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C^{the}resset



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Above: Joel Sheesley, *Kneeling Down*, 1992, oil on canvas, 68 x 90 inches.

Cover: Joel Sheesley, *Abraham's Puzzle*, 1991, oil on canvas, 62 x 72 inches.

Back cover: Joel Sheesley, *Lot Flees Sodom*, 1991, oil on canvas, 72 x 48 inches.

These paintings are from an October solo Sheesley exhibit at VU. Here this Wheaton College painting professor presents recent realist paintings of young family life in suburbia. Using these images as metaphors of Biblical stories, Sheesley explores hidden ironies in the American suburban dream.

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IN LUCE TUA

In the Middle

We're a long way from what O.P. Kretzmann liked to call the high noon of the twentieth century. Wondering the other day what it might have felt like to be in that middle—I was ten at the time, and not inclined to metaphysics, so it passed me by without my noticing—gave me pause. On so many of today's issues I seem to be in the middle, at least as I sense the boundaries set up by the people who write or speak nationally. In terms of generations, I'm too late for the Silent Generation, too early for the Baby Boomers. I'm also in that group of folks who have children yet to provide for, and parents to worry about. Here too I seem to be in the middle.

More than this, though, the quality of mind which seeks a middle characterizes what is for me most praiseworthy in human endeavor. If I had posters in my office, the Hunk for my wall (if I were being my best self) wouldn't be Gerard Depardieu. My choice would be Cyrus Vance—what a guy! The achievements of the heroic extremist pale before those of the person who can pull two sides closer to a middle. Thus, while the world needed Martin Luther King, Jr., it also needs Will Campbell, understanding and ministering to the Klansman as to the Freedom Rider.

At its worst, of course, this attitude means never having to say you're sorry, because you've never said, done, or thought anything that could bother anyone. Later on, you can always point to your careful non-involvement in any cause. You don't have to establish deniability because you were never in a position to have anything to deny. But at its best, the tendency may spring from and result in strong feelings of connectedness. People on both sides of an issue may have claims—as friends, sisters, parents—such that one cannot dismiss them, and their unwelcome ideology, simply. Thus dialogue becomes a necessity, and exploration, diffidence, and humility a characteristic mode of discourse.

Such a view may explain why, to many people, the old-fashioned academic may seem disconnected from "reality." Crisp decision-making rules the day. Your bumper stickers should be congruent; one seldom sees "Visualize World Peace" and "Support Our Troops" on the same car. But ideally, the academic mind has this capacity

to look around, and in some manner to see both behind and before. To give weight to both past and future inevitably gives a person the sense of being in the middle. The historical view and the prophetic view converge in this: they see the present as a contingent, not a culminating moment.

Now that so much of our public discourse is shaped by the metaphors of struggle and contention—the term "culture wars" being only the most forthright—perhaps we do well to give some effort to thinking in the middle, to the re-establishment of the means of creating middle spaces in our arguments. To some extent, such an activity defines *The Cresset*, one of a decreasing number of journals not devoted to one side or another of a cause, but seeking to give space for a number of positions held by people who desire to be engaged with what they must, at least temporarily, call "the other side."

In this issue, two more articles developed from the Cresset Colloquium occupy the first pages. Professor McGuigan's article is long, and dense, but its careful reasoning and calm deliberation merit attention even from those of us who read philosophy only when prodded by a sharp stick. Professor Duvick applies toliterature the principles of communitarian discourse, providing an elegant demonstration that learning happens best with openness to possibility.

Other articles too describe a spectrum—not certainly the widest one could describe, but nevertheless modestly divergent. Still, their common element seems to me the desire to speak—would "lovingly" be too soft and maternal a term? Before the next *Cresset* appears, all of us will have to have made many choices, and those we make on the ballot are only the most public. My hope is that we work at seeing our choices modestly. To continue with a spatial metaphor, I wish that we could learn to see our choices not so much as a defiant staking out of positions, but rather as necessary interruptions in the process of expanding our common ground.

Peace,

GME

EXCELLENCE AND INCLUSION: AN ARISTOTELIAN ARGUMENT FOR OPENING THE CANON



JoEllen Mitchell McGuigan

As part of my participation in the Cresset Colloquium last spring I was given the opportunity to read and reflect on two recent works written by woman scholars: *Transforming Knowledge* by Elizabeth Minnich and *Love's Knowledge* by Martha Nussbaum. Though there was no particular need to relate the work of one to the other notwithstanding the appearance of "knowledge" in the title of both books it struck me immediately that there was an important point of connection between them. Minnich's book is a critique of the Academy, one designed to promote the inclusion of more work by women and persons of color in the university curriculum. On the other hand, Nussbaum's essays in *Love's Knowledge* present a demonstration of what philosophy done in "a different voice" can be like. As I read Nussbaum's unique treatment of literature and philosophy, as I worked through her cognitivist account of the emotions, as I read and reflected on her insistence that Aristotelian conceptions of rationality and the good life could be highly instructive for us today, I could not help thinking that this was just the sort of work Minnich was proffering for inclusion in the canon, not because its inclusion would satisfy the demands for political correctness, but because the work itself has the potential for transforming our very conception of the world, for constituting, in other words "transforming knowledge" of the sort Minnich places at the heart of the university's enterprise.

While Minnich sometimes made her claims awkwardly, even abrasively, for me there was no mistaking the importance of her fundamental point—traditional conceptions of what counts as knowledge, of what sort of characteristics qualify a work as excellent, have been far too limited to do justice to our students. It is this claim of Minnich's that I want to write about here. Somewhat ironically, I intend to do so not by laying out and analyzing

her particular arguments, but by actually trying to do a bit of philosophy on Nussbaum's Aristotelian model. In these few pages I hope to sketch an Aristotelian conception of distributive justice as applied to the university. In so doing, I intend to suggest at least one justification for opening up the curriculum to the works of women and members of other under-represented groups, by suggesting how our conception of excellence could be enlarged using Aristotelian notions of human flourishing, inclusively understood. But, before I present you with my own ideas, a summary of Nussbaum's arguments for Aristotelian distribution is in order.

I. Nussbaum on Aristotle on Distribution

In recent essays such as "Aristotelian Social Democracy" and "Nature Function and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution" Nussbaum has been exploring the possibility that an Aristotelian conception of justice might provide a real alternative to liberal principles of distribution. This is the case because at the heart of much of Aristotle's work on politics and society lies the fundamental question: what is the good for human beings? It is Nussbaum's belief that controversies over how to allot material wealth, institutional and social opportunities, even political power, cannot be resolved without first confronting this basic question. Her belief stands in contrast to the approach of political philosophers in the liberal tradition such as Mill, or John Rawls in his 1971 *A Theory of Justice*, who approach distributive questions with a steadfastly agnostic attitude toward the possessions, objects, experiences, activities, and opportunities that we ought to hold constitutive of a good human life.

At best, theorists like Rawls have only a "thin" theory of good which validates only those "primary" goods assumed to be desired by any person regardless of her general conception of a life well lived. Utilitarians share with Rawls an aversion to promoting one conception of the good for persons over another, being generally skeptical of an account of the good that could have determinate content and be objectively validated. As a result they leave

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to the particular preferences of individual persons the resolution of what is choiceworthy and what is not. Of course there are many critical differences between Rawls' theory and utilitarianism, the most important of which is Rawls' deontological orientation. But in approaching distributive questions with no articulate theory of the good, such political theorists fall back on the principle of maximization as at least one main device of their distributive approach. Thus, as Nussbaum points out, Rawls takes it to be evident that if some wealth and income is necessary to any life, and therefore in that sense some wealth and income constitute primary goods, it can also be assumed that "most persons prefer a greater, rather than a smaller share of wealth and income" (Rawls, 396). Similarly it is the distinguishing feature of utilitarianism most generally understood, that the maximization overall of whatever is preferred or desired by persons is the goal of any efficient distribution.

Aristotle's central placement of the question of what is the good for humans stands as a challenge to the notion that a general principle of maximization could ever be an adequate basic approach to distributive issues. From his perspective, it is not possible to assume that more wealth is better than less wealth, without understanding how riches affect human excellence and the possibility of actually achieving a life well lived. On an Aristotelian view, external goods, like any tool, all have a limit of instrumental use that can only be established by reference to what such goods are actually useful for. Without a contentful general theory of the good, such a reference cannot be made. Perhaps more importantly, the Aristotelian would hold that without a rich theory of the good, there is no means by which to distinguish merely instrumental from intrinsic goods. Hence, distributive schemes which aim at maximization of undifferentiated particular goods without any theory of how they relate to a human life well-lived are fundamentally incoherent.

Of course for the proponent of any specific vision of the good, the problem has always been to objectively legitimate its substantive content, to establish it as *the* justified account over competing alternatives. But, the Aristotelian has a plausible response to this problem, for from her perspective, the good for human beings can be articulated by reference to human nature, which in turn yields the notion of excellent human functioning, or, full human flourishing. From this perspective, only possessions, objects, experiences, activities and opportunities that actually promote full *human* flourishing should be subject to distribution, and then only in the right amounts. Hence, not every preference or desire implies a distributive claim and the device of maximization ceases to have any favored status in the system of allotment. We

need not, for instance, count the desire for tobacco as equivalent to the desire for knowledge in trying to determine a just distribution of available social resources.

Taking her lead from Aristotle then, it is Nussbaum's view that "the things that one cannot have too much and more is always better than less" are "the capabilities out of which excellent functioning, doing well and living well, can be selected" (Nussbaum 1988, 152). Hence, the purpose of political arrangements is and ought to be to "effect the transition from one level of [human] capacity to another" (146). And, thus, the best distributive scheme is the one that best provides the persons subject to it with the necessary conditions of their fully human flourishing.

Now it is not Nussbaum's project simply to argue for the superiority of the Aristotelian conception of the good over accounts that remain agnostic on the question of what is choiceworthy for humans and take the task of good political arrangements to be to maximize our given desires or preferences overall, whether they be for push-pin, daytime TV or great works of art. The intuitive appeal of liberal conceptions of liberty make establishing the superiority of the Aristotelian vision difficult, complex and controversial. While Nussbaum's work has contributed significantly to the whole debate between communitarians and liberals, it is also a central aim of her writing to develop the distributive implications of the Aristotelian approach to their fullest in order to demonstrate its potential as an inclusive democratic vision. It is this aspect of her analysis that I want to exploit in my application of her views to the university. But how does Nussbaum hope to convince us that Aristotelianism has within it a rich theory of the good that promotes just distributions and is also inclusive? To understand this aspect of her work, it is necessary to connect the Aristotelian understanding of the good as excellent human functioning to notions of human capacity and eligibility for membership in the polity.

II. Human Functioning, Human Excellence, and Virtue.

It is the key piece in Nussbaum's argument that attention to human nature will yield, at an acceptable level of generality, just one determinate set of human functionings from which correlative particular goods may be ascertained. Of course it is just this claim that liberal political theorists question. Nonetheless, in her view, these are the goods that turn out to be constituents of the good life, in that they enable us to effectuate a multiplicity of uniquely human functionings by enabling us to develop a diversity of capabilities correlative to those functionings. It is this last move, from function to capacity, that contains the democratic implications Nussbaum wants to develop

and extend from the Aristotelian vision. But not just any sort of activity undertaken by a human being constitutes uniquely *human* functioning and so not just any capacity possessed by humans constitutes a basis for particular distributive claims. To hold otherwise would be to reformulate the Aristotelian vision into a kind of liberalism where every capacity possessed by a person—be it for drug addiction or cruelty—would give rise to a potential distributive claim, regardless of whether the exercise of that capacity promotes excellent human functioning or not. Clearly, the Aristotelian conception of *human* functioning and its relation to human capacity must be understood before the plausibility of its power to provide us with a contentful theory of the good can be assessed. The classic statement of this conception is found in Aristotle's argument connecting the good with excellent human functioning found in Book One of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In the beginning sections of Book One, Aristotle has posed the question of what ends we pursue for their own sake, and not for the sake of other ends. In response, he identifies happiness as such an end:

Now happiness is thought to be such an end most of all, for it is this that we choose always for its own sake and never for the sake of something else; and as for honor and pleasure and intellect and every virtue, we choose them for their own sake...but we also choose them for the sake of happiness, believing that through these we shall be happy, but no one chooses happiness for the sake of these, nor, in general, for the sake of some other thing. (EN. 1097b1-6)

On these grounds, Aristotle identifies happiness with the good, for he holds that only that which we pursue for its own sake can constitute the good.

But, the point of the arguments in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to demonstrate the best way to live, not to establish the foundation for an ethical philosophy grounded in hedonism. So, it is Aristotle's task to generate content for this notion of the good that goes beyond an identification of happiness with that which we pursue for its own sake. This he does by associating real happiness with excellent human functioning:

Perhaps to say that happiness is the highest good is something which appears to be agreed upon; what we miss, however, is a more explicit statement as to what it is. Perhaps this might be given if the function of a man is taken into consideration. For just as in a flute-player or a statue-maker or any artist or, in general, in anyone who has a function or an *action* to perform the goodness or excellence lies in that function, so it would seem to be the case in a man, if indeed he has a function. But, should we

hold that while a carpenter and a shoemaker have certain functions or *actions* to perform, a man has none at all, but is by nature without a function? Is it not more reasonable to posit that, just as an eye and a hand and a foot and any part of the body in general appear to have certain functions, so a man has some function other than these? What then should that function be? (EN. 1097b20-33)

To warrant this move from an undifferentiated notion of the good as happiness to a contentful conception of the good as human functioning, Aristotle has to demonstrate that there is some function unique to human beings alone. This he does by identifying the life of a human being as "the life of *action* of a being who has reason" (EN. 1098a3-5). While we share a life of nutrition and growth with plants and also a life of perception with animals, we are unique in the worldly scheme of things as beings who possess the capacity to act, reflectively and according to reason. As a result, any conception of the good for man, of happiness for man as a species being with unique attributes, will have to take the human capacity to act according to reason into account, in fact will have to give it a central position. So, following the identification of the good with happiness, happiness in turn with human functioning, and unique human functioning with our capacity to act as reason dictates, Aristotle believes that he is justified to "posit the function of a man to be a certain kind of life, namely, activity or *actions* of the soul with reason" (EN. 1098a13-14). Moreover, this does not provide us with a minimal standard of human functioning only, for "the function of a man is generically the same as that of a good man, like that of a lyre player and a good lyre player" (EN. 1098a9-10) so that "excellence with respect to virtue" ought to be added to that function. Hence, "the good for man turns out to be an activity of the soul [reason] according to virtue..." (EN. 1098a15-17). Hence, the "good for man" just *is* excellent human functioning, where the identification of excellence with virtue is understood.

Now Aristotle does not give the term "virtue" its modern meaning of moral rectitude with connotations of chasteness, virginity and the like. Rather, he wants to explain virtue and its correlative, excellence, by reference to action and to use it in his analysis to establish that the best human life is the one the strives for the realization of practical wisdom. So later in Book Two, Aristotle tells us:

[Ethical] virtue, then, is a habit, disposed toward action by deliberate choice, being at the mean relative to us, and defined by reason, as a prudent man would define it. It is a mean between two vices, one by excess and the other by deficiency; and while some of the vices exceed while the others are deficient in what is

right in feelings and *actions*, virtue finds and chooses the mean. (EN. 1106b35-1107a5)

By these various arguments, Aristotle has taken us from the good, to happiness, to human functioning, and then finally, to excellent human functioning as the undertaking of our actions in accordance with practical reason, that is, as the performing of actions deliberately chosen in accordance with virtue, where virtue is understood as the disposition to effect actions that practical reason establishes as being at the mean relative to us. But what real relevance does this theory of the good have for political questions about how to distribute a society's wealth and opportunity? From Nussbaum's perspective it is simply this: on an Aristotelian model, the good society does not just aim at increasing wealth, at enlarging the GNP, but rather it actively promotes the excellent human functioning, the full human flourishing, of its members. And, this goal has rather significant distributive implications of both a negative and a positive sort. It serves to limit the list of goods subject to the distribution to those things that promote or effectuate excellent human functioning. And, with regard to these, it requires that each individual receive only the amount that best promotes her functioning, not necessarily the amount she desires. Following the negative implications of a view such as this, for example, we would not have to count the smoker's desire for more and more cigarettes as something that social resources ought to be devoted to satisfying. We would have an articulate reason to justify choosing to spend resources on things like art and education and medical care instead.

But, perhaps an even more striking distributive effect of Aristotle's theory of the good is that it provides rather strong arguments for the notion of positive entitlements to societal resources like education, health care and more. If the good for human beings just is excellent human functioning, and if the good society just is one that takes as its prime purpose the promotion of that sort of functioning in its members, then the good society has a positive obligation, within the limits of its resources, to provide them with the things that they need to flourish—from basic goods such as food and shelter, to more complex resources like a fine education, sports and artistic experiences, appropriate contexts within which to raise children, outlets for sexuality and other forms of personal expression, opportunities to politically participate, chances to meet others and to communicate with them in friendship, outlets for spirituality, chances to enjoy beauty, opportunities to develop a special skill, trade or hobby and the like. All of these things would qualify as goods to be distributed, because they are all important in some way to

make full human functioning possible and each relates in some sense to various human capacities. Following an Aristotelian conception like this, a society that wished to be counted as good would not leave the development of the functioning of its members to the exigencies of the market and one's possibility of fully flourishing would not depend on the accidents of one's birth. Now, while the Aristotelian conception generates a rather impressive list of positive entitlements, some argue that it tells us nothing about *who* is to qualify as a recipient of such a distribution. It has been an effective liberal critique of the Aristotelian political vision that Aristotle himself promoted the superiority of an aristocracy, denigrated women, justified slavery and excluded common working people from political participation, among other things. Nonetheless, Nussbaum asserts that contained within the broader distributive implications of Aristotle's approach to the good is an argument for an inclusive, a democratic, vision of the proper way to allot society's resources. Nussbaum takes it as part of her project to reconstruct Aristotle and by so doing, to liberate the Aristotelian vision from its aristocratic, anti-democratic past.

III. Capacity, Practical Reason, and Inclusion

From an analysis of various clues in the text, even including attention to Aristotle's infamous treatment of women and slaves, Nussbaum concludes that the necessary and sufficient condition for qualifying as a recipient of a just distribution is possessing *by one's very nature* a less developed capability, a basic capacity, to eventually perform the particular actions required by the context of one's life in accordance with practical reason. The core notion here is that the dictates of practical reason, determined by reference to an embedded potential life history, generate a number of human functions, of potential human excellences that can be related back to basic capabilities that give rise to their possible actual exercise when nurtured by appropriate education and other resources. This general criterion can be reduced to the notion that persons who possess, by their nature, a minimum practical rational capacity that could be developed by the receipt of social resources like education are entitled to be included in the distribution.

Now members of groups that have been excluded from political participation and stunted in societal distributive schemes are understandably wary of an approach to eligibility for full membership in the polity based on one's capacity for rationality. After all, it was just this criterion that Aristotle believed women and slaves could not satisfy by their very nature. Some hold that the notion of rationality itself is so ambiguous, so flexible, that

it can be manipulated easily to provide a seemingly neutral basis for excluding certain human beings subject to a political system that affects and controls them from any claim to participation in it. This is a serious problem and one that cannot be easily resolved. Much of Nussbaum's work on distributive justice, however, consists in suggesting how this challenge might be met *within* a general Aristotelian framework by using the broad strategy of logically extending and developing the implications of fundamental Aristotelian notions consistently. From Nussbaum's perspective, Aristotle himself failed to consistently analyze the requirements of his own basic doctrines when he wrote about women, slaves and laborers.

Where might we go then in Aristotle's work to obtain a more specific understanding of the general requirement of the capacity to become practically wise? How can we understand how to tailor this basic notion to the circumstances of particular lives, lived in specific context by persons who have individual, but undeveloped, latent talents that might be relevant to a multiplicity of special human functionings performed in myriad circumstances? How can we in turn transform what we find into modern arguments for inclusion within an Aristotelian framework? In my view the richest source in Aristotle's own work is the *practical*, the context sensitive, aspect of practical reason.

Aristotle's basic notion of practical reason suffers from a certain ambiguity that we can see replicated in Nussbaum's analysis of the correlative concepts of human functioning and human capacity. This is the case because practical reason possesses some attributes that are very difficult to understand, stemming from its functional nature. While Aristotle sometimes talks as though the person who is practically wise possesses a general abstract property that exhibits *the* quintessential human attribute, it is also quite clear from the manner in which he works out the details of his theory that the notion of practical wisdom can only receive its determinate content in use, when practical reason is being exercised to dictate virtuous action in particular circumstances. Understood in this way, the notion of practical reason has a kind of modal quality to it, for it captures the notion of the possibility of choosing to behave in a certain manner in a future context. To be practically wise just *is* to act in response to specific conditions as the prudent person would, that is, to conform one's conduct to generate only those actions that are "at the mean, relative to us" in our particular circumstance. To think of practical reason in its potential state, then, is to think of it as a general disposition to act in such a way on particular occasions. To think of it in its actual state is to conceive of it in terms of actual choices made, of determinate performed actions undertaken in context, all of which exhibit behavior stemming from one's

general disposition, from one's general capacity to be practically wise, but each of which displays conduct at the mean, relative to the actor in her particular circumstance.

As a result, practical reason is constituted *both* by a general disposition *and* a series of actual deeds undertaken by particular persons in response to requirements for action stemming from real life. It is not surprising then, that we can become confused over whether practical reason refers to *one* general human functioning, or *many*, whether it is foreshadowed by *one* general human capacity, or *many particular* capabilities that might be activated in the circumstances of individual cases. This is important to efforts both to understand and extend the implications of Aristotle's views, because the more and varied the functions and capabilities that the notion of practical reason supports, the more and diverse are the persons who can stake their claim to inclusion in the distribution. In my view, a correct analysis of practical reason combines both its general and particular aspects, both its potential and actual manifestations, but places the greatest emphasis on its context sensitive character. To analyze it otherwise is simply to denigrate its *practical* character. Practical reason is that which enables us to live well by enabling us to choose to act, when required by the exigencies of our situation, in a manner that conforms to the dictates of virtue in the actual circumstance presented. As such, it allows, even presupposes, reference to diverse human contexts, to diverse correlative capabilities and, most importantly, to diverse human actions and actors in the determination of who is entitled to be included in a just distribution of any policy's material wealth and social opportunities.

To put my argument in another way, the contexts of practical reason range over all human endeavors with social value, including those previously undertaken just by women, or slaves or laborers. Moreover, the association of excellence with practical reason, and practical reason in turn with the myriad contexts of human life as it is actually lived, counts against an elitist, exclusionist understanding of that term. A person is excellent, a work is excellent, an institution is excellent in Aristotelian terms insofar as each reflects the unique human capacity for acting in accordance with practical reason in the context at hand. In attempting to amass knowledge, to understand our human predicament, to forge a society that works, we cannot treat some contexts that are obviously essential to human life as though they are meaningless, simply because they have been the circumstances to which the less powerful in our society have been consigned. Nor can we afford to view the practical wisdom, the knowledge gained in those settings, as somehow not excellent because it is possessed by those who have not been included in the past.

The Aristotelian conception of practical reason has no determinable content, in fact is powerless to supply us with a rich theory of the good, unless we are willing to recognize that by its very nature it requires diversity for its meaning. If we recognize the essential importance of diversity for our rich theory of the good, the distributive implications of our theory must be inclusively understood as well.

In developing his specific ideas about the virtues of character, in attempting to show the significance of practical reason in various contexts, Aristotle described many human endeavors and activities that he obviously valued and in regard to which he believed humans could function excellently and attain practical wisdom. He talked about the lyre player and the general, the ship's captain and the carpenter. In addition, he should have talked about the wife tending her child or cooking food, about the slave tending her master, about the laborer planting the fields, for each provides a context of unique human endeavor of *human* function that can be done well or ill, that can be performed through actions chosen in accordance with reason or not. As such, each provides a circumstance in which the unique human capacity to be practically wise is essential and can yield knowledge valuable for all. Unless we are willing to hold with Aristotle that women and persons of color and common laborers are indeed different sorts of beings altogether, unless we are willing to agree that they have a different species-being that does not allow for their capacity to be practically wise, we cannot exclude them from full participation in the distribution of a just society.

IV. Distribution and the University

As I mentioned at the beginning of this piece, it was my intention to apply the distributive implications of Nussbaum's recent work to the university in general, in order to make an argument for the inclusion of scholarly work by women, persons of color, and members of other under-represented groups in the canon. Many claims have been made for such inclusion based on intuitive notions of fairness. Mine has a different focus and consists basically in this point: if the university can be thought to embody a thick theory of the good on an Aristotelian model, then consistency requires that it be committed to diversity in the allocation of all the resources that it represents. The canon is one such resource subject to apportionment, and so it should contain the excellent works of members of the polity generated from all socially useful contexts. What follows is a brief sketch of the argument supporting these claims. I begin my analysis with a number of explicit assumptions.

The first is that access to education in general and to

a university education of a particular kind is a societal resource subject to distributive claims. While for the purposes of my argument, the university should be thought of as a resource, it should also be conceived of as a society within a society, charged with making distributions within its own sphere and subject to scrutiny on the question of whether those distributions are just and consistent with its mission, again understood on an Aristotelian model.

The second is that there is an abundance of excellent scholarly work by women, persons of color and others from under-represented groups that could be included within the curriculum. I take it as simply not plausible, as false, that the reason for the absence of such work is its non-existence or its lack of merit. This is especially the case when one gives excellence its particularly Aristotelian twist and associates it with the core notion of practical reason. I invite anyone who questions these claims to actually survey the work that is available, that has been available for a very long time and that is being generated currently in order to make an independent evaluation. In making this evaluation, I would urge the reader to also consider that this work carries with it additional value, because it represents practical wisdom generated from contexts that we do not know enough about.

Finally, I take it as non-controversial that the students attending the university will continue to come from more and more diverse backgrounds, from more and different racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, geographic and class contexts and that the high enrollment of women, especially at the undergraduate level, will continue. Moreover, I take it that these phenomena are positive, and that such students represent a particularly various set of human capacities and potentially excellent human functions that need to be developed.

One of the most important aspects of my argument is constituted by the claim that on an Aristotelian model, education is perhaps *the* critical social resource subject to distribution. This is true because of the connection between nascent human capacities and excellent human functionings. While it is very difficult to develop one's capacities, one's talents, without basic goods such as food and shelter, education is that resource which most brings out the unique human facility for reason, as it is to be applied practically in various contexts, so that full human flourishing is possible. It is an obvious subtext of Aristotle's work that providing education to human beings, so that they may learn how to live well, is perhaps the most important task of the good society.

The university's role in this general endeavor is quite obvious. While some might hold that the university is to be removed from the general society to provide a place of peace and quiet contemplation for the development of

abstract knowledge, of, as Aristotle calls it *theoria*, closer attention to his arguments will reveal that it is also to be a repository of practical wisdom, of *phronesis*. This is true in part because the university is to be an integrated component of the whole society, and as such, actively involved in realizing its general goals. And, the very projects that provide the subject matter for study are those that arise from the context of real life. It is an essential aspect of Aristotle's own methodology that he culled his ethical, political, and philosophical problems from real life, that he thought the knowledge really worth pursuing arose in the first instance from the actual context of human existence. Such a view of knowledge places central emphasis on the notion of practical wisdom and creates the implication that such wisdom is complementary, or perhaps even continuous, with more abstract learning conceived on the model of *theoria*. Thus on an Aristotelian account, practical wisdom lies at the heart of the university's enterprise.

If the university is to be a repository for practical wisdom, it is even more important to realize that it is perhaps the prime societal institution in which humans will actually be encouraged to fulfill the development of their disposition to act from reason according to virtue. Within the context of the university, students are to have the opportunity to develop habits of choosing to act with reason according to virtue, that is, of bringing forth their latent capacity to effect actions that practical reason establishes as being at the mean relative to them. They cannot achieve this general goal if the body of wisdom available in the university is radically incomplete, because it does not provide for all of the contexts of human endeavor in which excellent human functioning is called for, because it does not include teaching by persons who have achieved the state of practical wisdom in those contexts, or because it limits exposure to just those scholarly works legitimated by the traditional canon.

Practical wisdom is also more easily developed in the young of a society, when they can identify some of their teachers and some of their texts with the circumstances of their own lives. At the moment, we tolerate a state of affairs in American universities in which a very high proportion of our students are never exposed to work written by members of their own gender, race or class. It was my own experience to go through the course work and the comprehensive examinations for an entire Ph.D. program in philosophy without ever once being called upon to read a work written by a woman. How can the university be performing its mission in accordance with a rich theory of the good founded on diverse and excellent human functioning, when so many aspects of life and so much practical wisdom is being denied to the very students

whose capacities we are endeavoring to develop? Certainly we are not preparing them to go out and to live in accordance with virtue in the myriad contexts within which they will be called upon to act, so long as the domain of knowledge available in the university is so restricted.

Finally, all students with the capability ought to be given the opportunity to develop their capacity to become true scholars, if we are serious about applying the distributive implications of Aristotle's conception of the good to the university. Scholars need recognized outlets for their work and in order to make that work meaningful and authentic, they also need to draw on their life experiences in developing it. The possibility of having one's work included in the canon cannot be ignored as the logical extension of one's project as a scholar. By including women and persons of color in the university community, as the Aristotelian conception of the good society requires, we are obliged to accept the real possibility that their work be included in the curriculum, on pain of inconsistency if we fail to do so.

I have been particularly interested to apply an Aristotelian analysis of distributive issues to the university, because it seems to me to be one institution in society that is already committed to achieving a rich theory of the good. This is even more true of a university with a dedication to the Christian tradition, because of that tradition's commitment to the moral equality of persons and the inclusive implications that that commitment entails. I have intended to make an argument that does not fall back on intuitive appeals to fairness, powerful though those might be; rather it has been my desire to convince you that failing to open up the canon to the works of diverse scholars involves a failure of the very enterprise of the university itself. If we take it as our charge to promote fully human flourishing in the university environment, if we see it as our role to help bring forth the myriad human functionings out of the various human capacities of all of our students, if we place the development of practical wisdom at the core of our undertaking, then we cannot present a curriculum to our students that ignores the many, many rich and varied contexts out of which such capacities and functioning, such practical wisdom, spring. □

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“REMEMBER, THIS IS WRITING YOU’RE READING”: MARTHA NUSSBAUM, HENRY JAMES, FORM AND CONTENT

Randa J. Duvick

As part of the academic community, and particularly as a teacher of literature and language, I spend a good deal of time thinking and talking about the relationship between texts’ form and their content. How does one best guide students through texts as different—and yet as similar—as those of Marcel Proust and those of Nathalie Sarraute? How does one write an effective grant proposal? How does one convince a student that the way she writes is as important as what she writes?

I was excited, then, to discover that the form-content issue is at the heart of Martha Nussbaum’s *Love’s Knowledge*. What she calls the “project” of this collection of essays is in fact an exploration of what she sees as the interdependent relationship between philosophy and literature. A moral philosopher, she is concerned at bottom with exploring the question “How should one live?” For Nussbaum, the search for answers to this question must be wide-ranging, must be sensitive, must be loving. And importantly, she sees this search not only expressed in philosophical texts, but embodied in the forms and structures of novels. She argues that, precisely because of their nature as narrative, novels can investigate and express certain fundamental truths in ways that philosophical writings cannot. Her proposal is “that we should *add* the study of certain novels to the study of [recognized great philosophical works in ethics], on the grounds that without them we will not have a fully adequate statement of a powerful ethical conception” (27).

Narrative fiction constitutes a particularly appropriate vehicle for the Aristotelian point of view she takes up: her

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exploration of “An Aristotelian Conception of Private and Public Rationality” argues for making moral choices based on both the particularity and the context of the situation in which the decision-maker finds herself. As Nussbaum expresses it in a recent article in the *Times Literary Supplement*, “The whole of character is taken to be available for ethical cultivation; and human goodness requires not just obeying certain external rules, but also forming choice, desire, passion and attention, in a comprehensive and exacting way over the course of an entire life” (TLS 10). A novel sets before us people in situations with choices to make; shows us the results of those choices; allows us to observe the growth or at least the changes in characters who must choose their actions according to new knowledge and changed situations. The novelist can show us “the course of an entire life,” can create characters who are “forming choice, desire, passion and attention.” We can learn from the lives of characters who are sincerely seeking moral truth, characters who are “finely aware and richly responsible,” as Henry James puts it in the preface to *The Princess Casamassima*.

A central component in Nussbaum’s project linking philosophy and the novel is her desire “to suggest, with Aristotle, that practical reasoning unaccompanied by emotion is not sufficient for practical wisdom” (40). Just as philosophical prose by itself is not sufficient to answer the question of how to live, she contends, intellectual calculation cannot alone lead to moral wisdom. Nussbaum argues that, according to the Aristotelian view, the fact that emotions are directly connected to some of our most deeply-held ideas about what is important means that in some cases those emotions are more trustworthy than calculated intellectual reasoning. And indeed, in a novel, not only do the characters feel and often act according to those feelings, giving the reader a more realistic representation of life situations in which moral choices are made, the reader is also emotionally caught up in the story, with the characters—and thus led by her emotional involvement to a truer understanding of the moral lesson to be learned.

Nussbaum carries out her project in part by

examining the search for moral truth as that search is represented in works of fiction by Henry James, Marcel Proust, Samuel Beckett, Charles Dickens and Ann Beattie. Nussbaum does not argue that *any* work of fiction can lead us to a deeper understanding of how to live: "the claim is," she says, "that only the style of a certain sort of narrative artist . . . can adequately state certain important truths about the world . . ." (6). James, in particular, holds Nussbaum's attention; his works form the object of three of the essays of *Love's Knowledge*, and his works of fiction and his writings on the role of the novelist appear throughout the collection. If Nussbaum spends much time exploring the moral dilemmas, the internal debates, the dance of relationship among the characters of James's work, it is in part because of the sympathy in their ideas; both hold that, as Nussbaum puts it, "fine attention and good deliberation require a highly complex, nuanced perception of, and emotional response to, the concrete features of one's own context" (7). But beyond this, there is a particular fit between the Jamesian form and the content, the nature, of the Aristotelan search that Nussbaum describes. There is something in James's prose, says Nussbaum, that "unfold[s] before us the richness of its reflection" (141), that shows the "bewildering complexity" of moral choice (142), that "convey[s] the active adventure of the deliberative intelligence" (142). She describes his prose as "linguistically fine-tuned" and "metaphorically resourceful" (157), speaks of the "sheer difficulty of James's later style" (as exemplified in *The Golden Bowl*), which creates "consciousness of our own flaws and blind spots" (144). I would like to explore in more depth how it is that James constructs a form—a style—that embodies this rich and sensitive search for moral truth and meaning.

A study of style is more than a list of techniques used by an author. At its best, stylistic commentary works in context, showing the inseparability of form and content in a particular passage or a particular work. Stylistic commentary should, indeed, itself be "finely aware" as it helps the reader to a richer understanding of a text. The study of style that I undertake here builds on Nussbaum's discussion of *The Golden Bowl*. The book's focus, of course, is the relationships among the rich American industrialist and art collector Adam Verver, his daughter Maggie, and their respective spouses, Charlotte (a friend of Maggie's) and the Italian prince Amerigo. In the passage under consideration here, Maggie has just discovered that her husband and Charlotte had been lovers before either of the two was married. Nussbaum's study of the characters' moral compass—how they judge what is right and wrong, and therefore how to act—shows that Maggie has always, heretofore, judged according to rules, logic, intellect: her moral world has consisted of air-tight compartments that did not admit flexibility. This "simple" view of the world is beginning to change, just as the golden bowl with the

hidden flaw—which Charlotte had considered, but rejected, as a wedding gift for Maggie and Amerigo—has been broken. Here, Maggie and Amerigo are alone together for the first time since Maggie has discovered the truth about his past. Maggie begins to realize that her reactions to this complex world of human relationships must become more flexible.

Amerigo, meanwhile, after all, could clearly make the most of her having enjoined on him to wait—suggested it by the positive pomp of her dealings with the smashed cup; to wait, that is, till she should pronounce as Mrs. Assingham had promised for her. This delay, again, certainly tested her presence of mind—though that strain was not what presently made her speak. Keep her eyes, for the time, from her husband's as she might, she soon found herself much more drivingly conscious of the strain on his own wit. There was even a minute, when her back was turned to him, during which she knew once more the strangeness of her desire to spare him, a strangeness that had already, fifty times, brushed her, in the depth of her trouble, as with the wild wing of some bird of the air who might blindly have swooped for an instant into the shaft of a well, darkening there by his momentary flutter the far-off round of sky. It was extraordinary, this quality in the taste of her wrong which made her completed sense of it seem rather to soften than to harden, and it was the more extraordinary the more she had to recognize it; for what it came to was that, seeing herself finally sure, knowing everything, having the fact, in all its abomination, so utterly before her that there was nothing else to add—what it came to was that, merely by being *with* him there in silence, she felt, within her, the sudden split between conviction and action. They had begun to cease, on the spot, surprisingly, to be connected; conviction, that is, budged no inch, only planting its feet the more firmly in the soil—but action began to hover like some lighter and larger, but easier form, excited by its very power to keep above ground. It would be free, it would be independent, it would go in—wouldn't it?—for some prodigious and superior adventure of its own. What would condemn it, so to speak, to the responsibility of freedom—this glimmered on Maggie even now—was the possibility, richer with every lapsing moment, that her husband would have, on the whole question, a new need of her, a need which was in fact being born between them in these very seconds. It struck her truly as so new that he would indeed, absolutely, by this circumstance, be *really* needing her for the first time in their whole connection. . . .

(*The Golden Bowl*, Book Second, Chapter XXXIV)

How does James's style represent, even embody, the way in which Maggie approaches this new beginning of moral understanding, and the *kind* of understanding that she is learning about, an understanding characterized by nuance, sensitivity to context, caring for emotion? I would like to discuss briefly several of the techniques that James uses in this paragraph, and then show how those techniques work together to build what is perhaps the central sentence of the passage, the sentence in which Maggie feels for the first time the beginnings of change in her understanding of moral truth.

A listing of the stylistic devices used by James in this

passage would include the following: repetition of vocabulary and of syntactic forms; the placement of elements like adverbs or prepositional phrases in such a way as to "interrupt" a sentence's syntactic flow; the use of deictics (words such as "it" or "this," whose meaning resides in the word or words for which they are standing in) whose referent appears after the deictic rather than before it; and the juxtaposition of abstract vocabulary with concrete vocabulary. An example of each of these techniques in the passage under consideration will help us to understand how James is constructing a rich and nuanced context for Maggie's discovery.

The first instance of repetition occurs in the opening sentence of the passage: "Amerigo . . . could clearly make the most of her having enjoined on him *to wait*—suggested it by the positive pomp . . . ; *to wait*, that is, till she should. . . ." The repetition serves several functions here. It works as a sort of syntactic signpost: after the explanatory phrase "suggested it by the pomp of her dealing with the smashed cup," which tells us how Amerigo knew she had "told" him to wait, the reader's attention is brought back to this verb and then led onward as we discover for what Amerigo is to wait ("till she should pronounce . . ."). After the explanatory "digression," we are led back to the point. Repetition also places extra emphasis on the verb "to wait," whose meaning is echoed in the first words of the following sentence: "This *delay*." We will see that *waiting* is in fact crucial just now for Maggie: she is aware of her husband's presence and of the change in their relationship that is at that moment taking place, and she needs time to let the change unfold in her. Further on in the paragraph James repeats the word "strangeness": ". . . the *strangeness* of her desire to spare him, a *strangeness* that had already. . . ." Again, its repetition draws attention to this word; it underlines Maggie's consciousness that she is reacting in a way she would not have reacted before: with "a desire to spare [her husband]." The second occurrence of the word "strangeness" serves as the springboard for a long and complex image that equates this "strangeness" with "the wild wing of some bird" whose flutter darkens the sky for a moment. Repetition thus makes possible amplification, giving the reader a richer understanding of Maggie's feeling of strangeness, and deeper insight into her state of mind.

One of the most vivid impressions that I have on reading James is that his sentences are constantly *interrupted* by words and phrases that comment, clarify, or qualify in some way. Often, these "interruptions" are set off by commas, affecting the sentence's pace and rhythm: "Amerigo, meanwhile, after all, could clearly make . . ."; "to wait, that is, till . . ."; "This delay, again, certainly tested . . ."; "Keep her eyes, for the time, from her husband . . ."; "A strangeness that had already, fifty times, brushed her, in the depth of her trouble. . . ." The "interruptions" frequently work on the level of the narrative—the telling of the story—to *guide* the reader in some way: "that is" lets

the reader know that an explanation of sorts is to follow; "again" points out that in speaking of "delay," the author is picking up the theme of waiting previously explored. Thus, the author shows us the relationships between different parts of the text. Other "interruptions" add information, as in "A strangeness that had already, fifty times, brushed her. . . ." The phrase "fifty times" here tells us of the pervasiveness of the "strangeness" Maggie feels: the separation of the auxiliary verb and its past participle ("had . . . brushed") by this phrase, with the fact that it is set it off by commas, breaks up the sentence's rhythm and highlights the phrase, leading us to see the intensity and the importance of this new feeling for Maggie. This frequent "interruption" in James's sentences is a device by which James weaves a more complete and more complex textual fabric, allowing us to experience with his characters the difficulties and the hesitations of life, obliging us to recognize relationships within the text. As with James's text, so with life: reading demands, as does the working-through of issues of moral truth, careful attention, concern for qualification and nuance. We cannot plunge straight ahead through James's text any more than we should plunge straight ahead through life's moral dilemmas.

This last image—Maggie feeling that the strangeness of her desire to spare her husband is like a bird darkening the sky—is an example of the juxtaposition of concrete and abstract that occurs in this paragraph, and throughout *The Golden Bowl*. What Maggie is feeling, the change taking place in her, her search for moral rightness, exists on an abstract level; this abstraction is, however, presented by way of a concrete image ("the wild wing of some bird . . ."). In the same way, in the following sentence, the "split between conviction and action," the new moral complexity of which Maggie is becoming aware, is also expressed in concrete images: conviction "plant[ed] its feet the more firmly in the soil," while "action began to hover. . . ." The juxtaposition of concrete and abstract calls on the reader to *imagine* conviction with feet, to *imagine* action as hovering, helping the reader to understand better, I believe, the change taking place in Maggie. Encountering and trying to understand these images, the reader is involved in "an activity of exploration and unraveling that uses abilities . . . of emotion and imagination," as Nussbaum puts it—abilities "rarely tapped by philosophical texts" (143) but that are necessary here.

All of these techniques—repetition, "interruption," and juxtaposition of abstract and concrete—join with the fourth technique mentioned above—use of deictics—in what I see as the central sentence of this passage of *The Golden Bowl*, in the sentence beginning "It was extraordinary, this quality in the taste of her wrong. . . ." It

is here that Maggie's watertight moral compartments begin to break apart, just as the golden bowl has broken. From the beginning of the sentence, James is building tension, creating a complex and nuanced situation, communicating to the reader just how crucial this "sudden split between conviction and action" really is.

The sentence opens with a deictic pronoun: "*It* was extraordinary, this . . ." Often, the reader knows to what a deictic is referring, because that thing has already been mentioned. Further in this passage, for example, is the phrase ". . . *action* began to hover . . . , excited by *its* very power. . . ." But here, we must wait to find out the identity of "it," to discover what is "extraordinary," until the end of the long clause that follows. "It was extraordinary, . . . this quality in the taste of her wrong which made her completed sense of it seem rather to soften than to harden." The opening phrase, "it was extraordinary," is then repeated and intensified—"it was the more extraordinary"—as we read of Maggie's having "to recognize" her feeling. The same delay in the identification of a deictic's referent occurs, further in the sentence, in the phrase "*what* it came to was that . . ." The reader waits to find out just *what* it came to—in other words, to find out just what the crucial meaning of this situation is.

Several things are accomplished by this stylistic device. First, James is able to highlight the adjective "extraordinary" by placing it at the end of the short introductory phrase, and later repeating that phrase. Second, James creates tension by delaying the identification of the deictic's reference. This is particularly true for our second phrase, "what it came to was that . . ." James first suspends its completion by adding a phrase that clarifies for the reader Maggie's state of mind—"seeing herself finally sure, knowing everything, having the fact, . . . so utterly before her. . . ." Then, after repeating the phrase "what it came to was that . . .," both to get the reader back on track and to highlight the importance of this phrase, James again suspends its completion by putting in an "interruption"—the phrase "merely by being *with* him there in silence." James has thus spun out the sentence, continually increasing its tension. The release of that tension comes at last in the important final phrase, "she felt, within her, the sudden split between conviction and action." Here, indeed, is the crux of the matter. Maggie's formerly compartmentalized moral world will no longer dictate to her what action she must take: conviction and action have split.

Why has it taken James so long to get to this? Partly, of course, the final phrase has gained in rhetorical strength through the accumulation of tension throughout such a long and complex sentence. It is also true, however, that James has needed to set the stage for this statement: the reader must understand the full context in which Maggie is

functioning, to understand the suddenness and the importance of what she is experiencing. The series of participial phrases, "seeing . . .," "knowing . . .," "having . . .," stresses the certainty of Maggie's knowledge, a certainty which would, before, have pushed her automatically to a certain judgment and certain actions. But that is not the case any more: a final participial phrase, "being *with* him," prefaced by the adverb "merely," contrasts with the previous group, pointing the way to the change in Maggie's moral judgment. As Nussbaum points out, Maggie is learning that she must be like an actress improvising her role: her responses must be sensitive to situation, must "rather . . . soften than . . . harden." She has recognized for the first time the "responsibility of freedom" that she has, in choosing how to judge, how to act, how to live.

The sentences that follow build on this image of a split, and echo the metaphor of a bird in flight, describing action beginning "to hover, like some lighter and larger, but easier form, excited by its very power to keep above ground." Again, James makes this abstract concept clearer by use of a concrete image. This hovering, this beginning of flight, also implies a new freedom: "it would be free, it would be independent, it would go in—wouldn't it?—for some prodigious and superior adventure of its own." We note in this sentence yet another "interruption," the interjection "wouldn't it?" The function of this phrase is not so much to guide the reader in the text, as other "interruptions" do, but to allow the reader to follow Maggie's thinking as she works through these new ideas. We listen as she reassures herself that the split between conviction and action really does result in freedom, and, further, in a "responsibility of freedom." Thus does the text take us along with Maggie even as her learning takes place.

Why, then, is James's prose so fitting for this kind of journey toward moral truth? It makes room for revision or addition; without being in any way improvised itself, it facilitates the expression of improvisation, the incorporation of new knowledge into understanding. Through repetition and qualification it includes nuance and refinement of ideas; its complexity defies shallow attempts at facile understanding. And finally, its rhythms and tensions enlist our emotions and its images call on our imagination as aids in comprehension. Thus equipped, we can follow the characters in their moral adventure, learning as they learn.

Nussbaum's arguments for the inclusion of texts of narrative fiction in serious philosophical discussion are rich, insightful, and, for me, convincing. She is part of the growing movement of writers in many disciplines who argue that it is time to move away from the idea that traditional impersonal expository prose is the only style acceptable for "serious" academic writing. Such writers would like academic writing to be open to more sources of knowledge, including personal experience and emotion (again, Nussbaum's argument in favor of emotion as a legitimate source of philosophical knowledge supports

this), and would like academic writing to be free to draw on more kinds of written expression. (I think John Ruff's responses, in the form of poems, to our reading and discussion in the Colloquium are examples of just this kind of freedom.) It is not surprising, then, to realize that, in her introduction to *Love's Knowledge*, Nussbaum writes of her personal journey toward this philosophical/literary project. Her intellectual and personal relationships with novels and with philosophy have much to do with her belief in this project, and she does not hesitate to include her own narrative of her growing attention to the ideas that are explored in this book.

Finally, it is not surprising either to read Nussbaum's own effort at fusing narrative fiction and philosophical discussion, in her essay "Love and the Individual: Romantic Rightness and Platonic Inspiration" (Chapter 13 of *Love's Knowledge*). Here, she combines "A Story," the narrative of an unnamed woman reflecting on love and her own experience of it, with ordered philosophical reasoning, arguments and counterarguments. The essay's narrator says, "What I am after, it seems, is a noncontrolling art of writing that will leave the writer more receptive to love than before" (321). She is trying, also, to help readers come to an understanding of this topic by using all of their capacities of understanding—intellectual and emotional. The reader comes to understand the question under discussion here both by *feeling with* the story's narrator, and by following intellectually the essay's philosophical arguments. As it expresses the inseparability

of emotional and intellectual knowledge, as it places the discussion of love in a specific context, the prose style of this essay is, in many places, distinctly Jamesian—including complex sentences with repetitions and "interruptions" that qualify and give nuance, words that remind the reader of the text's internal connections, and juxtapositions of concrete and abstract.

I believe that the growing discussion regarding what kind of form is appropriate for what kind of content is an important one, one that we must take seriously, one that merits more attention than I have paid to it here. Nussbaum has given us a sensitive and cogent argument in favor of openness in this regard: in both her "experimental" essay and her more "traditional" (in form, at least) philosophical/literary essays, she demonstrates how much richer and deeper our understanding can be if we are willing to listen to and learn from different ways of telling stories. □

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In Turley's Woods

The sycamores in Turley's Woods are wet
and give no hint of color that they had
a few days past when looking made you sad
with aching joy, knowing nature let
you find the trees in autumn red and gold
on just this day, or in the amber light
of dusk when oaks and maples shake their bright
slender branches in the blowing cold.
But farms and fields are locked in ice tonight.
The sheep are white and small as puffs of breath
and all the world is cold and still as death
beneath the winter moon whose pale light
uncovers frozen ponds and woods and weaves
the shadows of the clouds upon the leaves.

J. T. Ledbetter

From the Chapel



CHRIST THE KING

Leonard R. Klein

In my sermon two weeks ago I mentioned that one indication of the problems facing our nation was the loss of a common moral vocabulary. I said that we were losing a common language for right and wrong, for good and bad, and that the tradition of using biblical references as part of that moral vocabulary was in decline.

Before I left the house that morning I saw in the Sunday paper a story that many of you also saw and that one of you discovered had also made *The New York Times*. It seems that our District Attorney had had a death sentence against a convicted murderer overturned in the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth because he had dared to quote the Bible in his effort to convince the jurors that such a sentence was appropriate.

Now there are, I'm sure, a host of technical legal reasons for the action of the Supreme Court justice. But it's still an astounding story of the lengths to which we have gone to preserve our moral vocabulary and our public life from the taint of religion.

Had the D.A., for instance, quoted Joseph Stalin or, for that matter, the Buddha, it is unlikely that he would have lost this appeal. Curiously, the oath administered in the York County Court that convicted him reads as follows: "Do you swear by Almighty God, the Searcher of all hearts, that you will true answers make to all questions asked you by the court touching the matter now before it—and that as you shall answer to God at the last great day." If such language is a problem, I wonder that any convictions obtained across the alley could withstand the scrutiny of a higher court! To be sure, that oath is quaint and archaic,

but is solemn and religious. I've been called to the witness stand a few times, and, believe me, that oath gets your attention.

While we should not insist on keeping that oath or on any of a host of misguided efforts to make our secular state seem more Christian or just more religious, we ought to be outraged by the ideas and trends behind the notion that religion and in particular the majority Christian religion of America needs to be sealed off from important public issues. What is disturbing about the reports on the D.A.'s defeat in Harrisburg is not that a death sentence was overturned. Christians can have different opinions about the wisdom of the death penalty. What is disturbing is the notion that a quote from the Bible automatically tainted the process. And that it tainted it so severely that the sentence had to be overturned.

It is important for us Christians in America to understand some of the thinking behind the developments that have brought us to this point. We all know that the First Amendment to the Constitution bars the establishment of any religion as the faith of this society. Few thoughtful Christians have ever quarrelled with that solution to the wide variety of faith and thought in our country. What is sometimes forgotten is that the First Amendment in protecting the free exercise of religion anticipates that religion will play a lively role in shaping the society. The government is forbidden to establish any church just so that the varying religious groups will be able to play their full part in shaping both private and public life. In spite of their own unorthodox religious views, the founding fathers were very much of a mind that without religious backing the morals, laws, rights and freedoms of the new nation would be on very shaky ground indeed.

As the years have passed, however, Thomas Jefferson's understanding that there should be a high wall of separation between church and state has gained increasing prominence. Now for some quarters of our society—including many prominent legal thinkers, media gurus,

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and civil libertarians—the wall can never be high enough or thick enough to protect our rights and traditions from the dangerous influence of religion.

So, if we are going to be faithful disciples and faithful citizens at the same time, we need to try to figure out what is going on here and why. We are plainly dealing with more than an abstract legal theory. We are dealing with small but powerful elite groups who find the prospect of religious impact upon our laws, our culture, and our morals to be an enormous threat. We are confronted by people who genuinely believe that their liberties, their values, their very identities are threatened by us. Some are flat out anti-religious like Ted Turner, who boasts of how much he has grown since repudiating his Southern Baptist background.

Most of us do not see ourselves as a threat to the liberties we enjoy. Nor do we see why a religious idea—like, say, thou shalt not kill—embodied in the law is dangerous simply because it's religious. Yet the Gospel, the Bible, the Christian Church and its doctrinal and moral teaching are profoundly threatening to a significant minority of Americans. Why?

At least in part it is because of the image that dominates this liturgy for the last Sunday of the Church year—the assertion that the world has a King. Pilate didn't want any King of the Jews around, and many of our contemporaries want no such king either.

But the world we are told today has a king. We are not told that the Church has a King or that the people of Israel have a king. Or that you or I have a King. The world has a King.

"The Lord is King; he has put on splendid apparel," proclaims the psalm for this day.

The world is ruled. We are not so independent as we would like to think.

The ruler of this world is not the independent, self-governed individual. The ruler of this world is the Lord of Israel, the Ancient One of our Old Testament Lesson, who governs through "one like a human being," a son of man.

The world is not defined by our heroic efforts. The world is defined by the one who, according to our Second Lesson is "the Alpha and the Omega," whose Son is the ruler and judge of the world.

That's what we say. If we are to stick by it faithfully, some people will take offense. They will look upon us as slightly daffy at best, if not downright dangerous. It is very possible that those who struggle so furiously against the influence of religion in public life are taking the Gospel more seriously than we are.

For, you see, if this world has a king, then you and I are not kings, not masters and lords of our own destinies. That assertion is troubling for all human beings. And in America there is no myth more powerful than the belief in our absolute freedom and independence. We fought a revolution against a king and we will have no one over us. Like all myths this one is a little mushy around the edges. We follow the British royal family's ups and downs, and

right here in the city that likes to call itself the first capital of the American Republic (because the Articles of Confederation were signed here) this, the oldest of its churches, fronts on King and George Streets. But the myth is powerful.

No one shall rule us. Our hearts, our minds, our lives are our own. Such is the ruling myth of America, and so our claims for Christ the King and our assertion of the eternal reign of his Father are threatening and troubling.

The Commandments of God are offensive because they are, after all, commandments rather than suggestions or requests. And the notion of a future judgment, even though it is exercised by the crucified Lover of humanity, is repellent to those who insist on being their own sole moral compass.

But if God's Law and judgment are potentially offensive, so also is the Gospel. For the very word that we have, Savior, that we have been forgiven, can be heard as an insult by those who believe that they can and should be the ones to forgive and save themselves.

We believe that we have heard a good and loving word from the Eternal God, who comes from outside us to free us from sin, death, and evil—and from ourselves. But for those who do not or cannot share this faith, our faith can be both weird and threatening.

For a world that has declared itself utterly independent has no use for a King, not even one who rules from a cross.

We must recognize this. We must be aware that Christianity does irritate some people. While it may be the televangelists who get the bad press, don't think for a minute that we mainstream types cannot also give offense.

We must recognize the very important and exciting reality that the Church in the United States for all its size, wealth and prominence is in a missionary situation in a society that is increasingly ignorant of or hostile to the good news of Jesus Christ.

We need to know where we stand, and we need to recognize our own deep sin—that we are also offended by God's claim over us. It has been said that people go to church to make their last stand against God. That, I think, is unfair, but it's still a danger. It's a danger to us and to our mission in the world that we become so at ease with our religious life that we forget just how astounding, how wonderful and how offensive it is to say that the world has as its King a crucified itinerant rabbi who saw himself as the means by which God's rule was being initiated.

There are parts of that message that rub us the wrong way too. We are not always eager either to trust or obey him. But by the grace of God and the power of his Holy Spirit, we are able call him our matchless King.

And that is good news. For if this world has no King and no Judge, it has no future and no hope. If this world has no Savior, it has no hope of salvation at all. To those who wish to be liberated from all outside authority and rule, we can only say that it is good, not bad, to have such a king. The various liberations and freedoms that people

think they have achieved will turn out to be tyrants, rulers and kings of the worst sort. The freedom from God and neighbor that is so widely celebrated today is nothing but dreadful slavery—to the self, to the moment, to all sorts of folly.

But the crucified Messiah does not enslave us. Our Baptism does not enchain us. The Holy Spirit does not brainwash us; the Spirit liberates us—to be grateful to God, to love our neighbors. And what's more God gives us back ourselves. Our revolt does not free us; it enslaves and destroys us.

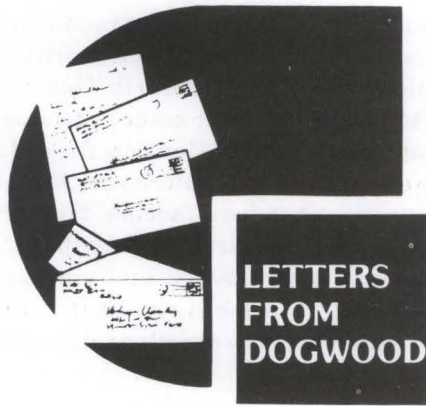
For no feature of our revolt against God is more conspicuous than this—when we reject God, we reject our neighbor too and become isolated. Indeed, we imagine that isolation is good for us. It's only true if it comes from me. I'm only real and authentic to the degree that I determine my own course by myself.

But that's not true. You cannot be human alone. I cannot be myself without you. Nor you without me. Too many people imagine that human beings are like an onion and that to get to the real thing you need to keep peeling back the layers. The only problem with that is that when you've peeled back all the layers there's nothing left. Take away your history, your family, your context, your background, language and morals, and all the communities and institutions that made you what you are and you won't find the real you. You'll find nothing at all.

We are not onions and we are not gods. We are creatures who have a loving Creator. We were created not for splendid isolation, for freedom from God and from our brothers and sisters. We were created for the Kingdom, the completed and final Community, of God. In the word of the magnificent eight hundred year old hymn we are about to sing—we were created for the “social joys” of a new creation and for the splendid praise of the halls of Zion, “conjubilant with song.”

None of this is to say for even a moment that the political freedoms and human rights of modern times are to be discarded. These are gifts of God that give us the opportunity to express and live in the kind of community to which he calls the human race. And the misguided notions of many of our neighbors don't mean that we are to turn on them with sectarian hatred. We are missionaries to modern people who have lost their way and sold their hope for a bundle of lies and false freedoms.

But we have a King. And we should not be afraid to say so. He has honored us by making us a Kingdom of priests. In our Baptism we have been anointed to live and rule with him. We are the ambassadors to this world of a Kingdom that is not from this world. We anticipate his rule even now as we praise him. And we await his Holy Spirit—in the hope that we might be as excited by the Good News of his love as are those who feel threatened by it. □



Points of Light

Charles Vandersee

Dear Editor:

Moebie had raised precisely the issue I least wanted to revisit. "Since you ask," I said to her, "it felt something like slow suffocation by toxic fumes."

"As if I was in this big room," I went on, "and exhaust from a bunch of big buses kept coming in. My mind started getting wobbly, and all these voices ebbed and flowed, foaming with insincerity. Day after day the voices got more and more turgid, and various expressions kept coalescing, and I felt

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I was being plunged from reality."

"And then at the end," I said, "it was like a hallucination. I was awash in blue balloons, and red and white ones, and—"

"Some of them as big as dinosaurs' testicles," said Moebie. "That was what popped into my head." "And of course," she said, "that was close to the effect intended. The American public awash in a turbulent sea of sperm, there in the Astrodome. Symbol of new birth, fecundity, primal energy, a virile new attack on all the nation's people."

"Attack on the nation's *problems*," you mean. I pointed out her miniblunder, and she nodded unreddening. Freudian slips are not what they used to be. I myself had felt wearied and inattentive, since that last turbulent Houston midnight. A bad way to start the new school year. "It took me a week," I said, "of vigorous aerobic activity to dissipate some of the fumes. Newspapers I put aside unread."

"You didn't really," rejoined Moebie, knowing all too well my unanchoritic disposition. "You kept on reading the pontifications, even the sidebars and stats, helplessly awash in the quadrennial tide."

This was an unusual flight of rhetoric for Moebie, who takes pride in expressing herself with what used to be called masculine force. It seemed the fumes had affected her too. I grew rigid, suddenly, with the premonition that she would strike out through the foamy tide toward the swollen piece of jetsam called Family Values. I did not want to join her in clambering over this jerry-built, tar-coated floating signifier.

"I suppose," she said, "it was no better and no worse than the Democratic convention, since both parties are past masters of posturing and pot-calling." Moebie had missed part of the Houston proceedings, and

all of the New York ones, having been shuttling between Portsmouth and Nepenthe, here in Virginia, combining field work with family feuding. I myself had missed the Democrats in New York, trying to prepare unsullied for vacation.

"This one was better, I'm convinced," I said. "The cogent analyses of the dynamics of our inner cities, with large-scale new initiatives, presented by Marilyn Quayle and the Bush grandchildren. The conciliatory and penitent gestures toward marginalized people of all kinds, from the hitherto pugnacious and divisive Patrick Buchanan."

"I must have missed all that, and didn't see it reported," said Moebie, after a long suspicious pause.

I asked what she had been reading, and she replied with an impressive list of daily and weekly sources. I shrugged the conventional male shrug, the God-given gesture conveying to women that no matter how much they find out, men always have found out one thing more.

This gesture probably would have provoked Moebie to seething emotional violence, the female prerogative, except for the lingering Astrofumes. "What I think I will remember for a long time," said Moebie instead, "was the one moment that Mr. Bush positively glowed." "As if," she went on, "he were one of his own points of light."

I couldn't think what instant she meant. He had seemed, several times, on the verge of physical violence, with a sort of torch behind each eye, that used to be called feminine, but when had he been gently luminous rather than lurid?

"Was it," I inquired, "the deeply moving moment just after his wife Barbara, the grandmother of his grandchildren, told of how her husband, the President of the Free World, was never too busy to tell his

granddaughters of his heroic exploits in the ocean during World War II, exploits sacredly reserved only to men?"

"There was positively a sea change in his countenance," Moebie replied, rejecting this plausible sally. "The sort of change," she went on, "that a film director hopes to inspire in every phlegmatic Grade B actor and seldom does." "It was of course the moment," she said, "(perhaps the climax of the convention) when he promised the American public he would *vigorously slash all their capital gains taxes to pieces.*"

"He looked," she said, "like a man struggling to keep his head above water, who suddenly discovers his feet touching bottom." "Perhaps," she mused, incautiously, "Arthurian. Excaliburesque."

"I must have missed that," I confessed, feeling slightly disoriented, as if stumbling over God in the middle of the Pledge of Allegiance. "I was awash," I explained, "in a sea of old newspapers and magazines, piled up while on vacation. At the same time I was lying on the couch succumbing to the air from the Astrodome, I was floundering in junk mail."

"Omaha Steaks International was soliciting," I explained, "also Oglala Lakota College, also ASH, Action on Smoking and Health." "None of which," I rued, "I have ever done anything for." Moebie's face seemed alternately ashen and medium rare.

"Also," I admitted, "I was drifting from time to time back over my travels, a sort of instinctive coping mechanism in periods of toxicity and watertreading." "My trip took me to the unexpected," I explained. "A huge recumbent cylinder in downtown Oklahoma City," for example, "much bigger than even the Banzai Pipeline. At one end a rain forest and at the other end a desert. You walk up and down in this cylinder, and lengthwise across by a bridge, and see towering

trees and ferns, miniature lizards, a waterfall, and a century plant much bigger in prickly diameter than any dinosaur's testicle."

All this, the Myriad Gardens Crystal Bridge, was perhaps too candid a confession, too inadequate a diversion. Moebie's eyes looked like convention balloons—restless, vacuous or lethal, expressions of transience. She takes very seriously the major media, the events that give rise to the media, the aftermath of the media, and the various bastard offspring of the media—spaced-out crack children, as it were—such as C-SPAN.

"I can't believe," she said reproachfully, "that you watched without undivided attention. You attended to intrusive mail; you woolgathered about a garish Oklahoma spectacle. You probably even ate."

"I did eat," I reported faithfully, having plenished the refrigerator immediately on getting back to town. "Wonderful local melons," I said, "and the new cookie-dough ice cream from Flugen-Scheiz." Is that its name? I wondered what edibles the Astrodome hawkers had proffered Buchanan and Gramm. Certainly not chicken salad. Perhaps sourdough bread stuffed with crab?

"Food," I explained, "helps me concentrate on three or four things at once." "Food," I expanded, "is empowering." I groped for an example.

"Take William Bennett's head," I proposed. "Which, by the way, I had never noticed before, is set on his neck diagonally, or else it was the camera angle." Moebie seethed and murmured; being a media user and defender, she resents even implied criticism of technicians.

"On the strength of peppermint Altoids from Callard & Bowser in York, England," I explained, "I could read virtually the whole scenario in William

Bennett's mind. As he kept mouthing his ever more flatulent insincerities while nominating Danforth Quayle. 'Plato and Pericles, once,' he was inwardly intoning. 'Matthew Arnold. Tocqueville. Thomas Stearns Eliot. Garry Wills, Abraham Lincoln, Edward Everett Hale, the dead at Gettysburg.' And of course, every few interminable moments, 'But what the hell. In politics, yagottado what yagottadoodoo.'

"That," I said, "is my cookie-dough reading of a memorable subliminal event." "One relishes," I added as a coda, "watching a would-be philosopher-king awash in the effort to breathe timeless universal virtue into a pirouetting opportunist and moral marionette."

I could not tell whether Moebie was now visualizing a cascade of sperm balloons descending in benison on the vice-president and against the ample teeth of his spouse, or whether an atavistic sensation prompted by mention of cookie dough had momentarily pulled her beneath the surface of the present. She looked peculiarly drained, as if the re-experiencing of salient low moments of the recent past had put her in need of a cold beer commercial.

"A potatoe for your thoughts," I said.

"I'm thinking," she said, after a long tuberous pause, "of October." "It was only, after all," she went on, "a single event, the convention, in a sequence of events. It was only a gathering of the faithful, the unquizzical, the emergent underdogs, the party hacks, the figureheads, the Establishment, the hangers-on, the manipulators, the mudslingers, the sleaze craftspeople." "No doubt," she continued, without taking a breath, as if afraid to, "the same sort of crowd that gathered in New York a few weeks earlier." "Although," she said, "I suspect the Republicans had more balloons, though probably they paid smaller wages to the blowers-up."

"That would be two differences between the two parties," I granted. Moebie as a practiced analyst of public affairs has a way of getting to one or more hearts of the matters, sometimes. It is, after all, not the rhetoric and posturing that matter, but the differences between the two parties.

"August is not October," she went on, sententiously. "And October is not November."

There was her incisiveness. I am as appreciative as anyone, when it comes to a knife cutting through a sea of foam.

"Anything could happen," I asserted, striving to meet the pace she was setting. "Toxicity and turbulence on the part of both parties could be replaced by a sort of neo-Perotvian message to the people that the time has come for moratoria on greed and blaming the criminal." Metaphorically, I brushed the water out of my eye, as both of us dove and surfaced among the Lone Star swells.

"You mean blaming the *victim*," she nearly cackled. What goes around comes around, as Moses allegedly heard on Sinai. Moebie craved the crisp spearmint taste of revenge.

"No, really," I insisted. "I thought Ross Perot had it in for those of us who were out blaming the criminal," I

said. "Didn't he want large rooms full of people conceding and compromising, rooms large enough even for people with the least to concede, victims even, to make generous big efforts?" "That is," I said, "a sort of zero-based entitlement event in which everybody in the country, even those with nothing, came together to confess that they had too much?"

Moebie had evidently not read the historical little Texan this way, or had not had time to, while on the peace shuttle for and against her feuding family. I shrugged the male shrug, but she had averted her eyes.

"Whatever happens in November, we know what happens after November," said Moebie, returning pithily to the subject at hand.

Moebie and I are sometimes very much on the same wave length, and we hurled ourselves out of the turbulent water, metaphorically, giving each other the high-five: "Business as usual!"

"A nation as awash or more so," I added.

I could sense, though, her immediately wanting to repent of this shared and triumphalist pre-November, post-Houston cynicism,

which seemed to be able to flourish as impressively as the tropics in a huge tube in middle Oklahoma. Think of all the effort it took in both cities, to produce the respective results!

I knew that we were far from the end of our discussion, and I did not relish the idea of having to induce her back into a sort of bleak national depression, now that from the edge of the pier, metaphorically, she had the illusion of seeing a point of green light. It was a surprise, therefore, when her next comment attempted closure on an earlier matter left, for her, pending. For me the pending issue was the manner of dinosaur procreation—not mammalian, with discernible external genitalia, I would have guessed, but not having volumes of the *National Geographic* on disk on hand.

"Did you get those melons at Giant," she asked, "or at Food Lion, or where? Or is it too late?"

"It's almost always too late, for more and more things," I heard myself saying, succeeding in not shrugging, but not by much.

From Dogwood in election year,
faithfully yours,

C.V.



American Malaise: Its Diagnosis and Treatment

Albert R. Trost

The United States is in a period of malaise. In fact, it is an extended period, dating at least from the Fall of 1991. This column is certainly not the first, nor will it be the last place where attention is called to our national condition of feeling bad. So many have commented on the feeling of malaise, that the comment itself is a cause of the feeling. The feeling seems to be associated with the concurrent decline in the popularity and the approval rating for President Bush. It comes after several months of euphoria over our adventure in the Gulf. There is no specific scandal or crisis associated with the beginning of the bad feeling. However, there is no lack of symptoms. Major indicators include the civil disorder in Los Angeles earlier in the year, the trade deficit with Japan, the continuing specter of urban homelessness,

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bankruptcies and layoffs, and even natural disasters like Hurricane Andrew seem to qualify. With every symptom, the feeling deepens that something is wrong.

There is a general feeling that the "something wrong" has an economic dimension. There are a lot of articles written on the decline of our competitive position in the world. The feeling here is that the source of our trouble may be external. There is also the suggestion by many that the problems may have a moral root. The decline of "family values" is a prominent theme in the present presidential campaign. The suggestion in this theme is that the causes are internal. Uncertainty about America's post-Cold War role in the world is a third much-discussed cause, a lack of international moral purpose.

We are like a patient who has had a low-grade fever for some time; it has not stopped the patient from normal functioning, but he does not feel well. He goes to the doctor for tests and diagnoses. The doctor finds ambiguous results from the tests. It is obvious that the patient is not feeling well and there may be some faint suggestions of causes, but nothing stands out. The patient is told to rest, change his diet, or take aspirin and go to bed. The bad feeling persists and the patient returns to the doctor. The visit has the same result. There is no clear diagnosis, and no clear remedy is prescribed. The condition of feeling

bad persists. After a number of visits to the doctor with the same results, the patient is likely to change doctors.

The doctor in this tale is personified by the President of the United States. We feel bad and look to our political leadership to at least tell us what is wrong, if not also help us to remedy our condition. We do not seem to get clear answers. Late last year, the message seemed to be that nothing was really wrong, but the bad feeling came from a bunch of "naysayers" positioning themselves for the presidential race. Early this year, the President and his spokespersons seemed to strongly agree that our problems were economic and had external causes. He went off to East Asia to fix the causes and blame (and got sick himself in Japan). Lately we have heard more about moral dimensions to the malaise, and the suggestion that a renewed emphasis on family values under Republican leadership was the remedy. There is not much evidence at this writing that the President has been vindicated as diagnostician, doctor, or political leader of the nation. We seem about ready to change doctors.

At this point, the writer of this column is also ready to make the change. Like much of the rest of the public, it is not so much because the other candidate, Bill Clinton, is believed to have the correct diagnosis, or the quick remedy. It is more the feeling that we are not making much

progress towards feeling better with the one we have. Parenthetically, our dilemma in finding the right doctor might explain the fascination of some for the appeal of that purveyor of snake remedies, Ross Perot.

Before many of us rush off to change physicians, one more look at the malaise and the political leadership of George Bush might be in order.

It would grossly overstate the case to say that the United States has lost its competitive edge in international economics. We have lost the edge in some product areas like automobiles and consumer electronics, but are front-runners in computer software, biotechnology, aerospace and pharmaceuticals. We continue to experience negative trade balances, though the value and the volume of our manufacturing exports continues to rise. The productivity of American labor remains relatively high and the cost relatively low, so that neither factor has been responsible for a decline in our competitive position. The United States remains a strong and successful economy. However, even though we are the largest national economy, others have been growing faster. We are not the leader in all categories. In some, like investment in our own manufacturing sector, we are well down the list.

It is when the comparative perspective is dropped, and the only comparison that is made is with ourselves, that the feeling of malaise grows. We are in a recession (though others are as well). Real growth in our economy under President Bush, computed as an annual average, is only about a third of what it was under Presidents Carter and Reagan. Government budget deficits continue to grow to record levels, the last two years of the Bush administration being particularly bad. Unemployment has grown in the Bush years. It has gone from over 5 percent to well over 7 percent. Newspaper articles continue to report that more are hungry and more are homeless than at any time since the Second World War. A newspaper article in

our local paper this very evening reports the number of "hungry" in America at 30 million.

It is hard to blame Mr. Bush alone for the recession, trade deficits, or budget deficits. He has had to share decision-making in these areas with a Congress, both of whose houses have been controlled by Democrats for the last four years. Also, most of the rest of the industrialized world is also experiencing recession. However, as *The Economist*, a British publication observed in its January 18, 1992 issue, in America, "to an extent that is not true of any other country, they look to the President for a lead; first in honestly admitting that the country has hard work ahead of it, and then in suggesting what that work might be." *The Economist* concludes in that same article, "giving a lead is not Mr. Bush's style."

It is not only in the economic maladies where diagnosis, prescription and cure are desperately needed. The health and education systems are in dire need of attention. Neither can be fixed simply by more money. This is especially true of the already too costly health-care system. Structural reforms are required. Innovation is required. Leadership is needed.

Perhaps the biggest reason for our present malaise is the one most in need of basic identification and diagnosis. It is at its base a moral problem. This is the continuing inequity of life conditions among our own people. We are a strong and successful nation, but a sizable minority do not share in this strength or success. Across the family income spectrum, there continue to be vast differences in nutrition, housing, health care, and basic education. We need, as a nation, to be shown this problem, and reminded of our responsibilities for it. Cure of these maladies, especially this last, is too much to ask of one President's time in office.

Can President Bush help us with our feeling of malaise in a second term? The evidence from his first term and his other public positions earlier in his career are not

encouraging. President Bush's strengths are his prudence, and his ability to consult with others and to compromise. He works best in a small group. His style was what was needed in molding an allied coalition to fight in the Gulf (and to win). His accomplishments in guiding Western response to the demise of the Soviet Union (among Western leaders), may be his chief claim to later fame. He has been patient and prudent in bringing Israelis and Arabs together in the Middle East (through James Baker). He is good at mastering complexity, but not in communicating the complexity to the American people. His analysis of a complex domestic problem sounds like waffling and indecision. The warmth, compassion, and cordiality he has been able to convey to leaders of other allied nations with whom he works, with his close staff and friends, or even occasionally with Congressional leaders, he has not been able to transfer to the American public at large.

We might be able to ride with a warm, close family doctor and friend for four more years, but George Bush has not been the country family doctor that maybe his predecessor was to many people. He does not inspire that kind of trust. Impatient with our lack of confidence and trust in him, he has occasionally pandered to our baser instincts and self-diagnoses. His ill advised trip to Japan with our auto industry executives in January was such a time. He was on the verge of "Japan-bashing." The use of Willie Horton to talk about crime and social problems in 1988 was not inspiring. He has recently resurrected his "no new taxes" prescription again.

Our doctor has been prudent, even conservative, and probably competent as he has tried to deal with our problems over the last four years. But he has not diagnosed or cured our general malaise. It may be too deep and too complex to be cured. However, many are tired of feeling listless and down. We will probably try another doctor. □



***The Player* :** **A Postmodern Morality** **Play** **Reinhold Dooley**

In a recent press conference Woody Allen defended himself against charges of child molestation, and thus implicitly defended the morality of his affair with Mia Farrow's adopted daughter, the child for whom Allen acted as father figure for 12 years. Framed by the TV screen, this event played like an out-take of *Manhattan*. It had the "real life" texture of *Zelig*. It also displayed the metaphysical confusion of *Purple Rose of Cairo*, in which a fictional character steps out from the film into the real world. As in earlier days when Reagan blurred the line between Hollywood and reality, Allen appeared more like a fictional, cinematic character, than a real person.

In this bizarre episode we see a blurring of the lines between the "actual" historical real and the cinematic real and a concomitant blurring of distinctions between the

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moral and immoral. This blurring is symptomatic of postmodernism, which erases distinctions by undermining all absolutes and foundations.

Specifically, postmodernism rejects the linguistic theology which assumes a referent or "real" existing prior to language. "There is nothing outside the text," states Jacques Derrida, by which he means, among other things, that there is no world or reality which we can talk about which is not itself a text. There is nothing beyond or behind language. Rather than directing us to the real, language is tropic; it only takes us to more language. It keeps us at the surface level of meaning because there are no depths of meaning to plumb; there is nothing below language. Linguistically speaking, this means there is no foundational meaning to language, only the radical plurality and play of unresolvable indeterminacies. In theological terms there is no grounding author or authority who underwrites the real or who gives authenticity to identity and validity to morality.

It is within this context of postmodern theory that Robert Altman's latest film, *The Player* offers itself up as a morality play for our times. In a variation of Derrida, *The Player* suggests that "there is nothing outside the film." It suggests (somewhat exaggeratedly, of course) that in American culture of which Hollywood is a microcosm, there is no

reality beyond the cinematic, beyond the surface of film. There is no reality which is not interfused with the qualities and values of what I shall call the "cinematic reel." (Note: For the sake of brevity I conflate all media—TV, advertising, movies—under the rubric of the "cinematic reel.")

The Allen incident is a particularly blatant example of how utterly interfused and imbricated American culture is with the cinematic. It is necessarily a more subtle interweaving of spectacle and reality that we find in the general population. But it is not my purpose to document instances of this cultural phenomenon beyond its manifestation in Altman's film. (See the work of Jean Baudrillard who has shown how the media has constructed western cultural reality by replacing it with an imaginary hyperreality.)

Altman's movie is typical of the thriller genre in that it involves murder and suspense. But, significantly, the murdered person in this instance is an author of screenplays and his murderer is a Hollywood executive who suspects the writer of sending anonymous threatening postcards. And atypical of the genre, the executive, Griffin Mill, actually gets away with cold-blooded murder. Furthermore, in a quintessential "happy ending," he gets the dead writer's girl as well.

The movie is set in Hollywood, the epitome of the cinematic reel. As

such it crystallizes the theoretical point that "there is nothing outside the film": the Hollywood which the film is supposed to represent is itself already film-like. There is a redundancy in making a film about Hollywood because it is always already all show and showpeople. An expose of the "real Hollywood" would reveal only tinsel behind the tinsel of Tinseltown. At one point Mill pleads, "Can't we talk about something other than Hollywood?" But he immediately breaks into resigned laughter: for these Hollywood insiders there is nothing outside of Hollywood. The ever-conspicuous motto of Mill's studio reads, "Movies, now more than ever."

Even for those outside the business, the Hollywood simulacrum supersedes the real. When Mill is taken in as a murder suspect, a witness notes with amazement that her real-life experience of the police lineup is just like TV. It is only the similarity to the mediated version of reality which makes the event real to her. Her experience of reality has been constructed by the cinematic reel.

The difficulty of establishing what is truly outside the film, is suggested by the desire to use "real" people in the movies. When pitching his script to Mill, a British screenwriter insists on casting "real" people in his film *Habeas Corpus*. His overzealous agent surreptitiously interjects the name "Bruce Willis" for the lead role. The distinction between the real and reel fails here. The screenwriter's "real" people are actors, after all; while Bruce Willis, though an actor, is nonetheless "real."

Even the cameo appearances which seem to point outward toward a grounding reality are problematic. After seeing cameos of at least 60 stars, we are taken aback when we initially encounter Whoopi Goldberg holding an Oscar in her hand. We mistake her for herself when in "actuality" she is a police officer interrogating Mill. The cameo itself as a device leads us to question what it means to act as oneself, to play oneself. When Bruce Willis finally appears in the Hollywood

production of "Habeas Corpus," there is some difficulty in "producing the body"; for his appearance is a cameo of himself playing himself as his persona playing a character in a movie. As Altman's title suggests, in the real and the cinematic reel, everyone is a player.

Of course, no one is more of a player in this movie than Griffin Mill. Figuratively, he is a player in the Hollywood game of power and prestige. Throughout the film he plays his social role scrupulously: he dresses the part, drives the proper car, drinks the appropriate designer waters from correct glassware. As the movie progresses he very convincingly acts the part of an innocent man. However, he is also a player in a literal sense in that he is an actor in a film. In the opening shot of *The Player*, as credits roll, we view a scene marker which states "Scene 1, take 10." The film is actually a movie within a movie. At the conclusion we discover that Mill has produced a movie called *The Player*, the very movie we have just watched. His life has been grist for his own Hollywood mill. He is a player in both the real and the reel. This is recognized at least twice in the film. Imitating a player from the movie *Freaks*, one of the police challenges Mill's real status, taunting him with the chant "one of us, one of us." Kahane too identifies Mill as an unreal player, stating, "See you in the next reel."

Postmodern life, *The Player* reveals, is cinematic. Like the actual strip of film, it is all surface, transparent, depthless, capable of projecting life-like but nonetheless insubstantial images. Rather than being a convenient vehicle for the expression of the real, film, it turns out, is itself the real, and the only real there is. Nothing authentic underlies film or exists beyond film. In the postmodern world real people are actually players; real things are only simulacra, mere representations of an imaginary real.

In postmodern terms, *The Player* establishes that the universe we live in is emphatically not "logocentric." Derrida describes logocentrism as the

Western metaphysics which professes an ultimate referent, a self-certifying absolute foundation beyond the play of language which is able to fix determinate meanings. Historically, God has been acknowledged as the Logos, the fixed center and the guarantor of the validity of language.

The postmodern condition results from a loss of God as the author of the word and the world. In a linguistic echo of Nietzsche, it declares what Roland Barthes calls the "death of the author." Without the author as arbiter of a text's meaning (or the world's), we are left with a never-ending proliferation of discrepant meanings. We are left with radical undecidability as all readings become defensible. It is precisely this postmodern phenomenon, the death of the author and its resulting anarchy, that is enacted in Altman's morality play.

The desire for independence from the author is expressed by Larry Levy, a studio executive vying for Mill's position. He argues that screenwriters are too expensive, he questions their creative ability, and suggests that their originality is undesirable. He denounces them as ultimately superfluous. To his rhetorical question "Who wrote the ending of *Fatal Attraction*?" he answers "the audience." Using an apt religious trope, he rejects authors, stating "I never saw a writer who could change water to wine."

Mill, of course, has actually enacted this desire for autonomy by murdering the screenwriter, Kahane. Pursuing Levy's unwitting association of the author with THE Author—God, we discover that Mill is a diminutive version of Lucifer. Thus, within the theological and theoretical allegory of this morality play Mill has nullified the diadic economy of origins/originality, author/authority, creator/creativity. He has figuratively initiated the postmodern age.

Furthermore, like the vulturous griffin whose name he bears, he preys on the dead, usurping the murdered writer's lover, June. In an act of Freudian rebellion, he reenacts the oedipal event, killing the authoritarian

father and seducing the mother. As a result of these violations he is loosed from the law of the father, from author and authority. Both he and June become their own points of origin, radically free to create their own world, and to interpret their own morality. Mill rightly describes June, and himself by extension, as a "pragmatic anarchist." They rationalize that "If you don't suffer, then it wasn't a crime." And Mill suffers neither remorse (both he and June are described as heartless) nor at the hands of the law, because he gets away with the murder. In the absence of the Author as external, transcendent arbiter of morality, there is no need for moral discernment. In this film, distinctions are made between designer waters rather than crimes and misdemeanors.

The final scene depicts a smiling Mill hugging his pregnant wife amidst a profusion of flowers, in front of their mansion, with an American flag blowing in the breeze. Is it the American dream come true? Is it a happy ending? Or is it meant to be ironic? In the absence of an author it is difficult to tell. But this is a morality play I have asserted. And in fact *The Player* resurrects both the author and moral authority. The author actually never died. As it turns out, Mill murdered the wrong writer. The actual writer of poison pen letters ultimately returns to blackmail Mill. The demand is that he produce the movie which the blackmailer calls *The Player*.

But this is not the true return of the author, for the blackmailer's power is tentative and does not dismay Mill in the least, and rather than condemn the "happy" ending, it

ensures it. Rather, the authentic author has been with us the entire film. It is Altman himself. He is the grounding author, the moral authority, who announces himself in the opening shot of the film and is an abiding and critical presence throughout. Altman, who is literally introduced in the credits, preserves the leader footage with the scene marker in it and thus blatantly asserts his very real authorial and authoritative presence behind the camera and throughout the film. It is thus his movie which frames Mill's and serves as a stinging comment and rebuke of Mill, Hollywood, and postmodernism. And it is Altman, not Mill, who gets the last laugh. Dubbed over the picture-perfect ending and undercutting its "happiness," we hear the ironic and scornful jeer: na-nee na-nee nah-nah. □

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in Happy Joe's.

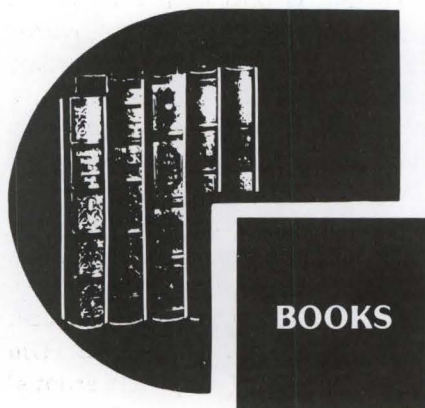
You were Ben Kingsley on the screen,
a warm feeling of peace and understanding
to us, in a land of simple ideas,
stubborn stances, fixed vision,
traditional values.

How can you spin cotton in a small town,
how can you go about in a loin cloth,
we wondered,
how can you extract salt
from a freshwater reservoir,
what's oppression
where few hold contrary thoughts?

Brutal shots rang out
in six-channel Dolby.
We ordered a medium pepperoni,
a medium taco pizza,
talked about ignorance destroying humanity,
considered fasting to open minds,
imagined our bodies prone before horses,
stayed out past midnight
on endless diet coke refills.

Gandhi-not-medium
you sample, example,
of the East
on that Mid-western screen.
Mid-mediocrity, bad taste in our mouths,
we became as perplexed as you,
the long quiet car ride,
the good night, good night,
the see-you-before-the-dishwasher-tomorrow,
the lonely fall towards sleep,
the why of the streetlight bleeding in the night,
sending slivers of where across my sheets.

Stu Selthun



Faith in Many Keys

Jean Sullivan. *Morning Light: The Spiritual Journal of Jean Sullivan*. Trans. by Joseph Cunneen and Patrick Gormally. New York: Paulist Press, 1988. 180 pp. \$12.95.

----- *The Sea Remains*. Trans. by Robert A. Donahue, Jr. and Joseph Cunneen. New York: Crossroad, 1989. 118 pp. \$13.95.

Last fall, my class and I were discussing Mark's story of the rich man who followed all the commandments: "Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow me.' When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions" (10:21-22). What might this mean to thirteen middle-class freshmen and their middle-class teacher? Well, some of us said, it doesn't mean *we* have to sell what we own. We just need to keep ourselves from getting too materialistic, and keep the poor in mind. One student, who spoke infrequently, offering something either drolly humorous or deeply serious, disagreed. "Too often

people water down these words. I think he means just what he's saying. The challenge he's presenting is real, and spoken to us, too." His conviction impressed and unsettled us. By affirming Jesus' harsh request that we give away everything and follow, the student reanimated the moment in Judea, and its radical challenge.

Jean Sullivan also attempts to reanimate the harsh—and joyful—words of the Gospel. A French Catholic priest, born in 1913 and killed in an auto accident in 1980, Sullivan lived out his vocation in his writing. His work can be located in a tradition that includes Charles Péguy, Georges Bernanos, and Simone Weil, each of whom Sullivan cites. Highly regarded in France, most of his twenty-six books are published by the prestigious Gallimard press. As I call attention to Sullivan's prestige, however, I run counter to the spirit of his voice. In both of his recently translated, mutually illuminating books—his novel, *The Sea Remains*, and his spiritual journal, *Morning Light*—Sullivan sees prestige and power as squelching the Gospel's radically humble Word: "Jesus' message is the opposite of power" (ML 25). In his embrace of "the humility of the flesh" (ML 97), in the homely Semitic images with which he invests his words, Jesus affirms the value of our physical lives, and the paradoxical authority of kenosis, the pouring out of power. The Gospel's words call us to participate in the process of kenosis in our own lives, and its call can shock,

wound, and grieve. Ultimately it can liberate and heal. Sullivan's own words seek to usher in the possibility of such an experience in his readers.

In the first section of *Morning Light*, Sullivan offers deeply felt and insightful readings of Mark and John. He insists that if we truly wish to hear the Gospel's Word, we must release the Greek conceptual and Roman legalistic traditions surrounding it, and embrace its Semitic rootedness: "The Gospel emerged from a world of peasants and sailors. Jesus is the rabbi whose word is transpierced with images of trees, water, harvests, cattle, shepherds, and vagabonds" (ML 3). In allowing concepts to eclipse the Gospel's physical, prosaic vitality, we run counter to its message of humility; our impulse to conceptualize easily turns sectarian and imperialistic (ML 90). To avoid such an impulse, Sullivan exhorts us to read and experience the Gospel as a poem, for "in every poem the revelation is not situated only, or primarily in the idea; it is not a knowledge. It is born of a breathing and rhythm—that is, it is conveyed by the body, and not only in the mind" (ML 4). In response to this revelation, we evince our faith and love in our bodies—in our tone of voice, our glances, our gestures toward others, perhaps in "quietly doing the dishes," the image with which Sullivan closes *Morning Light* (180).

Sullivan's spiritual wisdom is grounded in the Incarnation and kenosis of Jesus. He thus recognizes the Church's need for institutional

embodiment. As a character in *The Sea Remains* puts it, "the gospel couldn't be delivered to the world in its pure essence. If the soul were without a body, there would no longer be a soul" (24). Yet a tension can emerge between Incarnation and kenosis. If the Church inhibits the working of the Spirit through its body of dogma, or confuses spectacle with enspirited ritual, it allows power to abolish kenosis, and embodiment becomes petrification. The Church can easily forget its fundamental role as the "servant of the Gospel" (ML 27). As servant, it ought to "allow the Word to make its own way within human consciousness" (ML 92). If in the quest for conceptual coherence, it attempts "to keep the lid on that sparrow-hawk, the Holy Spirit" it "yield[s] to the temptation of an imperialistic unity" (93). Likewise, if it covers itself too snugly with the trappings of power and prestige, it grows deaf to the Gospel's call to poverty. Cardinal Ramon Rimaz, the chief character of *The Sea Remains*, reflects on this in a homily:

Of course he remained convinced that the Church needed a firm and independent base in order not to dissolve in people's consciousness: there were lots of examples to demonstrate the illusion of those who had wanted to rely solely on their inspiration. But little by little, he said, he had come to think that the social power of the Church could be the cause of its spiritual weakness, just as a mass membership could go hand in hand with profound alienation. The Church itself ought to be poor and humble, without waiting to be crucified. People were able to be poor and humble for themselves, and rich and proud for the Church. (100)

Rimaz utters these words—"as discreet as a feather brushing a windowpane"—late in the novel, near the end of an interior journey through humiliation and self-discovery. He is a retired Spanish cardinal, living in a villa near the sea. In an Augustinian search through memory, he recollects those moments when the conflict between his role as Church leader and servant of the Gospel was most clearly cast into relief. He remembers his

mother stepping into "the immense panelled rooms of [his] episcopal palace," and asking, stunned, "How can it be? We were . . . and you, because you. . . Is this what the gospel. . .?" (44). He recalls the authoritative challenge of a young Chinese priest: "Juan Ramon, are you a successor of the apostles or the director of a corporation?" (56). Now, with "all real power. . . withdrawn" (9), he recognizes the *futilidad* of a life founded on external reverence and regard as opposed to an interior vitality. In anger and humiliation, he orders his housekeeper to burn — "*Quema*" — the ecclesiastical memorabilia she has lovingly gathered.

Here, at his lowest point, his interior journey takes a hopeful, restorative turn. On long walks along the shore, he attends closely to the physical reality surrounding him—water, beach grass, boulders, the faces and bodies of other people. As he enters into relationship with an unlikely array of others—a small child, a painter and her imprisoned lover, his niece and her Marxist boyfriend, a poor fisherman—he emerges from solitude. Gradually, he rediscovers his deepest self and his vocation: "To his endless amazement, by discovering the world he entered into the understanding of the gospel" (81).

Like the Gospels, which are his inspiration, Sullivan's work is rich in paradox. In *The Sea Remains*, Rimaz must lose his self before he finds himself; in his recovery of childhood he achieves maturity; in accepting the limit of death he discovers his greatest joy. In *Morning Light*, Sullivan avows his Gospel-rooted preference for the marginal and the powerless, the last that shall be first—the rebel, reject, and vagabond. But, in his journal, as he pokes at the pompous and powerful, he veers close to sarcasm and judgment. Here paradox can deteriorate into binary opposition, and become just another assertion of power: "There is no hope for someone like that," he writes of the person who tells others "he's praying, that he's been praying, or is about to pray." Immediately aware of his objectifying

self-assertion, however, Sullivan seeks paradox and humility in his next sentence: "Of course, he might be a saint; language is deceptive" (138).

In *The Sea Remains*, he relinquishes such power in his refusal to inscribe its plot with a clear-cut authorial preference. The character one least suspects, emerges, possibly, as most Christ-like: Juan Gonzalez, a traditionally pious, rich, right-wing landowner. In a remarkable scene—one which looks ahead to the recent film *Jesus of Montreal*—the powerful landowner plays the part of Christ in the town's version of the Passion Play. "[P]erhaps. . . he becomes, by grace, humble and poor, one with Him under this cross" (113). "[P]erhaps" (104) too he inspires the culminating kenotic step of Cardinal Rimaz. As novelist, Sullivan sustains the radically disruptive spirit of paradox.

Appropriately, Denise Levertov has described Sullivan's novel "polyphonic," a word that the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin uses to describe Dostoevsky's affirmation of "the independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy of the hero. For the author the hero is not 'he' and not 'I' but a fully valid 'thou'. . ." (63). Bakhtin's words can be applied to Sullivan. In each of his characters, including Gonzalez, Sullivan deeply respects "the mystery of conscience and ambiguity of human actions" (SR, 69). He relinquishes authorial omniscience and control over them. His authorial "perhaps" regarding their motivations suggests a position alongside rather than above them. Thus, polyphonic creation partakes in kenosis.

Sullivan's fractured style further evinces his relinquishing of tight authorial control. Although ultimately beautiful in form, *The Sea Remains* often proceeds by hints, ellipses, premonitions, and fragmentary images. Although themes recur in *Morning Light*, and the book is rich in challenging ideas, he refrains from imposing a restrictive coherence or "order" (85) upon them. Taking the path of Eckhart, Siesius, the Tao, the Tch'an, he resists what he calls "the dominant thought of the West, which

invites us to knowledge, to power, to take, to possess" (11). In neither work does Sullivan wish us to mentally manipulate a system of ideas. He invites us, in this instant, to joyfully embody the words he offers: "Truths for our feet / Truths that can dance" (113).

As a Catholic, I believe that Sullivan's words can be salutary to the Church today, particularly as it responds to the questions of authority and ecumenism. Here is Sullivan on authority: "The prophet versus the worldly leader. We need a form of *authority*—author, one who gives life (the author of my days), who increases it—a chief if you prefer, but without power" (ML 162). I think here of Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee, relinquishing his position above, to sit with and listen to the women whose voices had not been heard. Such authority "authors" in that it opens up a space for the voice of the other, allows it to be heard, and seeks decision through attentive dialogue. Might such a conception of authority be institutionalized?

As a Catholic teaching at a Lutheran university, I am struck by the radical similarities in our two traditions, and wonder when we will be "officially" united. Sullivan also speaks briefly about ecumenism:

The Church exists everywhere there are communities that give testimony of universal love. Unless language changes—and it changes only after a spiritual revolution—ecumenism will remain what it has seemed so far, an administrative enterprise, following the laws of competition in which, despite the vocabulary of good feeling, we always detect the prudent search for advantage. We don't want to be cynical, but the truth is that no one wants to lose his clientele. Ecumenism will become truly worldwide only by rejecting calculation, through self-effacement. (156-57)

For Sullivan, both a revisioning of authority and the success of ecumenism will require a kenosis, a relinquishing of power and the self-effacement of all involved.

The path to self-effacement is painful; the habit of self-assertion dies hard. Sullivan is a reliable, challenging

guide on the interior journey that can lead to such a death—and to the rebirth of one's deepest self, "where decisions are made" (ML, 25). He aims to strip us of our too-habitual assumptions and assertions of piety: "May this book leave you broken and dispossessed" (ML, 84). But the scene of dispossession might be that of plenitude. Sullivan's words—like those of some students—seek to open a place for a new, more radical reception of the Word, and the inspiration that can follow. For the attentive reader, they succeed in fostering "the creative liberty of men and women wounded by the Gospel" (ML, 6).

Paul J. Contino

Mark Kline Taylor. *Remembering Esperanza: A Cultural-Political Theology for North American Praxis*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990. \$29.95 (cloth), \$16.95 (paper).

The burden of this book is to reflect critically upon Christian theology and its "postmodern" cultural and political situation. Taylor characterizes this situation as "trilemmic" such that each of three concerns threatens to displace the others: to acknowledge tradition, to celebrate cultural plurality, and to resist political domination. How can we celebrate plurality without falling into a toothless relativism which dissolves tradition and the moral basis of resistance to domination? How can we affirm Western tradition without denying the legitimacy of "non-Western" traditions? How can we resist domination without rejecting tradition and plurality? These questions are especially relevant for college and university communities as they reexamine their curricula and aims in light of recent challenges to the hegemony of European, Western traditions in higher education. The pointed and perceptive way in which Taylor puts his finger on our postmodern problem is one of the

achievements of his book.

Taylor offers no simple formula for solving these vexing conflicts, but his aim is to theorize in ways that take them seriously. The general direction of his "way out" of the trilemma is to privilege the need to resist oppression when this conflicts with tradition or cultural plurality. The final aim of resisting oppression is to affirm and celebrate differences. Taylor enrolls tradition, and specifically Christian theology, in the project of resisting oppression and affirming cultural plurality. He focuses upon four major forms of oppression—sexism, heterosexism, classism, and racism—developing his analyses in ways attentive to their bearing upon plurality.

Though he sees important differences among these forms of oppression, Taylor argues that the unifying source of oppression resides in fear of "otherness" and the related need to control that which threatens people in power. He begins with sexism, not because it is the root of all other oppressions, but because it is more ubiquitous and more accessible to himself as a white, male, affluent, heterosexual, Princeton Seminary professor. Taylor argues that patriarchy is motivated and sustained by a matrophobic and matricidal mythos. In making his case, he draws from anthropology, mythology, and psychoanalytic feminist theory.

Greek, Babylonian, and Hebrew mythic traditions, argues Taylor, have as a pervasive feature the defeat and control of "mother-identified" powers. Perhaps the clearest example here is the Babylonian creation epic, in which the male hero, Marduk, attacks and dismembers the female, Tiamat (representing the primordial matrix of existence), and creates the cosmos out of her carcass. Males, threatened by differences between themselves and their mothers, diminish, control, or destroy women. According to Taylor, this basic theme is also dominant in the Hebrew Bible and Greek traditions. Add to this a general diminution of women's cultural and economic powers to oppress women, and the outcome is sexism. The fear

of otherness, and related need to control, is also a central feature to Taylor's analysis of other forms of oppression:

The abstracting from the mother. . . not only involves the continual subordinating of women to men. . . (sexism); it also involves the alienation of women and men from intimate friendship with their own gender and from being at home with their own bodies (hetero-realism), the alienation of women and men from just distribution of the earth's goods (classism), and, further, the systematic dismemberment of black men and women's bodies and lives (racism) (147).

Taylor denies that matricide is the single cause of all oppression; more than other books with similar concerns, this one resists simplistic, monocausal explanations of oppression (and of anything else). These are inseparable, interlocked modes of oppression. But he does claim that matricide is the heuristic key in that it provides a deep and perverse dynamic unifying varied forms of oppression in ways which other candidates do not.

Although this unifying center makes for extremely provocative analysis, it also gives rise to objections. Why should sexism be the mode of oppression which unifies the other three modes? The astonishing prevalence and severity of absolute poverty arguably makes classism a more basic form of oppression than sexism, and call for political and economic analyses rather than the anthropological and psychological analyses that Taylor seems to favor. Taylor's sense that, at bottom, all oppression is a failure to deal with "otherness" fits the central role he gives to sexism, but his clear ranking of the need to resist oppression over the need to celebrate plurality would seem to favor classism as heuristically primary when treating interlocking oppressions. Why give any one of the four modes of oppression heuristic primacy? Racism would seem to be more central than sexism for interpreting the multiple forms of oppression plaguing Native American

communities.

Even if one agrees that sexism is heuristically primary as the unifying dynamic of oppression, one might argue with his claim that matricide is the basic dynamic of sexism. His support for the claim that the matricidal tenor of the Babylonian creation epic is also found in Genesis is tenuous at best. Though it is plausible to say that Genesis expresses a clear subordination of women to men, it is stretching the evidence to say that Genesis locates the roots of this subordination in matricidal or matrophobic impulses. Taylor is well aware of other explanations of the deep roots of sexism. Perhaps it is his own longstanding interest in anthropology and religious mythos that leads him to see the matricidal origins of sexism more clearly than, say, economic or political ones.

Interestingly, emancipation from political oppression is more fundamental than the celebration of plurality for Taylor's view of Jesus Christ. The priority here is more strategic than absolute; Taylor tends to see Christian theology as "strategic" in the sense that the central normative concern is how to get a theology that supports liberation from oppression and affirmation of difference. A central problem for Taylor is that the Christian "mythos" (Christianity's narratives and communal practices) has often served to exacerbate rather than to alleviate sexism, heterosexism, racism, and classism. He confesses that Christian scriptures are "androcentric, patriarchal, at other points racist and anti-Semitic, too" (162). For him the problem is much deeper than misusing the Bible. Therefore he expresses sympathy with those who reject Christianity, saying that they are making an "authentic and appropriate" response.

Although Taylor respects those who make this "authentic" response, he chooses instead to remain Christian. He does so because there are examples of Christian communities that resist oppression and because Christianity offers vital resources which might be marshalled

in the cause of justice and freedom. The heart of his revised Christianity is the claim that "Jesus Christ" refers primarily to a social and historical dynamic emancipating the oppressed and reconciling cultural differences. People experience Jesus Christ, then, when they participate in projects of liberation from sexism, heterosexism, racism, and classism.

The root metaphor Taylor proposes to guide a revised understanding of Jesus Christ identified above is "*Christus Mater*." "Christ our Mother," says Taylor, holds more power to liberate us from the matricidal impulses beneath all oppression than do other images of Christ. "*Christus Mater* is a root metaphor, then for a general maternalization of human community and nature that is emancipatory for women in struggle against sexism, but also for a maternalization that includes the materialization of all creation's hopes for emancipation from that which enchains it, pollutes it, destroys it" (196). Taylor is aware of objections to his proposals—from the side of Christian theology and of feminist theory—but he advances them nonetheless, though with clarification and qualifications.

Taylor's efforts to revise traditional understandings of Christ in light of our trilemmic situation are instructive in many ways. Too many theologians are blind to the ways their claims perpetuate injury to others, or simply are irrelevant to today's pressing problems. But the blatant way Taylor submits theology to projects of liberation, and to specific interpretations of these projects, is troubling. He is intensely aware of difficulties surrounding traditional sources of authority for theology. Thus he declares, "All *exegesis* is, in fact, *eisegesis*, but there remains a need to display the traits of the texts themselves that are consonant with one's interpretation" (182). For him, the Bible and traditional Church teachings provide a vast and diverse theological smorgasbord. Since theological and moral content of these sources is malleable and almost

endlessly multivalent, selection and reconstruction are to be determined primarily by the interests of the interpreter rather than by the Biblical text or by a combination of text and the confessional heritage of the Church.

I wish Taylor were as suspicious of his own interpretation of the sources of oppression as he is of traditional sources of theological authority. The multivalence of our social and cultural situation is as diverse as, if not more diverse than, that of the Bible. Some of the more radical theorists of oppression—those whose rage distorts reality with reductionistic analyses—are capaciously tolerated, perhaps because of Taylor's guilt feelings stemming from his membership in the class of white, affluent, heterosexual males. His focus upon sexism and matricide as the heuristics center for understanding our situation leads to illuminating analyses of both our situation and the Christian tradition, but it fails to do justice to elements of Christian faith which might challenge this analysis. "Christ Our Mother" as a root metaphor for Jesus Christ, for example, is a very provocative way to think about Christ. But if this is the root metaphor, then what happens to Christ, sent by the Father and empowered by the Spirit to free the world from sin and evil and to renew the face of the earth? What happens to the theocentric themes in the Bible and tradition — themes which, without blinding us to or hardening us against the suffering of this world, relativize the world and its projects and practices?

We are in Taylor's debt for writing such a clear analysis of profound problems; any careful reader will benefit from the helpful ways he poses issues, makes his choices, and supports them. His passion for justice and compassion with those who suffer is inspiring. Social theorists wishing to explore the relevance of their disciplines to a thoughtful Christian practice will find this book stimulating. Those who cavalierly dismiss all liberation theorists as reductionistic or mutually contradictory will find here an important challenge. But Taylor's

systematic, intentional subordination of scripture and Church to projects of liberation is, ironically, in danger of cutting Christians off from the very sources of grace and truth that empower them to resist oppression and affirm difference.

Douglas J. Schuurman

Alison Leslie Gold. *Clairvoyant: A Novel of the Imagined Life of Lucia Joyce*. New York: Hyperion, 1992. Pp. 176. \$ 19.99.

The life and times of James Joyce merited the meticulous care of an Ellmann. Joyce's contribution to Western literature could not have been fully appreciated, moreover, without the careful work of a host of scholars who have enriched our reading of the giant by their careful comments. But there comes a point when scholarship can be lethal.

Paddy Kavanagh, one of Ireland's most famous poet laureates, once asked, "Who killed James Joyce?" His answer, of course, was that academics had. The first weapon used "to slay mighty Ulysses" was a Harvard thesis. Further blows were inflicted by essays that gained American students scholarships at Trinity College.

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Hundreds of conferences and thousands of articles later, the Joyce industry has more than amply demonstrated Kavanagh's point. There is only so much that can be written about any author—even a magnificent one like Joyce—before the author can fall victim to critical cannibalism, his vitality sapped, his life blood drained by a descent into trivia. Any new book about Joyce comes into print with a rebuttable presumption that it is unnecessary. Alison Leslie Gold (co-author of the story of Miep Gies, the woman who helped the family of Anne Frank to hide from the Nazis in Amsterdam) has overcome this presumption and added something of value in her first novel.

If there is any lacuna in the scholarship about James Joyce, it is probably with respect to his daughter Lucia, who was clinically diagnosed as a schizophrenic (among other things) and who was confined to various mental institutions in France, Switzerland and England for nearly half a century until she died alone in a geriatric ward in Northampton near the end of 1982. In 1935 Lucia—then 28—was hospitalized in a clinic outside of Paris. She saw her beloved father on Sunday visits, when he would repeatedly reassure her that she would get well (as close as he ever came to acknowledging that she was sick), but she was never reunited with him before he died suddenly in 1941. Her mother Nora did not visit her in the asylum and never saw her after the War. The solicitors for her father's estate refused her repeated requests for funds to travel to see her brother Giorgio, with whom she had one visit in 1967. At her own request Lucia was buried not in Zurich beside her parents and brother, but in a quiet spot in England under the shade of a chestnut tree. The biographers note that the roar of the great lion at the Zurich zoo can be heard night and day near the Joyce grave in Fluntern Cemetery. They imagine this powerful voice celebrates the greatness of the father. Gold's Lucia knows better: it is her absence from that grave—the "empty hole in the ground"—that evokes the lion's roar.

Lucia's long and lonely isolation from her family did not inhibit the Joyce scholars, including Ellmann, from calling on her to learn any details about her father she might supply. Before the appearance of this work, however, few, if any, found Lucia Joyce interesting in her own right. Gold treats Lucia as a subject of fiction, not an object of biography, or—worse yet—of pity. She has empowered the female voice of one not normally acknowledged as one of James Joyce's women.

In constructing her novel, Gold has relied on Ellmann's masterful work and on the other contributions of leading Joyce scholars. She does not join their fascination with turning up new bits of information about the Joyce family. To her credit, Gold has taken care to respect the private and personal lives of her subjects. As she states in an afterword: "No use has been made of medical records nor of intimate letters that invade family privacy." At one level Gold's work has the strength of an historical novel. Never far from her story are the major events and the chief figures in the life of the Joyces. Far more significantly, though, Gold has created an image of the complicated inner life of her protagonist.

Lucia's imagined autobiography unfolds at intervals spaced in decades from her twenties to her seventies. Appropriately, the memory of the past is scrambled. The story begins at Lucia's fortieth year, then cuts back to an ingenious sketch of her childhood and adolescence cast in the form of notes for an opera set in Trieste, Zurich, and Paris, and featuring Lucia as the Soprano, Papa as the Tenor, and Mama as the Mezzo-soprano. The chapter "At Fifty" flashes forward to the condition of a sedated patient whose lessened violence and increased lucidity is ascribed to the newly discovered antipsychotic drug Thorazine. The long-term effects of this medication are described in the following chapter "At Sixty."

In a lovely spoof on Joycean scholars, Gold has a middle-aged professor named Carr (one thinks of the bureaucrat in the British consulate

in Zurich whom Lucia's litigious father sued for libel, and whom Tom Stoppard transforms into the central figure of *Travesties*) turning up at Lucia's asylum armed with a letter from the solicitors for her father's estate permitting a series of interviews. Lucia remembers him all right, "but not with pleasure." Carr obtains Lucia's brief essay, "The War," and reads it to a Joyce Symposium in Cologne in 1970, despite the delicious irony that Lucia reports that her father refused refuge from the Nazis in England "because he called the English a reptile-like race ending with Mr Carr, a true snake who turned and spat at us after fifteen years a friend."

As "Joyce scholarship was growing more lively with each passing year," Lucia's newly discovered essay—actually a copy rewritten by Lucia's nurse—fetches a high price paid by the oil-rich University of Texas outbidding libraries in London and Prague. Lucia notes both that her essay "was of little use to Joyce scholarship" and that it formed the basis for eight Ph.D. theses. Lucia the septuagenarian is "too tired and fed up with the past" to help the Joyce scholars and biographers any more. Finding the experience of dealing with the never-ending army of the curious to be "heart-pilfering," Lucia has an ad run in the newspaper asking the Joyce scholars not to bother her any more.

The two central and lengthiest chapters, "At Twenty" and "At Thirty," contain Lucia's memoirs, dubbed "The Story of the Blotting-Paper Girl (Keep Them Guessing for 300 Years)." The world depression is in the Parisian air. More than an economic fact, depression is a psychological reality among the characters that crowd into Lucia's life. There are hard times not only for the Joyces, but also for their friends, Samuel Beckett and Ezra Pound. Lucia "wept much more than Mother had wept." Ellmann describes the daily visits of Beckett to the Joyce household as exchanges of silence; the fictional Lucia recalls the degrees of intensity of these eerie silences: 'from wistful to dirge-like.' But she also remembers Beckett courting and spurning her;

hers too is the memory of the faithful Beckett who kept in touch with her during the war and sent her a birthday present every year until she died. The biographers uniformly describe Lucia's love affairs as sad; by contrast the fictional Lucia's coming of age was passionate and intense.

In Zurich Lucia consults as a patient with Carl Gustav Jung. She recalls her father's characterization of Jung as "a Swiss Tweedledum" and Freud as "the Viennese Tweedledee," but she does not share this memory with Dr. Jung. Nor does she reveal her recurrent dream that Europe would soon be criss-crossed by hobnail boots, "for fear that giving voice to this secret information would...actually cause it to occur." For all her father's conviction that "what might be construed as incomprehensible nonsense to others were flashes of imagination and wisdom," after repeated suicide attempts Lucia finds that all of her doors and windows "now contained locks."

Weekly contacts between Lucia and her father are recalled tenderly, even nostalgically. Despite the omnipresence of a hefty nurse, "Father and I played the piano together each Sunday, sang together, ate Italian cakes together." Through the daughter's eyes we glimpse an intense portrait of the artist as an old man after the completion of *Ulysses*: "immobile on a bench on a quiet street of Paris..., every muscle and sinew gone slack..., seeing nothing through his useless eyes but dancing specks of white light in the left and the pale mauve shadow of two trees with his right."

Like Stoppard's brilliant inversion of *Hamlet*, in which the tale of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is as plausible as that of slain royalty, Gold's *Clairvoyant* makes Lucia Joyce come to life as vividly as many of the characters of *The Dubliners*, if not those of *Bloomsday* itself.

If Kavanagh was right in warning that scholars could "slay mighty Ulysses" with their dissertations, we can be grateful that Gold has not added to the trivia Joyceana, but has produced a moving piece of fiction in

the Joycean mode. It is a more fitting tribute to Lucia than her father's insistence that his daughter was not sick, but clairvoyant (which gives rise to the title). As the fictional Lucia puts it: "He looked for messages in my flights of thought in conversation, in my distractions." It is Gold who has found those messages and given us in this novel of Lucia's imagined life the sort of work in which Joyce himself would have taken more delight than in dozens of the efforts by critics to unravel his own work.

Edward McGlynn Gaffney

Masao Takenaka and Ron O'Grady. *The Bible Through Asian Eyes*. New York: Friendship Press, 1991. pp. 200. \$35.00 (cloth), \$25.00 (paper).

This is a splendidly conceived and beautifully produced volume. The authors deserve much of the credit in selecting the more than 100 works from eighteen countries in Asia, for they are respectively chair and vice-chairpersons of the Asian Christian Art Association which is behind this venture. Neither of the authors is an artist or professor of art, but each has had a long-standing interest in Christian art in Asia and has played an important role in promoting it. Dr. Takenaka is professor of Christian ethics at Doshisha University in Japan whereas Ron O'Grady is a minister of the Associated Churches of Christ in New Zealand and former Associate General Secretary of the Christian Conference of Asia. Takenaka published the first collection of similar works, *Christian Art in Asia*, in 1975, and this led to the formation of the Asian Christian Art Association.

The ecumenical, international scope of this venture is remarkable. Friendship Press is only the distributor (in the USA). The actual publisher is Pace Publishing in New Zealand, and the printing was done in Hong Kong. Support for this volume came from Protestant and Roman Catholic missionary societies in Canada,

Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden—and from the Suntory Foundation in Japan.

The format of this volume is attractive and illuminating. Facing the artistic works, which are in full color, is a page of text which consists of a brief explanation of the artist and his or her medium and technique, a relevant scripture passage, followed by an appropriate reflection or meditation either by some well-known Asian writer or by the authors of this book. The visual and verbal contributions compliment each other nicely, but either would stand by itself as a thing of beauty.

I am not an artist, nor an artist's son (to paraphrase Amos), although I acted as an interpreter for a number of contemporary print artists during our last years as missionaries in Japan. Hence, I am not qualified to make critical judgements about the quality of the artistic contributions. Nevertheless, I venture that most of these works would more than pass muster by any artistic criteria. The overall impression is one of strength and vitality. The genre vary from folk art, wood carvings and traditional oils, acrylics and prints, to flower arrangements on concrete blocks, laser art, and bronze wall sculptures.

A few pictures are reminiscent of older American Sunday school cards, but for the most part they avoid the maudlin, cloying Christian art seen too often in this country. Some are stark in their realism, others striking abstractions which convey something of the oppression and suffering experienced by many Christians in Asia.

My only reservation is with an occasional eclectic comment in the text. I question, for example, the assertion of Jyoti Saki, an Indian artist and theologian:

It appears to me that a Buddhist, Hindu, Moslem or even an agnostic can represent Jesus as an authentic expression of his or her belief. That is, the image of Jesus can represent a true confession of faith for believing Hindu, Buddhist or Moslem.

To say that Jesus can have a universal appeal for people of all faiths or no faith is one thing. To say, however, that "the image of Jesus can represent a true confession of faith for a believing Hindu, Buddhist or Moslem" is something else (my italics). The understanding of guilt, grace, and redemption varies so much in the different faiths that it does not do justice to any one of them to suggest that the Christ of the Christian faith can be confessed faithfully by a Hindu or a Muslim.

Despite this demurrer, I can recommend the book with great enthusiasm. It is not only a feast for the eyes and a stimulus for the heart and mind; it also deepens one's faith and gives fresh new understanding of familiar Biblical scenes. As the authors point out, "Asian eyes may indeed have a unique way of viewing reality which will help [us] to see familiar things in a new perspective." To savor this book is both a religious and an aesthetic experience.

I. John Hesselink

Notes on Poets...

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Sylvia

I don't know why
but you are wearing a hat,
a hat you would never wear
in your dream.

There is a gate
a young man would vault,
I would open
or watch it opened
or stand before.

Of course there are birds
sending signals called song
as we stand there,
the gate getting smaller,
the day dying down.

Two Poems

by

Daniel J. Langton

Flesh Wound

Your letter rumples the window seat,
pleated as carelessly as the dress
you wore to Paris in another time,
when today was all there was, we had no past
and didn't know the future tense. You asked
for nothing, not even a question, sublime
in yourself, the world a rueful mess
you hadn't caused, love a religious retreat.

Now you write: What can we do if the centers
aren't holding, the edges are as dead
as skin about to fall, the things that mattered
are broken, bruised, smashed and scattered?
I remember that woman, and what she said:
The healing begins as the bullet enters.

SECOND
CLASS
POSTAGE
PAID

