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# THE VOICED AND THE MUTE

A STORY we read somewhere tells of a young man, earnestly desirous of knowledge, who was drawn to a teacher known to affirm that truth is not to be found in books. This troubled the youth, since he was a great reader. But the attraction was strong and he asked to be accepted as a disciple; and then, having the assent of the sage, he inquired somewhat anxiously if he could keep his books.

"Keep them as long as you want," the sage replied, "for if you gave them up now, the feeling of being deprived would interfere with any learning."

What is a book, even the best of all books? Like a theory, it can be no more than an intermediary between the learner and what remains to be known. Actual knowledge, finally, is the radius of the self, since learning is becoming and knowing is being.

Yet it would be a sorry world without books. From books one discovers that it is possible to rise above the commonplace. As Arthur Morgan once pointed out, most of us encounter only mediocrity throughout our lives. Unless pressed by mysterious hungers we are likely to suppose that the world is shaped by nothing else. Books—the ones worth reading—provide the contrast of high and rare excellence, which becomes recognizable through the writer's art. Books, therefore, may be precious resources, depending, of course, on their use.

But they are also a great barrier. Consider the hullabaloo and anxiety about the "knowledge explosion." The factual catalog of the Universe, we are told, has become too large to fit in any library. But the microfiche will save us. Some day, electronic experts predict, all the twenty million books in the world will be recorded on tiny films that would stack only half a millimeter high—a cavity inside a large pin head could store them. And then, as John Platt has remarked, if a library burned down somewhere, "they would simply say to the Library of Congress, send us another pin!"

But even with the storage problem solved, think of indexing all those volumes! And indexes are not much better than labyrinths of preconception. They miss the resonances of great ideas; poetic analogues are not the currency of bibliographers. If there's something important you really want to pursue, no index will chart the approach. Even seven-league boots will prove weighted shackles for one who must learn to fly.

Well, that's a half truth, and here's another to match it, from an essay on education by Vinoba:

> If a man's house is filled with medicine bottles we infer that the man is probably ill. But if his house is full of books, we conclude that he is intelligent. Surely that is not right! The first rule of health is to take medicine only when it is absolutely necessary. By the same token, the first rule of intelligence ought to be to avoid, so far as possible, burying one's eyes in books. We consider medicine bottles to be the sign of a sick body; we ought to consider books, whether secular or religious, as the sign of a sick mind!
>
> The wise men of past ages, the fragrance of whose lives still fills the world, took no pains to make life literate, but to make it meaningful.

This is fairly named a half-truth for the reason that, all through his essay, Vinoba calls books to witness. He quotes the *Upanishads.* He cites the *Vedas* and ancient books which say that the student who has completed his studies is one perfected in humility. So, Vinoba's sermon against books is really a tract for the times, not an attack on their use. He is declaring that the "knowledge explosion" is a ridiculous idea, since collections of information grown too big for even professional librarians to handle can have little relevance to our lives. His balanced view is this:

> Wherever two people live together in . . . comradeship giving and receiving mutual help, there real education is in progress. The place of books is, therefore, secondary. This idea troubles many people, who think that if the place assigned to books is reduced the students will be deprived of the most valuable tools of knowledge. Books do have a place as tools of knowledge, but it is a very minor place. The major need is for teacher and student to become work-partners, and this can happen only when the distinction between the teacher "teaching" and the student "learning" can be overcome.

Well, we might look more closely at books as "tools." Already in this brief exploration we have used three or four, and others collected on the desk await attention. There are various ways of dividing books up for examination. Fiction and fact is one division. People say that facts you can rely on, but fiction is something somebody made up. It might be more useful to say that facts are only timely prejudices—relating to what people now declare to be "real"—while fiction may provide splendid works of the imagination. Of course, the truth in works of the imagination is problematic. But if *all* communicable truth is problematic, then fiction might prove a richer resource than fact.

A critic could argue that these "ifs" and "mights" do not improve our position, but all this is only preliminary inspection of the different ways to regard books and their relation to knowledge. Practically everything depends upon what the writer (or reader) thinks is "knowledge" and his view of how it may be transferred. A few years ago Ortega y Gasset was much criticized by European scholars for abandoning customs in philosophy. He made no system. He launched darting inquiries, delighting in unfinished provocation and paradox. An advocate of intellectual order spoke of Ortega's "frightening responsibility before history for having exchanged philosophy's noble mission for acrobatic sport." Defending the Spanish thinker, Robert McClintock wrote (in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* for October, 1969):

> By virtue of his ability to engage his readers in reasoning about particular problems, Ortega was master of philosophic dialogue. He did not state his thoughts so that they could be easily spoken by others. He rarely gave a systematic, abstract statement of a principle; instead he would treat principles in relation to particular situations, leaving it to the reader to *make,* not repeat, the abstraction. Further, he usually presented incomplete arguments, in which there would be gaps that the reader would have to fill for himself.

Did Ortega have a "theory of knowledge"? The only one we have come across in his writings—and it is hardly a "theory"—is the following, taken from *The Revolt of the Masses:*

> The man with the clear head is the man who . . . looks life in the face, realizes that everything in it is problematic, and feels himself lost. As this is the simple truth—that to live is to feel oneself lost—he who accepts it has already begun to find himself, to be on firm ground. Instinctively, as do the shipwrecked, he will look round for something to which to cling, and that tragic, ruthless glance, absolutely sincere, because it is a question of his salvation, will cause him to bring order into the chaos of his life. These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. He who does not really feel himself lost, is lost without remission; that is to say, he never finds himself, never comes up against his own reality. This is true in every order, even in science, in spite of science being of its nature an escape from life. (The majority of men of science have given themselves to it through fear of facing life. They are not clear heads; hence their notorious ineptitude in the presence of any concrete situation.) Our scientific ideas are of value to the degree in which we have felt ourselves lost before a question; have seen its problematic nature, and have realized that we cannot find support in received notions, in prescriptions, proverbs mere words. The man who discovers a new scientific truth has previously had to smash to atoms almost everything he had learnt, and arrives at the new truth with hands bloodstained from the slaughter of a thousand platitudes.

There is much sagacity here, but can we call it "knowledge"?

Ortega is exposing the unreliability, the delusive character, of the accumulations of learning honored by the world. All this, he

suggests, is what people live by in the unimportant side of their lives; but when the issue of a man's salvation comes to a head, then, if he knows nothing else, he is *lost,* and he will not find himself until he admits his total confusion and in that humbled state of mind makes an entirely new start.

So it is not knowledge that we have here, but a manual of moods, a litmus test of stance. Ortega makes no pretense, promises nothing. But we could also say that he has given expression to a very old teaching about the pursuit of knowledge. In the *Bhagavad-Gita* (Chap. 11), Krishna tells Arjuna:

> When thy heart shall have worked through the snares of delusion, then thou wilt attain to high indifference as to those doctrines which are already taught or which are yet to be taught. When thy mind once liberated from the Vedas shall be fixed immovably in contemplation, then shalt thou attain to devotion.

What is devotion? Here it means what Ortega means by salvation. By devotion a man comes to rest on some self-constructed promontory of eternity, the stuff of which has accreted around the affirmation that he has all the knowledge he needs as part of his being. Knowledge is but the radius of the self in time and space. Final realization—Nirvana—is both dissolution of the radius and its infinite extension.

To put away books is to achieve that indifference to doctrine of which Krishna speaks, to go beyond calculations, proverbs, prescriptions, words. Yet books are somehow reflections of these mighty and transcendent doings. A book is a work of the mind, and the mind is a two-edged sword which cuts both ways. It has the law of paradox in all its operations. It is first the agent of enslavement and then the hero of liberation. While the once-born mind is forever captive of books, data, and measurements, the twice-born mind riots with definitions, fathering new paradigm-shifts with every change of intellectual climate and moral altitude.

The long and prosy age of the collectors of fact in science is now closing out its ledgers. The facts, as historians of science since Heisenberg have been saying, are as we design and then read them, while philosophy is no longer a series of submissive footnotes to the Great Mosaic of scientific truth. New thoughts are sweeping through the depopulated world of mind, and another kind of science is gradually emerging. Looser, freer, if less materially secure days are ahead. By neglecting the initiative that once was theirs the academics have lost their authority during the same years in which politicians earned immeasurable disgrace.

A young man said recently:

> We must realize that there are areas of human culture in the imagination, in religious instincts, in the full dimensions of human culture rather than in its mere technocratic husk that are important and have to be affirmed. If we look upon our Presidents as colorless managers and develop alternative systems for cultural regeneration, then I think we have ways of creating new institutions that aren't weighted down with institutional inertia.

A young woman turns to the study of nature as to the pages of natural revelation:

> In the lower Bronx, for example, enthusiasts found an ailanthus tree that was fifteen feet long, growing from the corner of a garage roof. It was rooted in and living on "dust and roofing cinders." Even more spectacular is a desert plant, *Ibervillea sonorae*—a member of the gourd family—that Joseph Wood Krutch describes. If you see this plant in the desert, you see only a dried chunk of loose wood. It has neither roots nor stems; it's like an old gray knot-hole. But it is alive. Each year before the rainy season comes, it sends out a few roots and shoots. If the rain arrives, it grows flowers and fruits; these soon wither away, and it reverts to a state as quiet as driftwood.
>
> Well, the New York Botanical Garden put a dried *Ibervillea sonorae* on display in a glass case. "For seven years," says Joseph Wood Krutch, "without soil or water, simply lying in the case, it put forth a few anticipatory shoots and then, when no rainy season arrived, dried up again, hoping for better luck next year." That's what I call flying in the teeth of it all.

(It's hard to understand why no one at the New York Botanical Garden had the grace to splash a glass of water on the thing. Then they could say on their display case label, "This is a live plant." But by the eighth year what they had was a dead plant, which is precisely what it had looked like all along. The sight of it, reinforced by the label "Dead *Ibervillea sonorae"* would have been most melancholy to visitors to the botanical garden. I suppose they just threw it away.)

Parenthetical before-need requiem for a Botany that can hardly survive for long. Why should we keep it alive—this thing of books and labels and complete indifference to the humble heroism of a dried-up plant that kept itself alive for seven years, without food or water, through sheer will. A discipline without grace; objective science, they call it.

Annie Dillard, who tells this story after Mr. Krutch in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,* says that she is no scientist—"I explore the neighborhood"—but writers like her will help bring to birth a science less fearful of "facing (and supporting) life."

> In summer [she writes], I stalk. Summer leaves obscure heat dazzles, and creatures hide from the red-eyed sun, and me. I have to seek things out. The creatures I seek have several senses and free will; it becomes apparent that they do not wish to be seen. I can stalk them in either of two ways. The first is not what you think of as true stalking, but it is the *Via negativa,* and as fruitful as actual pursuit. When I stalk this way I take my stand on a bridge and wait, emptied. I put myself in the way of the creature's passage, like spring Eskimos at a seal's breathing hole. Something might come; something might go. I am Newton under the apple tree, Buddha under the bo. Stalking the other way, I forge my own passage seeking the creature. I wander the banks what I find, I follow, doggedly, like Eskimos haunting the caribou herds. I am Wilson squinting after the traces of electrons in a cloud chamber; I am Jacob at Peniel wrestling with the angel.

Another passage on stalking:

> I never knew I was there. . . . For that forty minutes last night I was as purely sensitive and mute as a photographic plate. . . . I have done this sort of thing so often that I have lost self-consciousness about moving slowly and halting suddenly; it is second nature to me now. And I have often noticed that even a few minutes of this self-forgetfulness is tremendously invigorating. I wonder if we do not waste most of our energy just by spending every waking minute saying hello to ourselves. Martin Buber quotes an old Hasid master who said, "When you walk across the fields with your mind pure and holy, then from-all the stones, and all growing things, and all animals, the sparks of their soul come out and cling to you, and then they are purified and become a holy fire in you." This is one way of describing the energy that comes, using the specialized Kabbalistic vocabulary of Hasidism.

Why not have scientists of this persuasion? Dillardists and Thoreauvians who would not let a plant die in a glass case, or even allow glass cases, but who would work to make the whole world into a botanical garden, and to change civilization into a place suitable for setting and nurturing holy fires. This is no new idea. Once Thoreau was asked to write a review of a book on the fruits of botanical science in Massachusetts. After paying appropriate respect to the learned treatise, he ended by saying:

> The true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men. His will be a deeper and finer experience. We do not learn by inference and deduction, and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy. It is with science as with ethics,—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method; the Baconian is as false as any other, and with all the helps of machinery and the arts, the most scientific will still be the healthiest and friendliest man, and possess a more perfect Indian wisdom.

Why are books obscure concerning such matters? Yet the obscurity is not remarkable. If a true knowledge of nature and the world—of man and the self—depends upon a "finer organization," if learning requires stripping away the obstacles we have placed in the way of "direct intercourse and sympathy," then knowing is indeed an occult art, and not to be found out from books. There may be useful manuals on knowing, texts on the recognizable symmetries of truth, and encyclopedias on the facets of man's perceptive powers (dealing, therefore, with the world he

looks out upon), but all remain useless except to those who have learned how to learn. For actual knowing the seer and visionary in each one of us must take charge. The problem is to comprehend *here* what is actually seen only *there,* by the subtle sight of the subtle-sighted.

Such secrets, it may be, have all been told a hundred times over, but reach us only in the form of reflections and echoes. Knowing remains difficult because, before there can be knowing there must be visioning, and before there can be visioning, the foundations of reality in mind and spirit must acquire substance for the inquirer. Paracelsus, from whom Blake learned so much, declared the rule:

> Imagination is Creative Power. Medicine uses imagination fixed. Phantasy is not imagination, but the frontier of folly. He who is born in imagination discovers the latent forces of Nature. Imagination exists in the perfect spirit, while phantasy exists in the body without the perfect spirit. Because Man does not imagine perfectly at all times, arts and sciences are uncertain, though in fact they are certain and, obtained by means of imagination, can give true results. Imagination takes precedence over all. Resolute imagination can accomplish all things.

This is the text of Blake's credo. He, like Thoreau, was sure that humans have a finer organization by which to see and to know. His art was a poignant call to seeking that means of seeing by an inner refinement.

Some books are made by imagination, others by phantasy. One tells the difference only by an individual power of imagination, the power which varies with every human being. The great books are books composed in the classic symmetry of imagination's use. The more powerful they are, the more they press the reader to contribute his own truth Books, then, may speak with resounding voice, or remain mute.

# *REVIEW*
## A GREAT, BIG BIRD

OUR current reading is *Sandy,* the story of a sandhill crane that fell in love with a cattle rancher, with sufficient reason. The issue of this affair was the partial restoration of a diminishing species of beautiful birds that live in Oregon. *Sandy* (Dial Press, 1968) is by Dayton O. Hyde, a book prescribed for reading in these sickly days, to strengthen the faith in both man and beast. Now a forty-nine-year-old man who raises beef cattle in Klamath County, southern Oregon, Mr. Hyde first worked for his brother; later he moved to a ranch called Yamsi, which he eventually acquired from his grandfather, where he now works and lives with his family of wife and five children. *Sandy* is his first book, and its readers are sure to hope there will be others. It is the sort of book that, once begun, you carry about, poised for reading choice passages to willing or unwilling friends. As a review assignment it is likely to displace other plans.

Like all the birds we have heard of, Sandy began with an egg. This egg, however, was doomed to destruction when Dayton Hyde first heard from an old Indian cowboy where it had been laid. The mother crane had built her floating nest in a mid-river marshy area filled with rushes, anchoring it to a barbed wire fence that crossed the channel at that point. The old Indian remarked that it was a shame the sandhill hen had made this mistake, since "when the South Fork rises in flood her nest will go plumb under." That was enough for Hyde. That night the water began to rise and next morning he took off at dawn in his car. When he arrived at the river-fence the water was high and angry with whitecaps, and the sodden hen crane was weakening, wedged against a strand of wire, her nest about to break loose. Hyde stripped, threw his clothes on a patch of snow, and swam out to the nest, having to fend off the desperate mother bird as he grabbed two eggs, one with each hand. At that moment the hen was swept under and the nest was carried away. He struggled back to shore, fighting clusters of driftwood and cakes of ice that were rushing downstream. As he lay resting on the bank, and shivering, the male crane dropped suddenly from the sky, pretending injury to lure him away from where the nest had been. Hyde called softly, "Forgive me, bird. I *am* trying to help." Safely at home, security for the eggs was a warm incubator; for Hyde, a long, hot bath.

One egg hatched. Clear photographs show by steps what happened: first, a tiny hole in the mottled brown egg, then a little chick sitting comfortably beside the shattered shell. Hyde's wife said, "It's cute, but what does it eat?" Well, it wouldn't eat anything for a couple of days, and Hyde later learned that this was normal, since the new-born bird was still living on the nourishment of the yolk sac. But the moment came when the chick suddenly reached out and snatched a crushed worm from Hyde's fingers. Then Mrs. Hyde took over, digging and crushing worms and trying to keep up with the sandhill crane's magnificent appetite. After two weeks, raw liver was added to the diet, also miscellaneous bugs from the marshes. Being a crane, the little bird's legs grew rapidly, soon looking like stilts. In a matter of months Sandy reached maturity, happily taking over the Hydes' wading pool and exchanging splashes with the children.

The next order of business was teaching Sandy to fly. A certain identity problem had to be overcome.

> No longer was she a little bird; she was a stately and imposing empress, some five feet tall with a wingspread of over six feet. She had become a crane in everything except her concept of herself—which was, of course, that she was a human.

Yet instinct led Sandy to spread her wings, make short runs ending in broad jumps.

> If I consented to share this with her she was delighted. It must have been a strange sight indeed for the people of Bly, for I would spread my arms, flap them like wings, and Sandy would croak with delight and follow suit, round and round the garden, over the back fence, out over the hot summer fields. When, lungs bursting, I would stop to look about, the curtains of the neighboring houses would flutter as faces quickly retreated. Once one of the neighbors got to not watching so hard he shingled himself right off his roof, sending mud, garbage, shingles, and nails splattering in all directions.

> And then one day, catching a sudden gust of wind, Sandy became accidentally and irretrievably airborne. With a squawk of mingled terror and delight, she sailed high and uncertainly out over the town. . . .
>
> From that day on, flying became Sandy's joy. I cannot truthfully call it her great abiding passion, because her great abiding passion was me. But she loved to buzz the town, looking for all the world like some great prehistoric bird, eons back in time, neck stretched, downbeat slow, measured, graceful, upbeat quick, but almost reluctant, as though for that split instant she almost dared to fall.

A lonely bird, Sandy took great pleasure in her human companions. She did everything she could to coax Hyde to fly with her, performing ancestral ritual dances with him, and gurgling blandishments. But he could only watch:

> There is in a sandhill crane no movement, no action not of immaculate grace, unless it is at that moment when they first touch land from flight. But then, once settled, they are pure grace again with elegant and measured step, as though that one ungainly moment had never been. Since man first tried to reproduce the beauty of his world upon a cavern wall, the cranes have fascinated him, and he has sought to capture their plumed elegance. But their grace is also one of movement, more than faultless line, a dignity, a balance, and a poise.

Life with Sandy turned Hyde into a devout crane man. He read all that was known about them—which isn't much—and began to add to the store of avicultural knowledge. The book has a wealth of unpretentious lore about the birds in it. Mainly the question of how the species could be helped to survive and multiply engrossed him. The Fish and Wildlife Service was friendly but hardly interested—nobody hunts cranes except small boys with twenty-twos. "Find out the answers yourself," a kindly official said. This book is the delighting, non-technical result.

The day came when the Hydes decided that Sandy needed a mate. So Hyde went out into the marshes, seeking eggs. A stalker who rivals Annie Dillard in silent approaches, he found one from parents of tremendous size, and the fortunately male emergent was named Red King, who "stood chest high to a tall Indian" when he was grown. The problem now was to interest Sandy in his attentions, since she was indifferent to any male but Hyde when he was in sight. Well, in time she laid four eggs, and Hyde again played foster-mother to the chicks, putting crushed worm salad on a production basis. The new arrivals were named Eenie, Meeny, Miney, Moe, all healthy specimens except for Moe. Before long, out in the yard, Hyde was flapping his arms with the new generation, giving flight briefings anew. He must have got in a little ranching between times, but he doesn't say much about this, although there are some nice pictures of calves and cows. This is definitely not an ordinary "Western" story, although the cowboy humor in relation to Hyde's passion for birds recalls some of the best of Stewart Edward White.

Came a day when the four young cranes flapped their wings and flew away—migration time, and they had to go. But they were *tame* cranes, and whatever would happen to them? Hyde planted warnings up and down California, and in the spring hardly a week went by without some phone call from a far-off place—we've got one of your cranes, people said. But it always turned out to be a blue heron. Not till seven months later did he get a clue in an *Audubon Field Notes* story on three big "blue herons" that were causing a sensation on Bodega Bay, near Santa Rosa, California. Hyde got in the family sedan and drove five hundred miles to collect them from the local zoo. Walking up to the aviary screen, he called: they looked up, left the other birds, and crashed against the wire. "Say mister," said a bystander, "them birds knows you." The trip home was a sensation, too, with three man-size birds crowded into the back seat.

To survive, sandhill cranes need marshes, and Hyde believes the future of wildlife conservation lies with cooperation by farmers and ranchers since privately held land is about all that is now available for this purpose. Legislation won't accomplish much; people have to care and be interested, and some farmers are already doing what they can.

> Most of the people in agriculture are naturalists at heart or they wouldn't put up with the scant two per cent they get on their investments. They would like to help wildlife but they want to be asked, they want to be understood and appreciated, and above all, they want to be protected by law from human depredation before they can unrestrainedly invite wildlife and the public upon their private lands.

# *COMMENTARY*
## SAND COUNTRY

IT is a natural transition from *Sandy* to *The Sand Country of Aldo Leopold* by Charles Steinhacker (photographer) and Susan Flader (writer), who have put together a beautiful memorial of a man who is loved and admired by all conservationists. This illustrated account of the naturalist who gave us the idea of the "land ethic" and richly filled in its meaning is sure to be treasured by Leopold's numerous readers. Susan Flader's appreciation of him answers questions that many must have wondered about, and Charles Steinhacker's photographs (all in color) transport the reader to the country where Leopold lived and wrote. Interspersed among the pictures are quotations from his books, each a gem of perception and expression. The book is a Sierra Club production (1973), and sells for $14.95. Incidentally, Miss Flader corrects an error spread by a careless newspaper headline: Aldo Leopold did not die of burns by a grass fire, but from a coronary attack while working to control the blaze. He knew too much about fire-fighting to be overtaken by flames.

From Aldo Leopold's "Marshland Elegy," in *Sand County Almanac*, we take these reflections on cranes:

> Our ability to perceive quality in nature begins, as in art, with the pretty. It expands through successive stages of the beautiful to values as yet uncaptured by language. The quality of cranes lies, I think, in this higher gamut, as yet beyond the reach of words.
>
> This much, though, can be said: our appreciation of the crane grows with the slow unraveling of earthly history. His tribe, we now know, stems out of the remote Eocene. The other members of the fauna in which he originated are long since entombed within the hills. When we hear his call we hear no mere bird. We hear the trumpet in the orchestra of evolution. He is the symbol of our untameable past, of that incredible sweep of millennia which underlies and conditions the daily affairs of birds and men.
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> And so they live and have their being—these cranes—not in the constricted present, but in the wider reaches of evolutionary time. Their annual return is the ticking of the geologic clock. Upon the place of their return they confer a peculiar distinction. Amid the endless mediocrity of the commonplace, a crane marsh holds a paleontological patent of nobility, won in the march of aeons, and revocable only by shotgun. The sadness discernible in some marshes arises perhaps, from their once having harbored cranes.

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves
### EDUCATION AND THE LAW

SHALL the prejudices of parents be visited on their children, even unto the third and fourth generations?

This is the question of an article, "What Rights for Children?", in *Saturday Review/World* for May 4. The writer, James Cass, who is *S/R* education editor, remarks: "Traditionally, society has assumed that children's best interests are synonymous with those of their parents, except in cases where intervention of the state is required in order to protect the young." Is this assumption warranted? Cass quotes a *Harvard Educational Review* article by Hillary Rodman (attorney for the Children's Defense Fund):

> Child citizens, although their needs and interests may be greater than those of adults, have far fewer legal rights (and duties). Indeed, the special needs and interests which distinguish them from adults have served as the basis for not granting them rights and duties and for entrusting enforcement of the few rights they have to institutional decision makers.

Some readers may recall that in the MANAS lead article for Feb. 23, 1972, the issues of the case, *Wisconsin vs. Yoder*, were described at some length. This was an action brought by the state of Wisconsin against members of the Amish community to compel parents to send their children to high school—a level of education which the Amish said was in conflict with their religious scruples. The Amish won in the Supreme Court, which upheld the opinion of the Wisconsin Supreme Court: "To the Amish, secondary schools not only teach an unacceptable value system, but they also seek to integrate ethnic groups into a homogenized society," with the effect that "the education they receive is irrelevant to their lives . . . or will make Amish life impossible." The federal Supreme Court agreed, in effect confirming the assumption described by Hillary Rodman, that "children's best interests are synonymous with those of their parents."

Mr. Cass now reminds us that Justice Douglas dissented from the majority opinion. It happened that of the three Amish children involved in the case, one said that she shared her parents' religious convictions, but the other two did not. "Justice Douglas," Mr. Cass relates, "concurred in the majority decision as it affected the child who testified but dissented in the decision as it affected the other two." Following is a portion of what Cass calls "Douglas's revealing dissent":

> I agree with the Court that the religious scruples of the Amish are opposed to the education of their children beyond the grade schools, yet I disagree with the Court's conclusion that the matter is within the dispensation of parents alone. The Court assumes that the only interests at stake in the case are those of the Amish parents on the one hand, and those of the state on the other. The difficulty with this approach is that, despite the Court's claim, the parents are seeking to vindicate not only their free exercise claims, but also those of their high-school-age children.
>
> On this important matter of education, I think the children should be entitled to be heard. While the parents . . . normally speak for the entire family, the education of the child is a matter on which the child will often have decided views. He may want to be a pianist or an astronaut or an oceanographer. To do so, he will have to break from the Amish tradition.
>
> It is the future of the student, not the future of the parents, that is imperiled in today's decision. . . . It is the student's judgment, not his parents', that is essential if we are to give full meaning to what we have said about the Bill of Rights and of the right of students to be masters of their own destiny. If he is harnessed to the Amish way of life by those in authority over him and if his education is truncated, his entire life may be stunted and deformed. The child therefore, should be given an opportunity to be heard before the state gives the exemption which we honor today.

Who can quarrel with the sense of Justice Douglas' dissent—except the Amish who are mainly concerned with their children's "salvation," and the Wisconsin school administrators who

would probably regard the administration of the eminent jurist's proposal as an impossible task? In this dissent, Mr. Douglas reminds us of Simone Weil's wonderful plans for a new French society, which were morally admirable but administratively inconceivable. Imagine the pressures that would build up in an Amish home as teen-agers able to qualify for high school began to form their independent views concerning further public education; and the schools conducting the inquiry would almost certainly become involved in this tension. Mr. Douglas really proposed a reform—or change—in the Amish religion, since it is hardly possible for a state government to interpret the realities behind such private decisions. Actually, Justice Douglas' views in this case may be regarded as highly valuable as dicta, although dangerously threatening should they be turned into law. The law, it seems plain, is hardly a useful tool in such matters. We might say that we *needed* Justice Douglas' dissent for just this clarifying light.

What about a law that would require a child to break with his parents' beliefs in order to enjoy further education? Well, you could say that the child would have to break with those views anyhow, if he wanted to go to high school, and that without the provision Justice Douglas has suggested, the child—or thirteen- or fourteen-year-old—would have to run away from home in order to do it. The matter could be argued back and forth from here to eternity without satisfactory settlement. Does the responsibility of parents for the welfare of their children give them the right of *control* over their children? This question—which becomes an issue of coercive power simply by being asked—obliges you to say how *much* control for how *long*, and you find yourself breaking eggs with axes. When trust is lost, anything to do with education is lost; it may be important and necessary to consider these matters, but not under the heading of education. The State seems a bludgeoning intruder from the word go.

If government authority—whether of the states or the national government—were indeed the champion of true freedom, then the issue might appear in a different light. But as a *Saturday Review* writer of more than two years ago (in the Jan. 15, 1972 issue) said, "almost every article about education in the last five years has admitted, it is the schools, not the parents, that are damaging the children by excessively rigid control of their education." Defending the Amish position, this writer, Stephen Arons, a Massachusetts lawyer and community school teacher, wrote:

> One could sympathize with the idea that compulsory schooling should serve the purpose of providing every young person with the time and freedom and resources to explore and learn freely. According to this idea, the child is freed from work and family pressure and given some psychological space. But school is not value-free; and almost nowhere does it consist of freedom to explore. It is rather, a maze of requirements and expectations and coercion. Though we might like school to mean freedom, in reality it makes a mockery of the "holy curiosity of inquiry" about which Einstein said: "It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty."

We see no solution to such problems at the legislative level. Communities may need laws to protect children from harm of various sorts, but laws whose administration would depend almost wholly on a wise discretion and rare individual insight had almost certainly better not be passed. For how can the law provide a guarantee of rights which cannot even exist except as they are given recognition and substance by the moral intelligence of the human community, in voluntary response to human need? To burden the law with such responsibility may be not only unreasonable, but lead to an exercise of power that would mechanize and denature what voluntary moral responsibility still remains.

# *FRONTIERS*

## New and Old Critiques of Orthodoxy

IN his epoch-making paper, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," first published in *Science* for March 10, 1967, and later in *Machina Ex Deo* (MIT Press), Lynn White, Jr., made present environmental disasters the basis for urging a radical reform in Christian belief. He traced the policy of ruthless exploitation of nature to the Christian teaching that the Deity devised all of mineral, plant, and animal creation "explicitly for man's benefit and rule; no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes." Even the early scientists found mandate for their activities in this view. "It was not until the late eighteenth century," Dr. White says, "that the hypothesis of God became unnecessary to many scientists."

> If so, then modern Western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology. The dynamism of religious devotion, shaped by the Judeo-Christian dogma of creation, gave it impetus.
>
> We would seem to be headed toward conclusions unpalatable to many Christians. Since both *science* and *technology* are blessed words in our contemporary vocabulary, some may be happy at the notions, first, that viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature. But, as we now recognize, somewhat over a century ago science and technology, hitherto quite separate activities, joined to give mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecological effects, are out of control. If so, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt.

The remedy? Dr. White believes that nothing less than whole-hearted religious rebirth can reverse the Western attitude toward nature, and as a Christian he prefers the outlook of St. Francis, who taught"the equality of all creatures, including man," although he recognizes in the modern interest in Hinduism and Buddhism a current of sound reform in ideas of "the man-nature relationship."

Champions of Christianity have for many years praised its distinction as a "this world" religion, in tune with Western man's extrovert temperament and drive for "progress," in contrast to "world-denying" religions of the Orient. Even so sophisticated a writer as Denis de Rougement has maintained that the uniquely personal "soul" of Christian teaching is a cause of industrial progress and other good things, whereas stagnation and poor hygiene result from the "transitory ego" of Eastern conception. One may think that, from now on, Christian apologists are likely to claim different alliances. The Franciscan pan-psychism admired by Dr. White would point in other directions.

Meanwhile, another source of criticism of the "this-world" temper of Christian belief has emerged from modern archaeological studies. In 1946 Egyptian peasants digging for fertilizer in a cemetery near Nag Hammadi found old Gnostic books buried in jars—hidden there, presumably, by heretic monks expelled in the fourth century from the monasteries of that region by order of Athanasius. These old Coptic books—termed "codices" since they are papyrus scrolls cut into leaves and bound in leather covers—provide new light on early Gnostic Christianity and also on non- or pre-Christian Gnosticism (both Judiac and Hellenistic). Study of the Nag Hammadi Codices is carried on by the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, Calif., under the direction of James M. Robinson. In a recent paper Dr. Robinson says that these documents afford a real cross-section of Gnostic literature, showing Gnosticism to be "a religion in its own right." They contain Gnostic views of both the Old and the New Testaments. As severe critics of orthodox Judaism, the Gnostics classed Jehovah as a second or third rate god and our earth as the undesirable place of his unfortunate creation. In short, the Gnostics, as Dr. Robinson puts it, turned "Genesis upside down."

The doctrine of the codices, not very different from that found in such compilations as C. W. King's *The Gnostics and their Remains,* is summarized by Dr. Robinson:

> Since this world is hell, its creator must be the devil. The God of the Hebrew Scriptures, who revealed his name to Moses as Yahweh, became for the Gnostics the evil fabricator of this mess, Yaldabaoth. It is out of pure ignorance and vain conceit that he proclaims "I am God and there is no other beside me!" The Gnostics are by definition—since Gnostic means "knower"—those

> who know all about the hidden good God on high. It is he who sent the Gnostic redeemer with this saving knowledge. But Yaldabaoth is not the highest God; his mother Sophia made a catastrophic miscalculation in conceiving him without her mate—an abortive attempt on her part to imitate the first creative act of the highest God, a presumption punished by the blinding of her son. This blinded ignorant god is so jealous of humans he has fabricated that he forbids them to eat from the trees of the garden the food that leads to knowledge and immortality.

Apparently, traces of this "jealousy" remain in the Old Testament account of the Garden of Eden. In *Genesis* III, 22, the Lord says: "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil"—the "us" here suggesting the plurality of the Elohim rather than a single Deity. Since a knowledge of good and evil was indeed what the Serpent had promised when offering Eve the apple (*Gen.* III, 5), as the key to godlike being, the Serpent was for the Gnostics the representative of a higher Spirit, sent by the unknown Deity in response to Sophia's appeal to help her undo the mistakes of her ignorant offspring, Jehovah.

As for Jesus, the Gnostics showed little interest in the embodied redeemer, being concerned rather with the disembodied Christ. The Nag Hammadi Gnostic texts are in harmony with New Testament teaching which pictures the resurrected Christ as "a bright light," as was the case with Paul's vision. "The orthodox church," Dr. Robinson says, "shifted attention away from such luminous appearances of Jesus in favor of more down-to-earth portrayals in human appearance." He also says that the codices "make clear the gnosticizing milieu from which New Testament writers such as the author of the Gospel of John or of the epistle of Colossians drew their thought patterns."

In a general analysis, Dr. Robinson shows that the Gnostic heretics of the second and third centuries, so bitterly attacked by the Church Fathers, represented only a limited segment of Gnosticism. Since the Church thoroughly suppressed knowledge of the Gnostics and their teachings—except what was quoted for the purposes of refutation and attack—very little has been known about them. However—

> The Nag Hammadi Codices change this situation overnight. Many of the tractates in this library are Christian . . . . But some of the Christian texts turn out to be only edited versions of non-Christian texts. In one case both versions survive in the library: The tractate *Engnostos* is a non-Christian speculation. Right next to it is a tractate entitled *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, containing a dialogue between the resurrected Christ and his disciples. Upon reexamination it becomes dear that some Christian gnostic writer took the tractate *Engnostos*, cut it up into paragraphs, and built them into a fictitious dialogue of Jesus' answers to his disciples' questions. . . .

Other texts, like Dead Sea Essenian documents, reject orthodox Judaism. Ophite teachings are represented, and also Gnostic versions of Hermetic religion. Summarizing, Dr. Robinson says that "Gnostic mythology portrayed this world as an evil god's prison for the sparks of the divine, and imparted the knowledge with which they could escape to their lost origin above."

Something of the spirit of Gnostic belief is conveyed by an old Greek hymn recorded by Synesius, the Neoplatonist who became the Christian bishop of Ptolemais in the fifth century:

> Eternal Mind, thy seedling spark,
> Through this thin vase of day,
> Athwart the waves of chaos dark
> Emits a timorous ray.
> This mind-enfolding soul is sown,
> Incarnate germ in earth
> In pity, blessed Lord, then own
> What claims in Thee its birth.
> Far forth from Thee, thou central fire
> To earth's sad bondage cast,
> Let not the trembling spark expire;
> Absorb shine own at last!

While one does not find prayers in Plato, this hymn is Platonic in identifying earthly existence as bondage, and in harmony, too, with the spirit of Buddhism, although Buddhism adds the conception of man as laboring for the salvation of all the kingdoms of nature, in achieving his own. So, as the years bring chastening experience and as ancient religious philosophies are better understood, the alternatives to the smorgasbord theory of the earth's meaning for mankind become both numerous and more acceptable.