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# MINDS SEEKING FREEDOM

HEGEL'S rule, "The owl of Minerva does not rise until the sun of Empire has set," has clear application to our time. It means that an interlude of troubles leads to serious thinking—and not only serious but free. Breakdowns, as J. Bronowski said in one of his essays (*American Scholar*, Spring, 1966), spur thinkers to acts of self-reference, by which he meant a "central act of imagination," a "free play of the mind, outside the logical processes." Seemingly insoluble problems call for a renewed look at the assumptions in terms of which the problem is formulated. When one of the professors of Cal Tech once asked him how he came to formulate the Theory of Relativity, Einstein quickly replied: "By refusing to accept an axiom."

But which of the axioms of our time—the propositions or principles "that men universally accept"—should be challenged? This is a question which occupied one of the best essayists we know of, Joseph Wood Krutch, for the whole of his life. There are, he said, "a number of subjects which might profitably be discussed by fewer experts and more human beings." Of the subjects to which he gave attention, one in particular pervaded all his books and articles: What is the nature of man? He began *The Great Chain of Life* (Houghton Mifflin, 1965) with these words:

> Whenever men stop *doing things* long enough to *think about them*, they always ask themselves the question: "What am I?" And since that is the hardest of all questions to answer they usually settle for what looks easier—"If I don't know what I am, then can I tell what I am like?"
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> To that there are three common answers: "Like a god," "Like an animal," and "Like a machine." Perhaps there is some truth in all but the most evidently true is the second.
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> Man does not know how much he is like a god because he does not know what a god is like. He is not as much like a machine as he nowadays tries to persuade himself, because a machine cannot do many of the things he considers of supreme importance. It cannot be conscious; it cannot like, dislike, or desire. And it cannot reproduce its kind.
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> But man is so much like an animal—which can do all these things—that even the most convinced proponents of the other two answers admit that he is something like an animal too.

Mr. Krutch tells why he wrote this book. "If," he says, "we are going to accept also the now usual assumption that man is *nothing but* an animal, then we ought to be sure that we know what an animal is capable of before we agree to the more cynical conclusions to be drawn from the common belief." And he proceeds, in some 230 pages, to tell us what animals are like, with the implied purpose of adding to our understanding of man. His credentials are those of a humanist, his mode of discussion the essay. He will offer no final answers, yet does honor to questions that have no final answers by considering them in a variety of lights. Calling himself a "nature lover," he concludes his prologue:

> If I express opinions on subjects which some will maintain a mere nature lover has no right to discuss, it is because, having read much and observed a good deal, I am sometimes forced to the conclusion that the whole truth is not always represented in certain of the orthodox attitudes. The intuitions of a lover are not always to be trusted; but neither are those of the loveless. If I have also sometimes given way to that irritation which the layman often feels in the presence of the expert, I hope it will not be assumed I have forgot an essential fact, namely that I owe to the experts the technical information I appropriate.

This civilized, urbane, and widely educated man is about to launch into an informed discussion of nature and living things in general (and in particular), in order to encourage non-specialists to resume their rights as thinkers who, with whatever help they find in the work of the

scientific and learned, must nonetheless reach their own conclusions. To be a "nature-lover" is for him to be able to enter into, to some degree, the being and quality of other forms of life. He speaks of Schweitzer's "reverence for life," pointing out that Schweitzer's term, *Ehrfurcht*, "carries a stronger sense of 'awe' than the English word that has been weakened in use." If we lack that reverence or love, he says, we may find ourselves pursuing "no more than a shrewder exploitation of what it would be better to admire, to enjoy, and to share in." He finds this quality missing in the scientific approach:

> Unfortunately that laboratory biology which has tended to become the most earnestly cultivated kind of scientific study is precisely the kind least likely to stimulate compassion, love, or reverence for the creatures it studies. Those who interested themselves in old-fashioned natural history were brought into intimate association with animals and plants. Its aims and methods demanded an awareness of the living thing *as* a living thing and, at least until the rise of behaviorism, the suffering and the joy of lesser creatures was a part of the naturalist's subject matter. But the laboratory scientist is not of necessity drawn into any emotional relationship with animals or plants and the experiments which of necessity he must perform are more likely to make him more rather than less callous than the ordinary man.

Mr. Krutch warms to his task, which, it turns out, is to show that the ordinary human's way of thinking about himself, his purposes, and even, perhaps, his "evolution," is by no means explained by Charles Darwin, who declared that no organism ever develops a characteristic beyond the point where it is useful for survival. Krutch is convinced that higher objectives are involved, primary among them being the achievement of consciousness and reflective contemplation. There are things, he suggests, that we should quite simply learn from ourselves, and not from the biologists:

> Whenever man's thinking starts with himself rather than with his possible origins in lower forms of life he usually comes to the conclusion that consciousness is the primary fact. "I think therefore I am" seems to be the most inescapably self-evident of propositions. Only when he starts as far away from himself as possible can he get into the contrary habit of assuming what the nineteenth century did assume: namely, that his own mind is so far from being the most significant thing in the universe that it has no substantial significance at all, being a mere illusion, some sort of insubstantial by-product of those ultimate realities which are unconscious, automatic, and mechanical.

Having noted earlier that Alfred Russel Wallace, acknowledged by Darwin as co-propounder of the theory of natural selection, consistently differed from his more famous colleague, holding that natural selection could not account for "the higher qualities of man," Mr. Krutch recalls the similar doubts voiced by Samuel Butler, and various others. The archeologist, Jacquetta Hawkes, found natural selection inadequate to explain the workings of evolution; Edmund Sinnott, biologist dean of the Yale graduate school, declared for a "principle of organization" that "brings order out of randomness, spirit out of matter, and personality out of neutral and impersonal stuff"; while G. M. McKinley, a zoologist at the University of Pittsburgh, dismissed as absurd "the whole attempt to account for consciousness and intelligence in either man or the lower animals by natural selection alone." Krutch observes:

> Bernard Shaw has often been ridiculed for saying in effect that orthodox Darwinism simply cannot be true because it is too immoral and too dispiriting; because it teaches that never, since the beginning of time, has anything, from amoeba to man, been able to improve itself or to influence its fate. But at least his attitude calls attention to the fact that the question at issue, far from being of merely technical interest, has consequences very important for the society which answers it.
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> Both the conduct of modern man and his attitude toward the universe in which he lives have already been profoundly affected by his readiness to believe he is only a machine that created itself by purely mechanical means; that his convictions are the result of what happens to him rather than that what happens to him is in part the result of his convictions; that both "purpose" and "value" are, at most, insubstantial creations which have no counterparts

> anywhere outside himself. If you believe that, then the whole universe of which you are a part becomes a mere machine, not really alive in any sense usually associated with the term. Reject it, as Shaw does, and the universe becomes alive again.

In an earlier collection of essays published under the title, *If You Don't Mind My Saying So* (Sloane Associates, 1964), Krutch asked a basic question:

> If nature knows no purpose and makes no value judgments, and if, at the same time, man is himself a part of nature, then from whence came his concepts of purpose and value? If they came from nature, then they are part of nature. If they do not come from nature, then man himself is touched by something outside nature's realm. The concept of purpose must be either immanent or transcendent.

Biographer of Poe, Thoreau, and Samuel Johnson, Krutch recalls an observation by Johnson made long before our common-sense thinking about ourselves was displaced by biological theory:

> The truth is [Johnson wrote] that knowledge of external nature and the science which that knowledge requires or includes, are not the great or the frequent business of the human mind. Whether we provide for action or conversation, whether we wish to be useful or pleasing, the first requisite is the religious and moral knowledge of right and wrong, the next is an acquaintance with the history of mankind, and with those examples which may be said to embody truths, and proves by events the reasonableness of opinions. Prudence and Justice are virtues and excellences of all times and all places; we are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance.

Today things are reversed: only "knowledge of external nature" is the legitimate business of mankind, while we are all geometers perpetually and moralists only by chance! Krutch adds:

> Although Johnson was no doubt thinking only of physical sciences, Darwinism is merely an extension of them. One more result of the conviction that "knowledge of external nature" is, in fact, "the great and exclusive business of the human mind" is the Darwinian world in which man is merely an animal, and the animal merely a machine.

Quoting a *Nation* reviewer who said: "The future of the human race resides in its humanity, not in its ability to construct honeymoon hotels on Venus," Krutch asks: "What is this 'humanity' " which we are in danger of losing? Offering at least a negative definition, he says:

> It is that part of man's consciousness, intellect, and emotion which is neither exclusively interested in nor completely satisfied by either mere animal survival on the one hand, or wealth, power, and speed alone. It is that part of him which is least like a machine and therefore least satisfied by machines. It is the part that would like to know itself and that cherishes values to which nothing in the inanimate world seems to correspond and which the nonhuman world of living things only dubiously (though none the less comfortingly) seems to encourage.

For this reason Mr. Krutch devoted his considerable talents as a non-specialized human being, and as a scholarly humanist, to inquiry into the nature of man. He holds that an evident characteristic of man's nature is "the persistence with which he makes value judgments of some kind and thus persistently raises the very questions which relativists dismiss as either demonstrably unanswerable or radically meaningless." Moreover, he "insists upon believing that right and wrong are real, that justice and injustice do exist, even though he is not certain what any of them are." Krutch wants these and related qualities to be recognized. We know these things about ourselves at first hand, and Mr. Krutch, were he still among us, would argue that our lives should be based on them as first principles of our being. Man's attempt to build a society on "cultural and moral relativism" is certain, he says, "to reduce him to a condition he can come to accept comfortably only in so far as he succeeds in dehumanizing himself." Yet Krutch was well aware of the difficulties

> About the nature of man we shall perhaps never have much detailed knowledge. The very fact that habit can imitate nature so cunningly may forever prevent the development of any body of positive, detailed knowledge comparable to that which has accumulated around other subjects in themselves less important. Perhaps there can never be a real science

> of man, however much those who are trying to dehumanize him may believe that they have already founded it. The objectivity of science is possible only because it does involve a subject (man) and an object (the external world). But a science of man proposes that the subject—call him the observer, if you like—should also be the object; and that is impossible. Man can observe other men "objectively" only in so far as he excludes from his observation the fact that they are men like himself. Therefore what is nowadays called the science of man is, in actual fact, only the science of man-considered-as-something-less-than-man. . . .
>
> If we should ever decide that we do want a new world we shall have to find first the faith which could make it. As long as we believe that the only human reality is the human condition there will be no fundamental change in that condition. If we should become convinced again that man has a nature and that the greatest of his deeds is to create a condition suited to it, then a really new world might come gradually into being.

The effect of the science of "man-considered-as-something-less-than-man" was well described by Bertrand Russell in the *Nation* in 1937 (Jan. 9):

> Pragmatists explained that Truth is what it pays to believe. Historians of morals reduced the Good to a matter of tribal custom. Beauty was abolished by the artists in a revolt against the sugary insipidities of a philistine epoch and in a mood of fury in which satisfaction is to be derived only from what hurts. And so the world was swept clear not only of God as a person but of God's essence as an ideal to which man owed an ideal allegiance; while the individual, as a result of a crude and uncritical interpretation of sound doctrines, was left without any inner defense against social pressure.

The British psychologist, William McDougall, gave a similar summary of the effects of materialism (in *Modern Materialism and Emergent Evolution,* Methuen, 1929):

> Physiology claimed to show that the functioning of all the organs of the human body, especially of the brain, could be explained mechanically in terms consistent with Atomic Materialism. . . . Secondly, Darwin's theory of the origin of the species by natural selection led to the general acceptance of the theory of organic evolution and made it seem that all the marvels of nicely adapted structure and function displayed by living things were the products of a purely mechanical process of adaptation continued through many millions of years.

Actually, it was Darwinism which confirmed for the man in the street the implications of atomic materialism. As Gertrude Himmelfarb said recently in the *American Scholar* (Autumn, 1981), Darwin's *Descent of Man* "was, literally, reductivist, designed to demonstrate that the intellectual and spiritual faculties of human beings differed only in degree, not in kind, from those of animals," and that the "moral sense became only another form of the 'sociability' exhibited by animals."

While in recent decades numerous writers, along with Joseph Wood Krutch, have subjected the theory of natural selection to devastating criticism, almost no one has seriously called into question the essential Darwinist and evolutionary belief that humans are descended from some species of anthropoid ape, except for one writer, Frederic Wood Jones, whose book, *Hallmarks of Mankind* (published in England in 1948, and by Williams & Wilkins in the United States), presents anatomical evidence that the human species could not have been derived from any anthropoid. Jones shows that the claim of an ape-origin for man gained its support mainly from the polemics of the "evolution" controversy, causing biologists and even anatomists to neglect or misrepresent the facts which he assembles. Jones gives what seems to a lay reader incontrovertible anatomical evidence that the human line of evolution differentiated from the hypothetical common stem long before the anthropoid apes came into being. This professor of human and comparative anatomy in the English Royal College of Surgeons declared in his introduction "that the familiar story of Man's origin as it is given in Darwin's 'Descent of Man' and Huxley's 'Man's Place in Nature' would be nearer to the truth if it were read backwards." In his text—a brief eighty-six pages—he takes up one by one the major contentions of the Darwinists, showing that they were not and are not supported by sound

evidence. His own position is stated in two main contentions:

> The first is that, considered solely from the point of view of structure, Man is an extremely primitive type, and the second that, though more primitive in basal structure than the living monkeys and apes, Man has his own remarkable structural specialisations that distinguish him from all other Mammals and appear to be very ancient hallmarks.

Many of these "hallmarks" differentiating man from the apes were known in Darwin's time, but they have been brushed aside and neglected, for reasons Jones explains:

> We must bear in mind the fact that for many years after the publication of Charles Darwin's writings on evolution, controversy as to the validity of his thesis was bitter and intense and all too commonly it was charged with emotional bias. In these circumstances T. H. Huxley, Ernst Haeckel and all the most able advocates of the truth of Darwin's views sought, often by ignoring difficulties and by unjustified simplification of the problems involved, to impart an atmosphere of complete certainty to every instance in which an apparently real evolutionary trend could be demonstrated either in phylogeny or ontogeny.

After a time the polemics died down, giving what seemed a chance for impartial examination of evidence, but then came the Scopes trial (1925) in Tennessee, renewing the assertion of scientific dogmas, along with bigoted religious claims. Prof. Jones cites several examples of groundless scientific exaggeration and assertion, especially by Dr. W. K. Gregory of the Museum of Natural History in New York. Many of the assumptions of nineteenth-century champions of evolution have since been discarded, yet are permitted, Jones says, "to rank as verities when the defense of the major thesis is in question."

This English anatomist doesn't claim to know what was the origin or true line of descent of human beings; the evidence is lacking; and what has been taken for evidence is often more confusing than illuminating. Yet what he does say seems a useful—even emancipating—clearance for a return to more philosophical conceptions of the nature of man. The last sentence of *Hallmarks of Mankind* is this:

> If the Primate forms immediately ancestral to the human stock are ever to be revealed, they will be utterly unlike the slouching, hairy, "ape men" of which some have dreamed and of which they have made casts and pictures during their waking hours; and they will be found in geological strata antedating the heyday of the great apes.

# *REVIEW*
## LITERARY PUZZLE

WITH some reluctance—even distaste—we took up a large book by Noel Stock, *The Life of Ezra Pound,* which first came out in 1970 and is now available in an expanded edition from North Point Press in San Francisco (paperbound, $13.50). The reason for the reluctance, apart from reacting to Pound's political aberrations and offenses, was the failure of several attempts to read the *Cantos* with either enjoyment or edification. Yet the respect in which Pound is held by a number of poets and writers whom we esteem remained puzzling, and so we read Mr. Stock's book. We were happy to discover in the writer's measured judgment of the *Cantos* some reasons for our distaste:

> Early in his life Pound had dedicated himself to the writing of a masterwork and later decided that it should take the form of an 'epic" about history and civilizations. But the trouble was that the "epic" was born of the desire to write a masterwork rather than of a particular living knowledge which demanded to be embodied in an art. At no stage was he clear about what he was trying to do and further confusion was added when in the wake of Joyce and Eliot he decided that his "epic" would have to be modern and up to date. Although he had no intellectual grasp of the work to be made he was determined nevertheless to write it. Thus persisting against the virtue of his art he lost any chance he may have had to pause and rethink the whole project and went on piecing together an endless row of fragments. Some cantos and some fragments contain high poetry and there is much that is humorous or otherwise interesting; but in so far as the work asks to be taken as a whole it verges on bluff.

Pound's habit of bluff—which seems a deeply ingrained characterological trait—was carried pretty far. In a severely critical essay in *Explorations,* Gilbert Highet, a Columbia professor of Latin, examines Pound's use of Latin and Greek. He begins by saying that Pound's interest in Latin and Greek was not a pose, that he "really loved the classics and believed in them," but "would not take the trouble to understand them thoroughly." Highet quotes (from Canto LXIV) four lines with phrases and words in Latin and Greek, remarking that an "earnest reader, if he has no Greek and Latin himself, is pleasantly mystified and feels a vague admiration for a poet with so many languages and echoes ringing in his mind." Then Highet says: "How deeply, how accurately, and how sensitively he knows other languages I cannot tell; but although he shows off his Greek and Latin, his Latin is poor and his Greek is contemptible." He gives example after example of mistranslations and confusions in the passages used by Pound. Then:

> Unfortunately for an ambitious and energetic poet . . . Pound never had more than a smattering of Greek, scarcely enough to enable him to spell Greek words correctly, either in the Greek alphabet or in our own. In Latin he knew enough to let him follow the general sense of a simple sentence, and to grasp some of the more obvious effects of sound and rhythm, but not nearly enough to permit him to understand or even approach the greatest Roman poets, or to save him from making coarse and degrading blunders in interpreting Roman poetry. Worse than that, he would not learn. He would not admit his deficiencies and cure them through humility and industry. Nor would he shun those areas where a display of ignorance might be damaging. Where others would turn their eyes away from the sanctuary or else enter with quiet step and bowed head, Ezra Pound charged in shouting and singing and hiccuping, on roller skates, and rollicked around breaking the decorations and scrawling his name on the walls.

Pound, it seems, was so taken up with himself and his ideas and enthusiasms that these mistakes did not seem to matter to him. He was like a boy or an adolescent who had become convinced that any mistakes *he* made could not be important enough to notice or correct. Yet he did, finally, learn to bow his head.

When Italy entered World War II, Pound, finding parallels between the Italian dictator and Thomas Jefferson (his work on this subject, Stock remarks, being "more remarkable for what it ignores than for what it includes"), began to broadcast for the fascist powers, attacking usorious "capitalist-democracy" and endorsing

Nazi anti-Semitism. Since he was an American citizen, after the war he was brought to the United States to be tried as a traitor, but was found insane and confined in St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. for thirteen years. After his release, for which various American poets and writers labored, he returned to Italy. It was there, in 1967, that Allen Ginsberg visited him, finding him humbled and almost pathologically silent. The young American poet spoke appreciatively of what Pound had done to help modern poets—all of which comes out at length in Stock's book—but Pound replied:

> "Any good I've done has been spoiled by bad intentions—the preoccupation with irrelevant and stupid things." . . . And then very slowly, with emphasis, surely conscious of Ginsberg's being Jewish: "But the worst mistake I made was that stupid, surburban prejudice of anti-Semitism."

That admission, at the end of his life, makes of Pound something of a tragic figure, assuming he learned from his sufferings. But why write a biography of such a man, such an "artist," and why review a book about him? One reason would be that two qualities he surely possessed were erratic brilliance and intensity, and he had these in extraordinary measure, while seeming to show no more real sense than a conceited adolescent in other respects. This makes of him a puzzle, with reflection on his life and work perhaps a lesson. His weaknesses and his arrogance are written so large that he becomes a useful study in abnormal psychology. Here, one thinks of T. S. Eliot, a far better poet than Pound, who felt much indebted to him, and of Eliot's own conception of what is demanded of the authentic poet. In speaking of the poet's obligations, Eliot wrote: "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." If Pound could have understood this, and applied it to himself, his life might have had a very different outcome, and his art might have amounted to something.

It remains to understand why so many writers and artists were influenced for good by Pound, and why, for all his terrible mistakes, he is so often referred to with respect. This is the chief reason, we think, for reading Mr. Stock's book, which is by no means the work of a man blinded by admiration. Born in Idaho in 1885, Pound left the United States at the age of twenty-three, going to Venice and then to London. There, in 1913, he wrote for a feminist journal in which he edited the literary section, some essays on the role of the artist. Stock's quotations give illustrations of Pound's prose.

> Very clearly in this essay Pound sets out to show that the arts have a place in the community and can be justified because they are a science "just as chemistry is." Where chemistry studies the composition of matter, the arts "give us a great percentage of the lasting and unassailable data regarding the nature of man, of immaterial man, of man considered as a thinking and sentient creature." From medicine, he says, we learn that man thrives best when duly washed, aired and sunned; from the arts we learn that one man differs from another and that they do not resemble each other as do buttons cut by machine. It follows from this that an artist who "falsifies his report," for whatever reason, is no better than a doctor or scientists who falsified his, and should be punished or despised in proportion to the seriousness of his offence. Pound goes on to say that the "touchstone of an art is its precision." In the case of writing it shows in the way an author controls the energy seeking outlet and says just what he means "with complete clarity and simplicity" and using the smallest possible number of words. Poetry he regarded as something like *maximum efficiency of expression*, taking into account that in verse the "thinking, word-arranging, clarifying faculty must move and leap with the energizing, sentient, musical faculties." It is, he says, the difficulty of "this amphibious existence which keeps down the number of good poets."
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> On the difference between poetry and prose he says that certain poignant verse has a passionate simplicity, "which is beyond the precisions of the intellect." As perfect as fine prose is it [poetry] is in some way different; for without violating prose simplicity it goes beyond the clear statement of an observer and brings the intellect into contact with "the passionate moment." Whereas in fine prose the

> intelligence has found a subject for its observations, in the verse something has "come upon" the intelligence. "The poetic fact pre-exists."

Was Pound "religious"? The only statement he made on this subject, Stock says, was "his answer both to Eliot's question about his beliefs and to Eliot's Christianity," in a long article he wrote for the *New Review* of which Samuel Putnam was an editor. It appeared in the 1931-32 Winter issue, and Stock provides this summary:

> It was a long tribute to paganism, especially the mysteries of Eleusis, which he believed had persisted into the Middle Ages shining forth in the songs of Provence. . . . [He] ended by praising anthropology as an "extremely satisfactory" aspect of modern life, giving as an example Frobenius's "profoundly satisfactory account of the old chief who 'was so fine and so healthy' that he was convinced that his soul should go into the soil of Africa and enrich the crops at his death. And you find Pitt-Rivers account of the equally fine old Maori who would not have his people corrupted by the vile practices of British marriages, than which he could conceive nothing worse."

Ezra Pound, for all his talent and occasional insight, was more interested by opportunities to tell stupid people how unbearable they were, than by the invitations of his muse. A very jaunty fellow. Yet, in his way, an unselfish man committed to helping artists he admired and respected. One of human nature's more complicated and contradictory potpourris.

# *COMMENTARY*
## LIGHT AND HEAVY SINS

IN what we hope is justice to the subject of this week's Review, we quote from Hannah Arendt's *Men in Dark Times* (1968) on the tendency of poets to "misbehave":

> We need only remember the case of Ezra Pound. The United States government decided not to put him on trial for treason in wartime, because he could plead insanity, whereupon a committee of poets did, in a way, what the government chose not to—it judged him—and the result was an award for having written the best poetry of 1948. The poets honored him regardless of his misbehavior or insanity. They judged the poet; it was not their business to judge the citizen. And since they were poets themselves, they might have thought in Goethe's terms: *"Dichter sündgen nicht schwer,"* that is, poets should not shoulder such a heavy burden of guilt when they misbehave—one shouldn't take their sins altogether seriously. But Goethe's line had reference to different sins, light sins, such as Brecht speaks of when, speaking of his irrepressible desire to tell the least welcome truths—which, indeed, was one of his great virtues—he says, addressing his womenfolk, "In me you have a man on whom you can't rely," knowing full well that what women want most in their menfolk is reliability—the thing that poets can afford least.

Brecht's major sin was "his ode to Stalin and his praise of Stalin's crimes." So, as Hannah Arendt says, "there are sins and sins."

> Undeniably, Ezra Pound's sins were more serious; it was not merely a case of foolishly succumbing to Mussolini's exercises in oratory. In his vicious radio broadcasts, he went far beyond Mussolini's worst speeches, doing Hitler's business and proving to be one of the worst Jew-baiters among the intellectuals on either side of the Atlantic. To be sure, he had disliked the Jews before the war and has disliked them since, and this dislike is his private affair, of hardly any political importance. It is quite another matter to trumpet this kind of aversion to the world at a moment when Jews are being killed by the millions. However, Pound could plead insanity and get away with things that Brecht, entirely sane and highly intelligent, was not able to get away with. Brecht's sins were smaller than Pound's, yet he sinned more heavily, because he was only a poet, not an insane one.
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> For, despite the poets' lack of gravity, reliability, and responsibility, they obviously can't get away with everything. . .

And there have, after all, been fully responsible poets.

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves
### THE USES OF HISTORY

RECENTLY an eleven-year-old boy we know came home from school and asked for a newspaper—he needed, he said, to find a story to comment on for his social studies class. Well, he found one, and passed juvenile judgment on what it said. This minor event called to mind something written long ago by G. K. Chesterton (in his preface to a book on St. Francis of Assisi):

> Newspapers not only deal with news, but they deal with everything as if it were entirely new. It is exactly in the same fashion that we read that Admiral Bangs has been shot, which is the first intimation we have that he had ever been born. . . . After the Great War our public began to be told of all sorts of nations being emancipated. It had never been told a word about their being enslaved. We were called upon to judge of the justice of the settlements, when we had never been allowed to hear of the very existence of the quarrels.

In an article in the *Los Angeles Times* (Dec. 2, 1974), Carey McWilliams brought this comment up to date, saying:

> Television concentrates exclusively on the present—its beat is today, not yesterday and not tomorrow. The result is to obliterate the past. Yet how can we evaluate the present if we cannot remember the past? . . . So we are breeding, to the extent that we place more and more reliance on television, a new generation of Americans who know little of the immediate past, are obsessed with today, and discount the future.

Young or old, we may not be ready to adopt wholeheartedly the counsel of Thoreau, who said, "Read not the Times, Read the Eternities," yet judgments formed without knowledge of the past—to say nothing of the eternities—are likely to be poorer in quality than an admitted ignorance.

So, for the young (and old), a major need is for a becoming humility instead of skill in turning out snap judgments. There are ways, in other words, of showing how informed opinions are arrived at, and then how the passage of time may alter them. Even a brief sampling of the arguments of Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, in behalf of the Constitution, as a needed replacement of the Articles of Confederation (written as the *Federalist Papers* during 1788), will earn thoughtful respect for the uses of history. In the sixth of the Papers, for example, Hamilton took up the claim that the independent states, loosely related by the Confederation, would be less likely to become involved in wars. He said:

> The genius of republics, say they, is pacific; the spirit of commerce has a tendency to soften the manners of men, and to extinguish those inflammable humours which have so often kindled into wars. Commercial republics like ours [the original thirteen states], will never be disposed to waste themselves in ruinous contentions with each other. They will be governed by mutual interest, and will cultivate a spirit of mutual amity and concord.
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> We may ask these projectors in politics, whether it is not the true interest of all nations to cultivate the same benevolent and philosophic spirit? If this be their true interest, have they in fact pursued it? . . . Have republics in practice been less addicted to war than monarchies? . .
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> Has commerce hitherto done anything more than change the objects of war? Is not the love of wealth as domineering and enterprising a passion as that of power and glory? Have there not been as many wars founded upon commercial motives, since that has become the prevailing system of nations, as were before occasioned by the cupidity of territory or dominion?

He looks to the past for evidence:

> Sparta, Athens, Rome and Carthage were all republics; two of them, Athens and Carthage, of the commercial kind. Yet were they as often engaged in wars, offensive and defensive, as the neighboring monarchies of the same times. Sparta was little better than a well-regulated camp; and Rome was never sated of carnage and conquest. . . . Venice, in latter times, figured more than once in wars of ambition; till becoming an object of terror to the other Italian states, pope Julius the second found means to accomplish that formidable league, which gave a deadly blow to the power and pride of that haughty republic. . . . In the government of Britain the representatives of the people compose one branch of the national legislature. Commerce has been for ages the predominant pursuit of that country. Yet few nations have been more frequently engaged in war; and the wars, in which that kingdom has been engaged, have in numerous instances proceeded from the people. There have been, if I may so express it, almost as many popular as royal wars.

Here, parenthetically, one may recall Barbara Tuchman's comment suggesting that the Vietnam war had wider backing than military or political

motives. There were, she said, defense plants or installations in five sixths of the counties in the United States. Who, she asked, benefits?

> Who profits? Who lobbies in Congress to keep them in operation or to attract new plants where there are none? If you say it is the Pentagon, do not forget the local merchants and manufacturers, the local unions and employers, and the local Congressman whom we put there and whom we can recall. Who pays for our military budget of $85 billion? The taxpayers—who also have the vote. . . .
>
> The failure to end the war is also, in the last resort, civilian, since it is a failure by Congress to cut off appropriations.
>
> And where does that failure trace back to? To where the vote is. I feel bewildered when I hear that easy, empty slogan "Power to the People!" Is there any country in the world whose people have more than ours?

Hamilton's argument was for a strong central government, as provided by the Constitution, maintaining that feuds and conflicts between the states would be less likely if all major decisions were made by the federal authority. He and his colleagues were persuasive indeed, on grounds that now seem self-evident. Occasional samples of their thinking, especially as they may be related to current events, would be of value to us all. Thoughtful teachers could provide them; home-schooling parents, also.

Also to the point would be to call attention to *America Confronts a Revolutionary World* by William Appleman Williams. This historian points to the fact that our strong central government now rules an empire, with all that this implies, throwing into high relief the distinctive virtues of the Articles of Confederation. Conceivably, the provisions of the Constitution were best in 1788, but the decentralizing implication of the Articles may be more appropriate today, when the values of regionalism and unilateral disarmament are slowly becoming major issues.

After recalling material from the *Federalist,* one might turn to Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America,* for further illustration of a quality of thinking that needs to be recovered in the present. While de Tocqueville wrote mainly to point out to his French countrymen the remarkable achievements of American democracy, he was equally aware of what seemed to him the weaknesses of post-revolutionary times. What, he asked in his Introduction (1835), "have we adopted in the place of those institutions, those ideas, and those customs of our forefathers which we have abandoned?"

> The spell of royalty is broken, but it has not been succeeded by the majesty of the laws. The people have learned to despise all authority, but they still fear it; and fear now extorts more than was formerly paid from reverence and love.
>
> I perceive that we have destroyed those individual powers which were able, single-handed, to cope with tyranny; but it is the government alone that has inherited all the privileges of which families, guilds, and individuals have been deprived; to the power of a small number of persons, which if it was sometimes oppressive, was often conservative, has succeeded the weakness of the whole community. . .
>
> The poor man retains the prejudices of his forefathers without their faith, and their ignorance without their virtues; he has adopted the doctrine of self-interest as the rule of his actions without understanding the science that puts it to use; and his selfishness is no less blind than was formerly his devotion to others.

Our interest, here, is in a mode of inquiry, a way of thinking, not in forming "correct opinions." A significant passage in Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution* is suggested by what we have quoted from *Democracy in America.* She pointed out that as a result of the excitement attending adoption of the Constitution, less and less attention was paid by the people to their town meetings—"until what Emerson still considered to be 'the unit of the republic' and 'the school of the people' in political matters had withered away." Lewis Mumford also remarked that the importance of the township was not grasped by the founders (except for Jefferson), and that the failure of the Founders to incorporate the township in either the federal or the state constitutions was "one of the tragic oversights of the post-revolutionary development."

# *FRONTIERS*

## The Long-term Objective

A LITTLE more than twenty years ago, in September of 1962, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* appeared, immediately becoming a best seller and continuing in print to this day. The hard cover sale has been 162,000, with millions in paperback. Houghton Mifflin's editor, Paul Brooks, told a *New York Times* reporter (Sept. 27, 1982) that it was the most important book he worked on, remarking that no one ever found in it an error of fact. While *Silent Spring* led to many regulations of the use of pesticides and was a major contribution to the rise of interest in ecology, other publishers questioned by the *Times* writer reported diminishing interest, today, in environmental studies and ecology. "On the other hand," he says, "some publishers think that much of the money that previously went into buying such books, and much of the concern that went into the ecology movement, have been transferred to the anti-nuclear movement." One publisher told him: "People who once worried about saving the Rockies now worry about saving the earth."

This *Times* story, however, while of interest for the honor it pays to Rachel Carson, seems mainly concerned with trends in the sale of books, neglecting the stable and continuous work in the environmental and ecological area by various groups—the New Alchemists on Cape Cod, Wes Jackson's Land Institute in Salina, Kansas, and Ecology Action on the Peninsula in California. The initial wave of interest in these areas may have receded, but, instead of flotsam and jetsam, it left behind vital centers of research with practitioners engaged in sowing seeds for another kind of future. The *Times* writer did refer to the books issued by the Sierra Club and Rodale Press, but publications of high excellence are now coming from less known sources. For example, the Planet Drum Foundation (Box 31215, San Francisco, Calif. 94131) has issued a three-booklet set, *Eco-Decentralist Design,* consisting of *Figures of Regulation* by Peter Berg, George Tukel's *Toward a Bioregional Model,* and John Todd and Tukel's *Reinhabiting Cities and Towns* (the set $10 postpaid). Rachel Carson, we might say, sounded the alarm, and now, twenty years later, we find much evidence of genuine and lasting response, with a degree of maturity already reached in thinking and acting. The first steps are being taken to transform the existing society into one which understands and even reverences the natural environment.

An early passage in Berg's *Figures of Regulation* (by this he means patterns of restraint and direction) will illustrate:

> There has to be a transition from Late Industrial Society toward shared values, goals and understandings that fit with rather than contend against the regenerative processes of the biosphere. We need to begin building a dwelling in life instead of on top if it.
>
> The rough shape of a post-industrial society is already somewhat visible in the activities and movements that have sprung up within the last few decades to slow down or undo some of the negative effects of the late industrial period. Development of renewable energy, using sustainable methods to grow nutritious food, preserving and restoring endangered species and ecosystems, cooperating in networks to distribute locally food and goods, opposing further encroachment on natural areas by strip-mining or water-diversion projects, and regaining local control over development and land use decisions are hopeful signs that human needs are being considered in terms of the requirements of other life, on this planet. Even though these activities relate to a wide range of society's functions, they aren't all going on in the same place. They provide only a vague outline, as vague as the term "post-industrial" itself. Despite the urgent need to reformulate what society as a whole and individuals in it should reasonably aim to attain, and the methods through which those things should be sought, proposals for a sustainable society are still treated as though they belong in a fantasizing world of utopian science fiction.

Why should such sensible proposals be so regarded, when their content speaks so clearly to our condition? Habit and custom are in the way:

> One of the major reasons for this dilemma is the money-dominated sense of reality that prevails in

> Late Industrial Society, the Productivism that relentlessly favors short-term economic gain over long-term sustainability. Natural resources are chiefly seen in their ability to make money, and there are few limits on using them as rapidly as possible for that purpose. The ultimate test of worth for an activity is whether it "pays the bill." So thoroughly is this accepted as an ethical standard that utility companies can successfully campaign for building nuclear power facilities on the basis that they will save consumers two or three dollars a month on utility bills, regardless of the health or safety risks.
>
> The transition toward a society that fits in with natural processes of the biosphere requires a practical counter-ethic to immediate economic gain. The goal of *reinhabitation*, becoming full members of the life-community where we live, gives substance to the otherwise amorphous shape of post-industrial society. The restoration and maintenance of bioregions, naturally defined locations of natural and human communities, can be the basis of an effective counter-ethic. We can overcome the barriers to making this transition if we establish frameworks of understanding for evaluating methods and activities in terms of their ability to restore and maintain bioregions.

Peter Berg is well aware of the obstacles to learning new ways of thinking. Meanwhile, the present ferment concerning religious ideas and the foundation for ethics should be of help in releasing minds to recognize the obligations he is suggesting. The long-term objective is to establish a society which has customs which are on the side of life. If only a few people start thinking about their lives in terms of the rhythms of the bioregion where they live, what become customs for them will be examples to others. The goal of living which might be to achieve established patterns make talk of "bioregions" unnecessary because people are natural guardians of the life processes involved.

We'll return to the Planet Drum booklets to give attention to the other two. Seldom have we seen better designed reading material, well printed and inviting.