

Foreword to *Letters from Exile* by Celia Green

Celia Green is a genius. A scientific genius who deserves a professorship, though she has no academic position; and a philosophical genius, whose originality in analysing human behaviour places her in a class with Nietzsche and Freud. Why, then, is she not internationally honoured, but instead remains something of a cult figure? How can there be an unrecognised genius in our enlightened world?

When she published her first philosophical book, *The Human Evasion*, it was regarded as an uncomfortable attack on the prevailing fashion for anthropocentricity and obscurantism. Thirty years on, that fashion has become dogma. Reductionism is *de rigueur*, human beings are mere robots amenable to social manipulation.

Green's perspective, and her warnings against the arrogance of making man (i.e. society) the measure of everything, now seem remote from the current ideological landscape. Over the last half-century, we in the West have experienced an apparent increase in control over our social and economic environment. Along the way we have ditched religious beliefs, old-fashioned moral standards, and commitment to liberty (in its original sense), all without much qualm. Green's writings are a harsh reminder that reality is waiting in the wings. We prefer not to be reminded.

Her work on consciousness and perception is also out of tune with current fashion. Initially, her research on lucid dreams and hallucinatory experiences was seen by some as pioneering. Now, after decades of taking refuge in what Thomas Kuhn calls 'normal science' (much of it spurious in the sense of being high on experimental style and short on substance), psychology has become uninterested in the possibility of new paradigms, marginalising the big issues by ignoring or trivialising them.

Green started life as a child prodigy, excelling in all subjects but with a special aptitude for maths and physics. She was obviously cut out for an academic career, and was focused on this goal from a very early age.

Society's attitude towards gifted children has always been ambivalent. A precocious child, especially one which is very clear about its ambitions, departs too much from social norms for other people's comfort. Only its parents are likely to be sympathetic to its drives – a fact which has been mythologised into the concept of the 'pushing parent'.

Green's education was ruined by a hostile state education system. The complete story is a messy saga of antagonism, obstruction and interference. It is not merely a personal tragedy, but symptomatic of a post-war ideology destructively hostile towards innate ability. She arrived at Oxford at far too late an age for her, thoroughly disconnected from her work, but received no understanding or support from her college. The final outcome was that she received a second class degree. Her requests that this result be seen as

anomalous, and that she be considered for postgraduate work notwithstanding, were ignored. As a result, she was effectively thrown out of the academic world at the end of her degree.

It is sometimes said that if Green has a claim to recognition, it is for her pioneering work on lucid dreams and out-of-the-body experiences (carried out in constricted circumstances outside academia). So pioneering, in fact, that it formed the basis for the careers of several other psychologists. Not, however, for hers, since without an academic position one suffers the 'Catch 22' position that one can never be taken seriously as an academic. And can therefore never become eligible for academic positions.

Green took certain topics of sleep and perception, and progressed them as far as one could under minimal conditions without laboratory facilities. Having done so, and in the process made some advance in understanding, she wanted to take things further using more sophisticated research techniques and equipment and hoped to be recognised as a suitable person to do so. This did not happen. The half-hearted research carried out since then by people who already had access to laboratory facilities has not progressed things appreciably.

In an environment where mere survival was a struggle, and having found that doing research from outside was not succeeding in getting her back in, Green's main form of intellectual output became her analyses of society and human psychology. Her philosophical and sociological analyses turned out to be extraordinarily astute and incisive. Being in a desperate position can provide one with an unusual degree of lucidity about what is going on around one. The temptation to believe in society, to trust that at least some features of the situation are reliable or benevolent, is more or less absent.

On the face of it, there is something rather strange about human psychology. Human beings live in a state of mind called 'sanity' on a small planet in space. ...

Now sanity possesses a constellation of defining characteristics which are at first sight unrelated. ... A sane person believes firmly in the uselessness of thinking about what he does not understand, and is pathologically interested in other people. ...

I should make it plain at once that I use ['reality'] to mean 'everything that exists'. That is, of course, a highly idiosyncratic use of the word. I am aware that it is commonly used by sane people to mean 'everything that human beings understand about', or even 'human beings'.

Thus begins *The Human Evasion*, the first of Green's philosophical books. Once, 'philosophy' meant thinking about the big picture, in the sense of the universe and human beings' place in it (if any). Modern academic philosophy, however, has become a kind of pseudoscience of the everyday, not so distant from literary criticism, structuralist anthropology, or any of

the other modern disciplines which essentially look to human practices for their references.

The phrase 'the human condition' now seems old-fashioned. In the sixties, when *The Human Evasion* was published, it was still common to see human affairs as quite distinct from overall reality but possibly in some relation to it, and to raise questions about what this relation might be. The decline in religious belief has led not only to the rejection of dogmatic answers to such questions, but has made the questions themselves deeply unfashionable. In fact, it may be said that the questions have become more or less taboo, even though the answers themselves continue to have a certain mechanical currency. Modern pseudoanalytical disciplines, such as linguistic philosophy, have assisted enormously in this process.

So Green's writings on the human condition, under which rubric we may include the attempts of human beings to delude themselves they understand something about the universe, are not accepted as philosophy. Nor are her writings on social or political issues recognised as sociology or ethics, since she has not received 'training' or qualifications in these disciplines and does not place her work in the prevailing structure of accepted concepts and terminology.

Deprived of support, Green writes as an exile from the intellectual establishment, assessing with painful clarity and black humour the destructiveness of modern, 'liberal' society. Her books are partly indictments of contemporary ideology, and partly signals to say she needs support for the research which she could be doing in several areas. This book is a collection of her recent letters on a wide range of topics, each one dazzling with her usual lucidity, bird's-eye detachment and trenchant wit.

Green has produced all her books, including this one, under conditions of hardship and suffering. She does not want her books to be taken as evidence of her enthusiasm for particular topics, and certainly not as evidence that she has adequate conditions for functioning at a normal level. They are distress flares, and any person who reads this book should consider her situation to warrant serious concern, and do what they can to relieve her frustration.

Fabian Tassano