

Proud to be White? A Survey of Pakeha Prejudice in New Zealand. By Angela Ballara. Heinemann, Auckland, 1986. x, 205pp. NZ price: \$17.95.

PROUD TO BE WHITE? is informative and well-researched. And it provides, as Mrs Ballara intends, a valuable antidote to that kind of congratulatory history that plays down the roles of racial prejudice as an engine of New Zealand history and current politics. She takes the period from the year 1814 to the early 1980s, and demonstrates that many Pakeha judged, and that some still do judge, their race and culture to be superior to those of other racial and ethnic minorities who lived and settled in the country.

The book illuminates part of New Zealand's history. It is also a valuable contribution to current political debate about the ways in which Maori and Pakeha should now relate, for it is of Pakeha-Maori relations that she mainly writes. And the larger part of the book, covering as it does the lifetimes of those still living, quite unambiguously demonstrates the contempt, neglect (and paternalism) with which the Pakeha have treated and still think of others. The chapters on the Colour Bar, on immigration policy, on the Hunn Report, and on the 'negative image' of the Maori are particularly fine: clear, and well-supported with evidence.

Hiwi Tauroa, ex-Race Relations Conciliator, notes in his Foreword that what Mrs Ballara has recorded of the 'arrogance and cultivated superiority' of the Pakeha might well be hurtful to many and that the response 'might well be a continuing symphony of justification for the perpetuation of injustice'. Judging by reviews in the lay press, this is indeed partly so: the historical amnesia and anti-intellectualism of New Zealanders are never easy things to address, and the story she tells reflects no credit on the Pakeha actors. But from an historian's point of view, it is rather the slightly inhumane and moralizing tone of the book that is most likely to provide a barrier to its being treated as seriously as it should be; and it is to this aspect that I now turn, to suggest how the conflicting demands of the moralist and historian are not, to my mind, reconciled satisfactorily by Mrs Ballara.

The book reads as much as heresiology as history. Racism, ethnocentrism (in its eurocentric form), and prejudice predominate; but they are not convincingly described and distinguished from each other or from abutting virtues, vices, and characteristics. One would have thought that ethnocentrism, for instance, is not incompatible with a lively respect for other ethnic groups and ways of life, that it might well indeed be the basis for that respect; and it is wrong to yoke it with Theodore Adorno's much-disputed 'authoritarian personality'. Ethnocentrism is further alleged to be both a *cause* (via the psychology of authoritarianism) of prejudice and the *same* as prejudice against others on grounds of social, economic, religious, and ideological differences, as well as racial, ethnic, and national ones (pp.2-4). Too much is collected together into One Great Sin. The point seems to be that they all consist in the Pakeha's not sincerely believing in 'the concept of racial equality, which recognises the intrinsic value of all people and cultures, respecting their integrity as voluntary distinct units', and therefore imposing on the social world a 'scale by which cultures are assigned a place according to eurocentric notions of what is "higher" or "lower"' (p.113). This is the morality which informs the book.

And the Pakeha, it further appears on the same page, was wrong in not seeing, as the author does, that 'it is not possible to compare individuals who are products of different cultural systems or to place them on any meaningful scale of valuation; it is only possible to note their differences and account for them by looking for their origins in the differing cultural patterns to which they owe their difference' (p.113). In brief, we have on our hands a universalist morality typical of the radical polemicist, yoked uncomfortably with the historicist morality typical of the historian. Take the historicist morality first. As *Proud to be White?* demonstrates so well, people do in fact compare people and cultures,

and 'cultural systems' do in fact contain rules of judgement which are applicable and applied to other systems. So the 'impossibility' is a moral one, based on a lively appreciation of historical and social differences in cultures, together with the judgement that the objects of the differences are to be equally valued. But how *can* this moral position, assuming for the sake of argument its internal coherence, fit with the claim that racial equality is an overriding good? Only contingently, where as a matter of historical fact a person, determined by a cultural system, believes in it — probably intuitively as an obvious item of experience. And this does not happen very often. And if it is morally wrong ('impossible') to judge other persons and systems, and those other persons and systems happen *not* to believe in racial equality (as historically most persons and cultures have not), then either the moralist must give up her belief in racial equality as a rule against which all persons and cultures should be judged, or she must give up her historicism.

This general dilemma, as to the way in which current values are to confront alien ones, is one which all serious historians who wish to address themselves to their own time face. Philosophically it is a difficult question; and it is one that can probably be addressed by the historian only in the choice of appropriate style and tone, in a critical sympathy with the subjects of the history.

Mrs Ballara tends to the universalistic morality more than the historicist, and consequently too often expresses a lack of sympathy and patience with her Pakeha and European subjects. And her understanding of their motives and reasons for acting is indelicate and reductionist. It is only a tendency, but it is dominant one. She is perfectly aware, for instance, that around the turn of this century and into the 1930s, 'the concept of racial equality was understood in a very limited sense . . . and did not include an appreciation of the intrinsic value of all cultures and peoples', and she is able therefore to sympathize with Buck and Ngata as being trapped themselves by the contemporary ideology (pp.109-110). But generally she is as much interested in condemning and belittling as reconstructing the thoughts of her protagonists.

She blames the missionaries for thinking of Maori beliefs as 'degrading and superstitious' (p.12); but what else *could* they think, given their culture? She speaks of Pakeha 'liking to think' things (pp.19, 153), including that England was 'home'. But would she equally say that the Maori 'liked to think' of land as *turangawaewae*? 'Civilization' is always in quotation marks, not so much, it seemed to me, as a convention to remind the reader of the historicity of conceptions of it, as to deny the moral force of the idea. She continually criticizes Pakeha for applying attitudes of their own culture to judging the Maori, and there is in general no escaping her continued condemnation of the European-derived race and culture.

In brief, it seems to me that, as history-writing, the book is just too radically moralizing and not sensitive enough to the cultural conditioning of others. Mrs Ballara's enraged sensitivity to deviations from her own very modern ideology underlies both the vices and virtues of her book. It enables her to catalogue with ferocious energy some of the elements in a story that certainly needs telling; and it has not impeded her scrupulous quotation and description of what happened and what was said. But it does, like Thomas Edward's *Gangraena* (1646), repel as much as it undoubtedly informs. In the end, however, it is a book which ought to be read.

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