

Aquinas and the embryonic life

SIR — My hope, in writing about the Pope and human development¹, was to build on some existing Roman Catholic thinking on the basis for humane exceptions², and on Aquinas and reproductive issues, because of their moral and practical importance. If persuaded that this would be right, John Paul II has the bravery and force of character to do great practical good for people in general. I am sorry that my argument caused offence to a number of your readers.

I was encouraged to write by the infectious enthusiasm of St Thomas Aquinas to understand the natural world, for which he relied on Aristotle. When, in 1261, he read the new translation, by William of Moerbeke, of Aristotle's treatises on animals, he urged William to continue translating. As further books came to him in accurate Latin, he would dictate his own work, like a chess grand master, to several secretaries simultaneously. Aquinas argued that the soul is logically related to the body, and ensoulment is gradual³, dependent upon the development of the organs necessary for intellectual and spiritual life⁴.

Only a month ago, Pope John Paul II wrote an encyclical letter, *Ut Unum Sint*, seeking reunion of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. So Aquinas deserves particular attention just now: in 1274 he was summoned to a general council in Lyons on reconciliation of the Christian Churches, and he died on his way to it. Aquinas could yet inspire appropriate guidance on the ethical basis for the family and the population in today's world, so allowing churches an ecumenical future, as he earlier foreshadowed the renaissance.

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1. Godfrey, *J. Nature* **373**, 100 (1995).

2. O'Donoghue, N. D. *Irish theolog. Q.* **35**, 217–232 (1968).

3. Aquinas, *In 111 Sententiarum*, dist.3, q.5, art.2; and *De anima* art. 11.

4. Donceel, *J. Theolog. Stud.* **31**, 76–83 (1970).

● This correspondence is now closed. — Editor, *Nature*.

Politically correct

SIR — In commenting on the resignation of Martin Harwit from the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC (*Nature* **375**, 95; 1995), Stanley Goldberg is right to say that scholars should be able to “do their work without having to make sure that it agrees with prejudice of outsiders”.

It would also be desirable, however, if the same scholars were not so pressured from insiders either. Everybody knows that in academic institutions (especially in non-science subjects), the shortest and safest way to promotion and tenure and to key committees is political correctness. This includes blaming the Allies in the Second World War for using the atomic bomb or for bombing Dresden. (The logical corollary is that the Allies should not have been in such a hurry to end a war that was devastating to both sides.)

Being politically correct is also very useful outside academic life, especially if one wants to be interviewed by public radio or to be cited by, say, *The New York Times*. The pressure to conform is as strong from the inside as from the outside, which leads today's scholars to use collective minds instead of their own individual minds.

I believe that there was no need for the resignation of Martin Harwit; all that was required was that he (and other administrators following in his footsteps) should keep in mind that, in controversial matters, a scholar is supposed to present both points of view. Anyone who lived through the Second World War remembers how much hatred was abroad in those days everywhere. And if it is true that the Allies sometimes reacted in anger, it is also true that they had good reason to be angry.

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Friedmann models

SIR — John Maddox considers it striking that Tolman's book *Relativity, Thermodynamics and Cosmology* did not mention Friedmann's world models (*Nature* **375**, 445; 1995). He believes “they languished in the Russian language until about the publication of Tolman's book”. In fact Friedmann's famous cosmological papers were published in German in the *Zeitschrift für Physik* (**10**, 377; 1922 & **21**, 236; 1924) which was a widely read journal at that time. This makes Tolman's ignorance (and that of others) even more striking.

Friedmann discussed the solutions in terms of elliptical integrals and retained the cosmological constant λ . He did not give the more explicit simple solutions for the special case $\lambda = 0$ which are often erroneously attributed to him.

It may also be of interest that the translator of a recent Russian paper (Frenkel, V. Ya. *Physics-Uspekhi* **37**, 767; 1994) states that the correct transcription of Friedmann's name should be A. Fridman. As Friedmann's papers are written in excellent German, one wonders which

transcription he preferred. In his first paper (to which he refers in the second as “*unserer Notiz*”, or “our note”) the author's name is A. Friedman, in the second A. Friedmann.

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One ‘f’ in trophic

SIR — John Funder is most concerned about the second ‘p’ in apoptosis (*Nature* **371**, 98; 1994 & **373**, 379; 1995) and has fired considerable interest (*Nature* **372**, 312; 1994 & **374**, 670; 1995). But as an endocrinologist I suggest that the p in trophic should also concern us.

Over the past few years, this letter has become an endangered species. Led by the Americans, it has been hunted almost to extinction. Wonderful hormones such as adrenocorticotrophin, thyrotrophin and somatotrophin have become but inaccurate shadows of their former selves.

Surely, the stem must come from τροφικζ (‘nourishment’, which is what each of these hormones gives to its target cells) and not τροπικζ (‘turn’, as in geotropism)?

In this case it is not pronunciation that matters but accuracy.

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Mayflies in May

SIR — As a fisherman, I am interested in the hatching of the mayfly, *Ephemera danica*. This happens over about two and half hours in the early evening and continues for about a fortnight. It is known traditionally as ‘Duffers’ fortnight’, as even the most incompetent dry fly fisherman may catch a fish or two.

This year the hatch here, on the Gloucestershire Coln, was roughly between 21 and 28 May. The point of scientific interest is that a local sportsman fishing the same river at the turn of the century wrote that the keeper reckoned that the best hatch was on Derby day (the first Wednesday in June)¹. This means that the hatch today is happening some ten days earlier than it did a hundred years ago.

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1. Gibbs, J. A. *A Cotswold Village* p.154 (1898).