He is, rather, an unabashed nonbeliever (in his previous book, *The Atheist And The Holy City*, he discussed what it was like to be a nonreligious doctor toiling away in a clinic in Jerusalem while the world's major monotheistic denominations jockeyed for position among the sacred sites). He neither blames nor exculpates an all-powerful God for the vast amount of suffering in the world. But he recognizes that the absence of such a force implies an awesome responsibility on humans. The option to "curse God

and die" is not a live one.

The hero of this book is Arthur Schopenhauer, whose ethics of compassion is one that Klein embraces, and whose unflinching pursuit of the truth is one that Klein attempts to emulate. But he also understands the dilemmas that arise when the two paths do not converge.

Klein is particularly critical of fellow scientists who allow their quest for objective knowledge to dull their sense of humanity. He mentions the case of Professor Hallervorden, one of Germany's most prominent neuropathologists, who made a deal with fifty-five doctors during World War II: "Since you are killing all those people anyhow, you might as well send me their brains." Strangely enough, Hallervorden was considered a highly moral man, and a devoted follower of Kant's ethical teachings.

Klein's interest in the Holocaust is not merely academic. Many of his Hungarian relatives perished in the death camps. The theme of this collection is the ever-shifting line between the objective and the subjective, between the scientist's dispassionate love of the truth and the humanist's compassionate love for suffering creatures. Nowhere is this better expressed than in a chapter en-

titled "The Ultimate Fear." Klein talks about attending a scientific symposium in Los Angeles, where he was one of the main speakers. During a coffee break, an old woman came up to him who he recognized as a former playmate in pre-War Hungary. A survivor of Auschwitz, she told him, in a matter-of-fact voice, how, before her eyes, her father and mother were selected by Mengele himself to be sent to the gas chamber. While listening to this recitation, Klein is interrupted by various colleagues eager to introduce him to other conference attendees.

Then my scientific host appeared. He had been worried about the intrusion of the two strange women and suspected that they were trying to "monopolize" me. I felt that I owed him some sort of explanation, and I introduced the older woman, explaining that she was on the same deportation train to Auschwitz as my grandmother and my uncles, none of whom ever returned. My colleague stared at me, groping for words, obviously not knowing what to say. I have often noticed this reaction. Indeed, what could one really say?

It is his gentle but unbending insistence to speak the unspeakable, to view the unviewable, that makes this book so powerful, and so moving. Klein wrestles with the dichotomy of loving the cancer cells he studies so assiduously in his laboratory, and hating the effect that these cells have on the living beings they infect. His favorite analogy is that of the Escher drawing of black and white birds—

you can see either one or the other but not both at the same time. The compassionate rationalist must nonetheless always be aware of those aspects that are not presently in one's field of vision.

The most haunting passage in *Pieta* occurs at the end of the chapter called "Pista," about a troubled cousin of Klein's who committed suicide when both were young men. Tormented by the thought that he might have been able to save Pista from his self-inflicted death, Klein walks home

from the funeral with Pista's brother, talking about the inevitability of death, "an idea we accepted but at the same time wanted to ignore."

I suddenly felt that there were only three ways to survive this dilemma: to believe in spiritualism or other similar nonsense, to rationalize away the whole matter and claim that I had no more responsibility than anyone else, or to store it away as what it really was, an incurable wound deep in my consciousness.

Paradoxically, by sharing with the reader this "incurable wound," George Klein helps to make the human situation a bit more bearable. He shares this ability with the poets he so loves, who transform their suffering into art so that others may benefit. But he never allows his poetic sense to dilute his clear-headed rationalism. It is his ability to maintain this delicate balance that makes Klein such a rare individual and this collection so worth reading. ●

## Books in Brief

***Atheistic Humanism*, by Antony Flew (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1993), 302 pp., cloth \$29.95.** Within the framework of science and logic, secular humanist Antony Flew has written fourteen essays that critically examine traditional religious beliefs and the present human condition. He offers penetrating insights that both scrutinize the empty claims of Mosaic theism (e.g., god, miracles, and personal immortality) and support the pragmatic implications of scientific naturalism. Obviously indebted to David Hume and Charles Darwin, Flew's own philosophical position upholds atheism, free will, and social responsibility. Other topics treated include mental illness, communism, the right to death, and three concepts of racism. Appropriately the first volume in the Prometheus Lectures series, this book offers the readers an opportunity to ponder and enjoy the wisdom of one of the major secular thinkers of our time.

***Extraordinary Story of Human Origins*, by Piero and Alberto Angela (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1993), 328 pp., cloth \$26.95.** Translated from the Italian by Gabriele Tonne. This volume is an excellent, informative, and provocative introduction to the origin and history of our species during the past four million years. It focuses on those

fossils and artifacts that document the major phases of hominid evolution in central East Africa. The complex emergence of humankind had required obtaining bipedality (*Australopithecus afarensis*), then the making of stone implements (*Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus*), and finally the social use of symbolic language as articulate speech (*Homo sapiens*). Unlike most writers in paleoanthropology, these two authors bring their subject matter alive with a clear text, vivid descriptions, and dramatic illustrations. For secular humanists, the essential statement of this book is that our species is a recent product of, necessarily dependent upon, and totally within organic evolution. Therein is the great value of this work.

***Evolution Extended: Biological Debates on the Meaning of Life*, ed. by Connie Barlow (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 325 pp., cloth \$24.95.** There is a crucial distinction between the fact of evolution and those critical interpretations of evolving reality that seriously examine our species, life on Earth, and this dynamic universe. This collection of writings presents a wide range of positions in the relevant literature, from mechanistic materialism to cosmic mysticism. It addresses the issues of progress, teleology, explanatory mechanisms, and the ongoing challenge of

biblical fundamentalism (now mistakenly referred to as "scientific creationism"). Secular humanists will find those selections from Richard Dawkins, Julian Huxley, Jacques Monod, E. O. Wilson, and George Gaylord Simpson to be especially significant. This timely and unique volume makes it clear that any sound understanding of and proper appreciation for humankind within nature requires not only science and reason but also the evolutionary framework.

—H. James Birx

***Why the Religious Right Is Wrong: About Separation of Church and State*, by Robert Boston (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1993), 257 pp., paper \$16.95.** Rob Boston, assistant director of communications for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, believes that the wall separating church and state is perilously close to crumbling, mainly as a result of aggressive assaults by the religious right.

Boston explodes many of the myths advanced by the religious right in its war against religious liberty. He is at his best in Chapter 3 in the section titled "False Stories about 'the Wall.'" He picks apart the religious right's contention that Jefferson's wall of separation was "designed to protect the church from incursion by the state," and "that the United States government should be based on 'Christian principles.'"

This book is a courageous and unapologetic defense of church/state separation, and could not have arrived at a better time.

—Norm R. Allen, Jr.