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Back Cover: Resurrection Crown (detail)

The March 1993 Cresset cover showed Brusick's monumental painting of a “lamentation” of the crucified Christ by young adults and a child. The dead Christ is shown lying on a slab, being prepared for burial in a distant tomb. As a sequel, Resurrection Crown, also painted in 1989, shows a heavenly blue cloth covering a similar tomb-like slab in a cultivated Northwest Indiana field. Instead of Christ's body one sees the empty white winding cloth, the discarded crown of thorns, and suspended above, a living crown of white lilies suggesting “the triumph of resurrected life over death.”

Brusick, a realist artist, tries “to create a supernatural feeling from making tangible objects fail to obey their roles in a logical world.”
On Not Getting the Nod

The great decision has been made and announced, and I guess I can just admit that I'm hurt. Not angry, just terribly, terribly hurt. They didn't even call, which was the part that really grinds on me. You would have thought that they could have made a background check, or contacted some of my old friends and colleagues. It is the complete lack of any attempt to bring me into the discussions that stings. Because what has Russell Baker got that I haven't?

True, he is better known. And I will grant you that he is a very good writer. During his years in Britain, he was a correspondent for a prestigious East Coast newspaper. During my years in Britain, I gathered first hand information on the National Health Care System as it affected pregnancy, childbirth, well-baby care, innoculations and school milk programs. It is true that this research has never been published, though its results were unassailably beneficial.

In any case, during subsequent years our career paths have been similar. He writes columns, I write columns. He has written books (2), but I have written volumes—mostly concerning the correct use of the semicolon and the necessity of focussing a topic more specifically than "Guns in America," or "The Influence of TV."

Both of us presumably read all the time, which is not exactly a virtue, at least if you listen to people who try to get us to do something else. I recently heard him say that he thinks one of his qualifications is that he even reads big old classics, like James Fenimore Cooper. Well, just this year I read The Last of the Mohicans, and not for class, either. I was trying to see whether the Natty Bumppo I remembered bore the faintest resemblance to Daniel Day Lewis, and I was right—he didn't. I liked Daniel Day Lewis better, which is neither here nor there.

When the new host for Masterpiece Theater was announced, Russell Baker said in an interview that he was worried about being on television because he always cuts his own hair, and he wondered if he'd be forced to have a stylist. Well, I already have a stylist, and Danella had promised me, in a talk we had as soon as I knew Alistair Cooke was leaving, that she would continue to be my stylist, no matter where my career would take me. So I consider that in the matter of hair stylists, I have the distinct advantage over Mr. Baker.

One other advantage concerns my ability, honed over years of diligent practice, to move around in a big armchair. Now, this may not seem to you as though it should matter much, but Masterpiece Theater fans will recognize it as crucial. The host never, as it were, un-sits, though the camera moves all over the place. But you don't have to move and talk at the same time. You actually get to do this moving—shifting from side to side, uncrossing and recrossing the legs, changing from right elbow leaning on the chair arm to left elbow, with the corresponding alternation of the deliberative handhold on the chin—between statements. That is, you say something like, "Actually, Charles Dickens himself had never visited Old Wickhamchester-on-Sea until his fortieth year, in 1852, when he wrote to a friend that he found it decidedly chilly." Then, you shift positions in the chair, while the camera moves around to the other side, you re-cross your legs, and begin, "Only a writer of Dickens' daring would have risked setting a heat-wave scene in that quaint seaside resort. Now, our characters, the Featheringtons and the Miltons are suffering from the 75 degree heat, but they react to it quite differently, as we're about to see in Part Four of Dickens' Little Old Wickham."

Easy as pie. Easier, actually. Perhaps it is for that reason that the powers that be chose, as someone remarked, to replace a Cooke with a Baker. In any case, I'll just have to bear my disappointment as gracefully as possible, since it seems destined to be my last chance. I know very well that though I might imagine replacing Alistair Cooke, I could never hope to replace Diana Rigg.

April 1993

About an issue...

Several things have happened recently to make us more than usually conscious of the "woman question," as it has been called since the nineteenth century. One of them has been the unauthorized reprinting of Mary Todd's article from our March issue in a publication originating somewhere in Missouri. We presume the editors of that
publication indulge in this habitual illegality through ignorance of the law, but it may be that, so engaged in questions of Law and Gospel, they feel themselves above mere statutes. It is perhaps only another example of their selective attention to the real nature and purpose of either law or gospel.

Now that we think of it, the term “selective attention” may be a good one to describe a good deal of what takes place as some Lutherans debate the role of women in churches. Even putting the subject that way ought to give us pause. Why do we not speak of “men’s role in churches”? Silly question; the normal, or ordinary, or normative is “men.” Something other than that has to be specially described, specially named. An author means a male author, which is why people talk about “women authors.”

Such a discussion would seem very old, and very much a discussion that could have been carried out here maybe fifteen years ago, but, in fact, some Lutherans are still caught up in it. We don’t expect this column to be our last word on the subject, either. But last week, a truly radical feminist spoke on campus, and made many of us reflect—yet again—on what it means to try to describe the world and our work in it by means of gender. Disagreeing with her still left us a long way from a straight Missouri Synod understanding of these issues.

If, as feminists think, most of our social structures and mind sets have been significantly affected, not to say shaped, by male ways of seeing and thinking, one could say, as radical feminists do, that we should junk the whole lot, re-organize things with women in charge, let women’s ways of knowing and seeing and thinking dominate, for a change, and see if we wouldn’t be better off. But it is also possible to put it this way: Organizing life according to one view is like going around with one eye. You can manage, but you do keep bumping into things. Now, you can adjust, you can compensate, you can get better at it. You can probably persuade yourself that bumping into things is OK, or even that God meant for us to bump into things. But it might be terrific, and even within the scheme of things for the Kingdom of the Left Hand, to use both eyes. Because it isn’t the case that we only have one eye; it’s just that, most of the time, we’re only using one.

Would it be too presumptuous to point out, in this season, a story in which women saw and reported, but men thought their vision wasn’t right? Luke 24: 8-12:

And they remembered his words, and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told this to the apostles; but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.

It did work out all right. Eventually, the apostles believed. And presumably these women remained their friends, and their mothers, and their wives. But I imagine that when they were together—just the women—they sighed a lot.

Peace,

GME
THE PHILOSOPHICAL LIFE AS LITERATURE: FICTIONAL RENDITIONS OF WITTGENSTEIN

Philosophers are an incurious lot when it comes to the lives of other philosophers. A word or two about Bishop Berkeley's strange obsession with tar water or Immanuel Kant's fastidious punctuality in taking his afternoon walk, and it is on to the arguments against materialism or the transcendental deduction of the categories. What matters, we are told, is not the life but the philosophical work.

What then are we to say about Socrates? Here is a philosopher who did not produce a single text, and yet his life so fired the imaginations of his contemporaries that the numerous 'Socratic conversations' written following his death achieved for a time the status of a literary genre. That his case is almost unique in the history of western philosophy makes all the more extraordinary what has happened since the death of Ludwig Wittgenstein in 1951. The two lengthy biographies currently gracing bookstore shelves (Ray Monk's Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius and Brian McGuinness' Wittgenstein: A Life) are just a small sample of the steadily growing literature on Wittgenstein's life and times. Much of this literature takes the form of memoirs and recollections written by those who actually knew Wittgenstein, but some is literature in a narrower sense, for there are also noteworthy fictional renditions of Wittgenstein. It is these that will be our main concern here.

Before turning to the fiction, however, let us briefly review the facts.

Ludwig Wittgenstein was born in 1889 into an extremely wealthy and highly cultured Viennese family. His father was a leading figure in the iron and steel industry. His mother was a gifted pianist who made their home a center of musical activity. Brahms was a close friend and Labor a protege of the family. Wittgenstein's oldest brother, Hans, was a musical prodigy who at age four was composing his own work; another brother, Paul, was a successful concert pianist. Patrons of the visual as well as the musical arts, the Wittgensteins assembled an impressive private collection of contemporary painting and sculpture. Margarete Wittgenstein was the subject of a well-known portrait by Gustav Klimt, while Hermine, Wittgenstein's oldest sister, was a talented painter in her own right.

Ludwig, the youngest of eight siblings, was thought to be the dullard in matters artistic, but made up for it by showing signs of talent in matters mechanical. Educated at home until age fourteen, he then spent several years doing mediocre work at a technical school in Linz. Eventually he earned a degree in mechanical engineering at Berlin and went on to study aeronautical engineering in Manchester, doing research for a time at a kite flying station. While at Manchester, Wittgenstein developed an interest in the foundations of mathematics. A fellow student put him on to Bertrand Russell's The Principles of Mathematics, a work that made considerable progress toward showing mathematics to be nothing more than the logical manipulation of symbols. In the final pages of Principles, Russell acknowledged that although he had accomplished much, there was still work to be done. When Wittgenstein began to suspect he might be the one to do it, he consulted with the German logician, Gottlob Frege, and, on Frege's recommendation, left Manchester to go study with Russell.

Wittgenstein arrived in Cambridge in the fall of 1911. It was not long before Russell recognized Wittgenstein as his philosophical heir, or before Wittgenstein's personal well-being became a source of considerable concern. Wittgenstein frequently appeared late at night in Russell's rooms "looking like he had been fighting the devil." Russell let him pace back and forth for hours, fearing for his mental stability and worried he might commit suicide. This latter fear was well justified, for two of Wittgenstein's brothers had already killed themselves, and a third would do so during the war. After two tortured years at Cambridge, Wittgenstein left for the peace and quiet of Norway. Living

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In the preface to the Tractatus, Wittgenstein claims to have solved all the problems of philosophy. This being the case, he saw little point in resuming his studies at Cambridge, and, on being released from prison camp, returned to Vienna and immediately gave all his money away. This was no small matter, as his father’s foresightful investment in American bonds had made Wittgenstein one of the wealthiest men in Austria. After a year in teacher training college, he taught grammar school in various remote Alpine villages. He was generally well-liked by his students but did not get on with their parents, and resigned his position over a dispute regarding his methods of discipline. After his resignation, he spent some time as a gardener’s assistant in a monastery and gave serious consideration to becoming a monk. In the end, he returned instead to Vienna to build a house for his sister.

Meanwhile, the Tractatus had been picked up by the leading intellectuals of the day, a group known as the Vienna Circle. In the Tractatus, Wittgenstein sets out to provide a definitive account of the conditions required for successful symbolic representation. Along the way he claims to have resolved a number of the logical difficulties bequeathed to him by Russell, as well as a number of long-standing problems in the philosophy of language. One of the conclusions of the work, which is written in a cryptic, almost oracular style, is that all that can be intelligibly said can be said by the sciences. That which cannot be said but only shown Wittgenstein called the mystical—a term encompassing all matters having to do with ethics, religion, and the meaning of life. The importance of understanding the limits of our language lies, according to the Tractatus, in its bringing us into a right relation with the mystical. “It is not,” Wittgenstein writes, “how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists.” And thus “We feel that even when all possible scientific questions have been answered, the problems of life remain completely untouched. Of course, then no questions are left, and this itself is the answer.”

Although the members of the Vienna Circle failed to grasp the mystical point of the Tractatus, they recognized it as a work of genius, and philosophers soon began hunting Wittgenstein down to talk to him about his ideas. Eventually, he began to suspect that not only had he not solved all the problems of philosophy, but he had come at many of them in altogether the wrong way. More work was needed, and so, sixteen years after he left, he returned to Cambridge, was awarded a Ph.D. for the Tractatus, and began giving lectures. He published next to nothing for the remainder of his career, but filled notebook after notebook, producing enough material to keep his executors busy for years. He recorded his reflections in short paragraphs, repeating the same points over and over, refining and correcting. The masterwork of this later period was published after his death as the Philosophical Investigations. In it Wittgenstein comes at the problems he had dealt with earlier in the Tractatus in a startlingly new way.

An uneasy academician, Wittgenstein made little effort to accommodate himself to the genteel conventions of the senior common room. His lifestyle was Spartan in the extreme, and those who attended lectures in his rooms invariably mention the lack of furnishings. He refused to lecture to ‘tourists’ and insisted that his students attend regularly or not at all. He spoke without notes and was by turns harsh and encouraging in response to comments and questions. He worried that his influence as a teacher was more harmful than helpful, and discouraged his students from pursuing academic careers. He made use of every available opportunity to escape Cambridge, returning at one point to Norway to spend a year working on the manuscript that would become the Investigations, and, during the Second World War, doing stints as a hospital orderly in London and a medical research assistant in Newcastle. In 1947, he resigned his professorship for good. He continued his philosophical work, however, living for a time in a cottage on the west coast of Ireland and visiting a former student in America.

Throughout Wittgenstein’s life periods of energetic work alternated with periods of despair; the worry that he would succumb to madness or give in to the temptation of suicide was constantly with him. A man to whom friendship meant a great deal, he frequently treated his friends to severe chastisement, and those who loved him most dearly nonetheless found his relentless candor fearsome. He was as hard on himself as on others, writing shortly before his death: “God may say to me: ‘I am judging you out of your own mouth. Your own actions have made you shudder when you have seen other people do them.’” And yet, for all that, his last words as he lay dying in his doctor’s house were “Tell them I’ve had a wonderful life.”

Fictional renditions of Wittgenstein’s life come in two varieties: those make no bones about identifying a character as Wittgenstein, borrowing freely from his life and using his name as well, and those, more coy, that do the former but not the latter. The World as I Found It by Bruce Duffy is of the first variety, offering a fictionalized version of Wittgenstein’s life centered around his interactions with Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore. Although Duffy warns his readers in the preface that his book is a work of fiction,
Although Wittgenstein, unlike Moore and Russell, did not leave behind a philosophical autobiography, the problem here is probably not lack of information. There is no question that Moore and Russell were brilliant philosophers. Yet Moore, by his own account, was not a particularly hard worker. Russell, on the other hand, was capable of extremely hard work. But the hard work usually had an ulterior motive: he needed the royalties to support his family, or had a political agenda to push through. Wittgenstein differed from both Moore and Russell in having the rare passion for his work that is the mark of true genius.

It is hard to capture the inner life of a genius without diluting it. In Wittgenstein’s case this task is doubly difficult, for taking his philosophical views seriously places unusual constraints on descriptions of the inner life. For the early Wittgenstein, that which is at the real core of the self, that which makes one’s world happy or unhappy, is something beyond language and thought. It can be shown but not said. Although much changes as we move from the early to the later Wittgenstein, the distinction between showing and saying persists. For the later Wittgenstein, it is no longer the case that talk about God, ethics, and the inner life is senseless; there are perfectly legitimate language-games involving talk of this sort. Our perplexity about these games arises when we develop philosophical theories that, as it were, freeze the play. When we do that, our talk becomes problematic. The inner life, for example, becomes a mysterious “thing” hidden away inside us. But according to the later Wittgenstein the inner life is not a “thing” at all. Rather, it is an activity intimately bound up with all our other activities and only gains sense in the context of various shared social practices. Once again what is important about the inner life can only be shown and not said, for grasping it requires grasping a whole way of being in the world.

All good literature shows far more than it says, and Duffy is a skilled writer who succeeds in showing his readers a great deal. At times, however, he seems to be using the third person omniscience of his narrator to try to explain Wittgenstein to us, thus presuming a gap between inner and outer that can only be bridged by accessing Wittgenstein’s secret thoughts. For neither the early nor the later Wittgenstein does this presumption make much sense. Worse yet, it makes it next to impossible to capture the aspect of Wittgenstein’s personality most crucial to his genius—the passionate integrity that left no room for intellectual dissembling. If Duffy’s use of narrative omniscience undermines this integrity by introducing a gap between inner and outer, then no matter how successful his book is by other standards, it fails in the very thing that makes writing a quasi-realistic novel about Wittgenstein such an interesting project.

Thomas Bernhard’s Correction, like Duffy’s book, is billed as a novelistic treatment of Wittgenstein’s life. There is little in this work, however, that invites confusion.
between fiction and biography. Instead of Wittgenstein the brilliant logician we get Roithamer the brilliant mathematician. Like Wittgenstein, Roithamer designs and supervises construction of a home for his sister, but instead of a box-like building in the center of Vienna we get a cone-shaped house in the center of the Kobernaußer forest. Yet just as the austere and undamaged Stonborough house embodies the *Tractatus* in concrete and marble, so the cone embodies Roithamer’s most definitive philosophical results in a perfectly arranged series of chambers. Furthermore, both Wittgenstein and Roithamer make Cambridge their academic home, both retreat to rural settings when they need to do serious work, both generate massive amounts of material that get pared down—corrected—into a succession of increasingly concise formulations, and, in the end, both leave their most important papers to be sorted out by their literary executors.

The first person narrator in *Correction* is Roithamer’s literary executor. The narration consists of two chapters, each one a single long paragraph containing sentences that frequently run on for several pages. This style at first seems singularly unsuited to a work connected in any way with Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein’s own style is clipped and precise. Short sentences combine to form short paragraphs. Each word is carefully chosen, the condensation of years of thought. It is, perhaps, the weight of all that accumulated insight that, despite his quite straightforward grammar and perfectly ordinary vocabulary, makes it almost impossible to move quickly through his prose. The breathless style of Bernhard’s narrator, on the other hand, sweeps us along in a great rush. We are perpetually chasing after ends of sentences that seem just out of reach, until, by the end of the novel, we feel we have experienced first hand what it means to be held in thrall by a mind that never rests. *Correction* is an unsettling read for many reasons that have nothing to do with Wittgenstein’s life or work. Yet in forcing us to experience for ourselves something of the mental perturbation that was Wittgenstein’s natural condition, Bernhard succeeds where Duffy does not in conveying something important about how Wittgenstein found the world.

Terry Eagleton’s *Saints and Scholars* is very different from either *Correction* or *The World As I Found It*. In his pref­ace, rather than cautioning us against reading fiction as though it were fact, Eagleton merely comments that his novel is not entirely fantasy. And indeed the book opens by plunging us directly into the historical past. It is the morning of 12 May 1916, and we are taken into Kilmainham jail to witness the execution of James Connolly, leader of the insurgent republican forces of the Irish volunteers. As the bullets fly toward Connolly’s chest, we know, because history tells us so, that they will hit their target and produce the desired results. But of course “history does not always get the facts in the most significant order, or arrange them in the most aesthetically pleasing pattern.” And so, with nary a second to spare, Eagleton intervenes and blasts Connolly “out of the dreary continuum of history into a different place altogether.” That place is a cottage on the west coast of Ireland, where Ludwig Wittgenstein is staying with his friend Nikolai Bakhtin. Wittgenstein is on the run from academic philosophy and Bakhtin has come along for the ride. When a gloomy Leopold Bloom, fleeing Dublin for reasons of marital disappointment rather than political danger, fetches up on the same spot, the stage is set for the intellectual interchange that lies at the heart of the book.

The discussion is a political one. Connolly presents the case for Irish Republicanism, and Bakhtin and Wittgenstein have at him. Bakhtin (brother of Mikhail) supplies the postmodern voice in the debate, condemning Connolly’s socialism as a barely warmed over version of the Enlightenment: “that deadly dream of Bacon which has already chilled most of Europe to the bone.” Although he admires Connolly’s willingness to lead an insurrectionist attack despite knowing full well it cannot succeed, the grounds for Bakhtin’s admiration are radically at odds with Connolly’s own understanding of his actions. Connolly sees himself as sacrificial lamb, descending into a hell where he loses all sense of the meaning of his own rhetoric, so as to bring the Irish people to new life. On Bakhtin’s reading, Connolly would do better to see himself as the lead in far­cical recreation of the tragedy of the past. A revolution is a bit of comic theatre, and laughter, not violence, should be its characteristic mode.

Wittgenstein dismisses Bakhtin as frivolous and Connolly as deluded. Revolutions are not light entertainment but exact a heavy price, and it is ordinary folk not revolutionaries who pay it. For the common people, life after the revolution either goes on just as it always has, or their sufferings increase as they are set adrift from the only form of life they understand. Aware his stance may seem reaction­ary, Wittgenstein hastens to add that his Jewish ancestry has taught him what it is to belong to an oppressed people, and his objections to Irish Republicanism have nothing to do with a fondness for the British oppressors. Still, no matter how barbarous human history has been, he is “terrified of pulling one thread of that web” for fear of what else might unravel.

In creating his fictional Wittgenstein, Eagleton borrows freely from the life of the historical Wittgenstein. Certain eccentricities of behavior are carried over from one to the other (for example, the odd habit of washing dishes in the bathtub) and much of what the fictional Wittgenstein says is quoted directly from the historical. But the chronology is thoroughly askew. In particular, Eagleton has no compunction about mixing together catchy epigrams from earlier and later periods of Wittgenstein’s life and, furthermore, feels no obligation to supply the context that originally gave these epigrams their sense. The result is
some delightful nonsense, including an especially memorable scene in which Wittgenstein considers with great seriousness whether a man might have a hedgehog down his trousers and not know it. It is unclear, however, how much sympathy the historical Wittgenstein would have with the political views of his fictional namesake. Although Wittgenstein was indeed deeply pessimistic about the direction he saw European culture moving, one can be pessimistic without being reactionary. Yet to complain that neither Wittgenstein nor his philosophy are being treated fairly misses the point, for Eagleton makes clear from the beginning that he is writing a parody. Leopold Bloom sums it up well when, at a climactic moment he blurs out that he seems to be the only real person there; the others are “just stereotypes—stereotypes talking a lot of hot air.”

Wittgenstein has come in for a fair amount of stereotyping even apart the license fiction grants. The blame for this lies partly with his students, whose circulation of watered down versions of his views gave rise to much misinformation about the philosophical outlook of his later years. Nor was it just his philosophy that was misrepresented. Norman Malcolm, who attended Wittgenstein’s lectures in the late thirties and forties, reports that Wittgenstein the man was also the object of numerous fantastic rumors—he was, for example, reputed to be off herding goats in Turkey during the very period when he was in fact doing philosophical work in Ireland. Wittgenstein’s distinctive mannerisms only made matters worse, for those who spent much time in his presence invariably began to mimic his dramatic gestures and sudden shifts in intonation. This not only reinforced the cultic aspects of the Wittgenstein myth, but, as Malcolm wryly comments, “These imitations could easily appear ridiculous when compared with their original.”

The importance of distinguishing imitation from original was not lost on at least one of Wittgenstein’s students, a philosopher turned novelist by the name of Iris Murdoch. Under the Net is Murdoch’s first novel. It does not identify a particular character as Wittgenstein, but distorts aspects of his life through several of the dramatis personae. The first person narrator of the novel, Jake Donaghue, has little in common with Wittgenstein beyond a slight build and deceptively youthful appearance. Jake is a freelance translator of popular French novels who, when the story opens, has just been kicked out of his mistress’s living quarters. Homeless, he wanders about London renewing contacts and hoping someone will take him in.

His first stop is the flat of his philosopher friend, Dave Gellman. Like Wittgenstein, Dave employs linguistic analysis as a tool for unmasking the nonsense inherent in so many of our deeply held metaphysical convictions. He also, like Wittgenstein, makes a point of trying to dissuade his students from pursuing academic careers, urging them to find honest work instead. Yet Dave is a genial fellow whose failure to see anything odd in earning a living off philosophical attacks on philosophy is comical rather than hypocritical. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, while also no hypocrite, was fully aware of the peculiarity of his position. But in his case the metaphysical pretensions he needed to unmask ran very deep. In the Tractatus, Wittgenstein had pushed to their logical conclusion the core assumptions of an entire philosophical tradition as it had developed since Plato; his remaining at Cambridge as long as he did reflects the intensity of the struggle required to cure himself of a virulent philosophical disease. His students, who had not yet had time to become so seriously infected, were better off getting out while their illness was still relatively mild.

When Dave refuses to take him in, Jake sets off across London in search of a former lover, and, in the process, reestablishes contact with an old acquaintance, Hugo Belfounder. The story of this relationship, we are told, is the central theme of the book. On a previous occasion when Jake found himself homeless, he stayed for a while at a cold cure clinic in the country. In exchange for room, board and a quiet place to work, he was exposed to various permutations of the common cold and then plied with various cures. When Hugo intrudes as his new roommate, Jake responds less than graciously, miffed, among other things, by his having been given only a cold, while Hugo has both a cold and a cure. But before long, Jake realizes he has been assigned an extraordinary companion: “I had the feeling I was meeting for the first time an almost completely truthful man.” With Hugo there is none of that metaphysical generalizing about the world that leads one into lies. “It was,” Jake says, “as if his vision were sharpened to the point where even classification was impossible, for each thing was seen as absolutely unique.”

Hugo is an anti-metaphysician of a very different stripe than Dave. Dave puts one in mind of those Oxford philosophers who, picking up on rumors about Wittgenstein’s later thought, invented the pseudo-Wittgensteinian “ordinary language philosophy” that was all the rage right about the time Murdoch was finishing her novel. But Murdoch, unlike many of her Oxford colleagues, had been exposed for a year to the real thing. She knew the difference between clever attempts to deconstruct philosophical discourse and a serious struggle to see the world aright. Hugo, who is “completely without any sort of desire to score points,” would not know what to make of the former enterprise, but he is a stunning exemplar of what it means to succeed at the latter. Those who come under his sway soon find themselves struggling to see the world as he sees it. Talking with Hugo can transform what had seemed the plainest thing in the world into a cause for great astonishment, and yet Hugo rarely fails to throw “an extraordinary amount of light” on the topic at hand. During their conversations, Jake reports, he “began to see
Jake begins to record—just for himself at first—some of the things he listens to Hugo saying while he is being treated for a head injury and learns to his utter astonishment that Hugo is not at all disgusted by his account of their conversations. However, Jake knows he must break free from the theorician’s habit of telling lies. In the closing lines of the book, Hugo tells Jake: “Well...it’s just a matter of...” I stopped. I had no idea what it was a matter of. I laughed...’I don’t know why it is,’ I said. ‘It’s just one of the wonders of the world.’

Under the Net is a wonderful book even apart from the connections to Wittgenstein. Factor those in, however, and it is a tour de force. That Murdoch could easily have gone along with Eagleton’s route and reduced Wittgenstein to type is evident in her treatment of Dave. That she is aware of the dangers inherent in Duffy’s approach is clear from Hugo’s attitude toward attempts to describe inner states. “One couldn’t give such a description,” says Hugo, “without seeing that it was untrue.” But, he adds, actions don’t lie. Hugo’s ideas. In writing them out, however, he can’t resist tidying them up and thus transforming them into something new. Jake eventually publishes his notes, but is too ashamed of his falsified account of their conversations to continue seeing Hugo once the book is out. He knows, however, that fate will not let this business remain unfinished. The plot climaxes when Jake, who has just taken a job as a hospital orderly, sneaks into the room where Hugo is being treated for a head injury and learns to his utter astonishment that Hugo was not at all disgusted by his account of their conversations. In the course of their conversation Hugo repeats several times that Jake has always been far too impressed with him, and congratulates Jake on being able to do something Hugo has never done: produce original work.

Wittgenstein once wrote that he believed he had never “invented a line of thinking” but simply seized on what others had done and then carried out “the work of clarification.” In the preface to the Investigations, however, he wrote that he did not want “to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.” It is probably more than just coincidence that Hugo set Jake free just before escaping from the hospital himself, and that Murdoch was Wittgenstein’s student in the final year before he fled Cambridge for good. Nor is it likely to be mere coincidence that Jake plans to support himself as a writer by continuing to work part-time in a hospital, while Murdoch used her teaching position as Oxford as a base from which to launch her career as a novelist. Under the Net turns out to be not just a novel about Wittgenstein, but a novel about how to encounter Wittgenstein and respond with originality rather than imitation.

“Working in philosophy,” Wittgenstein writes, “is really more a working on oneself. On one’s own interpretation. On one’s way of seeing things.” The current fascination with Wittgenstein probably has less to do with the events of his life or the work he left behind—though both are certainly fascinating enough—than with the way his life shows what his work says. The work is the life and the life is the work. In this respect, there is very little difference between Wittgenstein and Socrates.

If Duffy fails to accomplish for Wittgenstein what Plato did for Socrates, it is a noble effort nonetheless to capture a life that can inspire and move us as readers. Eagleton comes closer to living up to his predecessor, for like Aristophanes he shows considerable skill in turning the philosophical life into high comedy. There is nothing terribly new in putting a philosophical life in the service of literature in either of these ways. But the service can also be rendered in the opposite direction. “Nothing,” Wittgenstein wrote, “is more important for teaching us to understand the concepts we have than constructing fictitious ones.” From Bernhard’s fictional construction we learn what it is like to be caught in a struggle against a certain kind of philosophical bewitchment. From Murdoch, however, we learn an even more important lesson. We learn how by means of a new kind of philosophy we can begin to live a new kind of life. This is Wittgenstein’s gift to us: a philosophical life that not only begins, but ends, in wonder.
Works Cited


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**Easter Visit**

Helium balloons from their great-grandson
Buoy spirits bowed in the undertow of age.
Heavy hands have but to twine curled ribbon
Around swollen fingers and pull to gauge
How little joy one needs for resurrection
Of rapture to ensue. Blue child-heads nudge
The ceiling seeking physical release
And bent souls soar on pain's too-brief surcease.

**Regina Lederle**
The Mantis

We find her waiting
on an old storefront window,
her small, ardent head listening,
her arms mysteriously raised
for murder or for prayer.

We catch our breath when
she turns her head to stare at us.
She has memorized every vibration in the air
and scans human sadness
with unsettling ease.

Her emerald wings glisten
there in the thickening dusk
and suddenly we want to plot with her
an escape from our bodies
like Flaubert who cut his life
in two separate parts, turning
the earth of his soul for pleasure
while his senses went to weed.

The dry leaves are beginning
to loosen and fall but
all her wisdom is forever locked
in a sane, savage silence.

So we leave, our griefs muffled
like chronicles of ash.
And she passes quietly on
to find the faithful partner
she will betray and eat.

Rita Signorelli-Pappas
AIDS & THE CLERGY:
The Call to Community

JOSEPH A. EDELHEIT

The traditional Jewish lectionary—the Torah portion for this week—begins with Exodus 35: Vayakhael Moshe et Adat Bnei Israel.

“Moses convoked the whole Israelite community”... There is a subtle but very apparent question which illuminates the text in this opening verse—why is there the redundancy of the verb vayakiel and the noun adat? The repetition of these synonyms—to congregate or to assemble the people—is not lost by even the most casual reader of the Hebrew. Is it mere emphasis? Or does it suggest a special role for Moses, who is the subject of the verb to convoke? In Exodus 32, the chapter of the Golden Calf, we read vayekahel in the opening verse (the same verb with a different conjugation) which conveys the people gathered for the purpose of creating an idol in place of the unseen God who had taken Moses away.

Thus Exodus 35 opens with the same verb, now with Moses present, not absent, as the means of the calling together of the assembly. What then does the text come to teach us by repeating vayakiel and adat, since both words mean assembly/congregation? How does scripture want us to understand the named description of Moses’ behavior, to assemble the assembly? To create a congregation from within the congregation? To appoint an assembly of the assembled? In my view, the emphasis illuminates the purposeful nature of the convocation. Each of these Hebrew words has within its root meaning, the notion of special purpose—a specific assembly—hence the verb/object repetition helps the reader understand that this congregation was willfully assembled by Moses for specific religious purposes, as juxtaposed to the masses, (haam) who assembled themselves in riotous caprice when Moses was absent.

It is Moses who draws together this Kehillah/Aydah/congregation; Moses whose absence stimulated the idolatrous disaster; Moses who now uses his presence for a holy convocation for the purpose of making God’s presence real by building the tabernacle.

We clergy/teachers of religion have reason to learn from Moshe Rabbenu, Moses our teacher. After the Golden Calf, Moses intercedes on behalf of the people, arguing that God’s reputation is on the line. Ultimately his argument saves the people, persuading God that he, Moses, on behalf of the people, was worthy enough to experience even God’s glory and presence. Thus, in the preceding chapter, God’s 13 attributes are experienced after Moses has inscribed a second set of tablets and then returns to the people, his face now glowing with Divine presence. It is at this juncture that the religious leader assembles the community and creates a religious congregation, for a purpose—a purpose worthy of healing the community and re-confirming the covenant, and consecrating the future. Here Moses is neither prophet nor priest but a community builder and leader. Vayekahel, he calls together the Aydah, the congregation, he teaches us that after the disaster, the renewal must begin with community, but to be a congregation, there must be a purpose.

This lesson is essential in our response to HIV/AIDS.

Rabbi Joseph Edelheit, previously of Michigan City, Indiana, and now at Temple Israel in Minneapolis, taught for many years in VU as part of a program in Christian-Jewish Studies. During his tenure as rabbi at Temple Emmanuel on Chicago’s North Shore, he delivered this address at the University of Chicago’s Bond Chapel.

April 1993
Religious leaders are called to assemble their communities as purposeful congregations. Synagogues and churches may seem by title or institution or social awareness to be congregations, but all too often there is only a mass of individuals, an aggregate of bodies without a purpose, without a sense of being in present in response to this plight. Too few religious leaders have responded after the disaster of the early eighties to the renewal of their religious visions by making purposeful, caring assemblies with congregations. Those who are sick and dying of HIV/AIDS often face their plight alone. They are shunned because of their “behavior” of transmission. Too few religious leaders have been willing to risk their own pious security, too few have pushed their communities’ religious vision to be inclusive of those who have been excluded by simplistic readings of scripture.

Our greatest challenge as clergy is to find the faith to respond like Moses with daring and with vision. HIV/AIDS is the most tragic of human disasters because it is not merely death, but also alienation which forces those who are in the most desperate need to be left outside of the congregation they most desperately yearn to be part of.

Rabbi Israel Salanter, a 19th century scholar and ethicist, taught “A rabbi whose community does not disagree with him is not really a rabbi—and a rabbi who fears his community is not really a man.” Making the appropriate changes for gender neutrality and a more inclusive statement of clergy from all faith communities, Salanter describes our contemporary challenge and Moses’ value to us as a role model; to be a religious leader assumes a willingness to bring together a congregation, a willingness to lead them through transformation, perhaps a transformation as drastic as that depicted in the change from riotous idolators to pious and energetic builders of the tabernacle. Our communities are no different and we clergy are no less required to lead with and for Divine purpose, to be the agents of transformation. How can any clergy person remain deaf to the cries of those with HIV/AIDS? To what purpose is anyone called to the clergy, if it is not to be in response to these cries?

I am ashamed at how few of us have followed Moses and convoked the community and created truly religious congregations with a purpose! With thousands sick and alone and thousands more who will be sick and alone, God will someday judge whether this has been a generation of clergy who are truly religious leaders, who can offer a transformative vision of hope.

Nearly five years ago, I read at the conclusion of my first sermon on AIDS, this personal rewriting, this personal interpretation of the medieval pietistic poem, “Untaneh Tokef.” Though this occasion is not Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, today I read it in memory of Allen who died two days ago after three months of Kaposi Sarcoma and I pray for Jay who is wasting away and for Jon who called yesterday that his HIV positive status is becoming increasingly fragile. And for those in our midst and those in our hearts, let us lead each other toward being congregations of purpose.

On Rosh Hashanah it is written
On Yom Kippur it is sealed,
Who shall live and who shall die.

Who shall live in fear of the past,
And who shall struggle to find hope in the future.

Who shall live afraid of the sting of discrimination,
And who shall fight for their rights, even while dying.
Who shall have to explain their hidden life,
And who shall continue to hide unable to explain why.

Who shall lose the dignity and security of their profession or calling,
And who shall be protected as a co-worker by others who speak out
to save their own integrity.

Who shall rise up self-righteously to judge and to condemn others,
And who shall find compassion for even that which they cannot
understand.

Who shall innocently be infected never knowing why,
And who knowing why they became infected will hide in the solitude
of innocence.

Who among the children and the very young shall die too soon,
And who among the parents and the grandparents shall mourn bitterly
confused.

Who shall die of AIDS alone and afraid,
And who shall die of AIDS embraced and serene.

We can no longer expect the traditional repentance, prayer and charity to temper these
severe decrees. However we can and must
Repent for the sins we commit against others when fear and ignorance cripple our
judgment, when prejudice distorts our reason and selfishness uproots our compassion.

We can and must
Pray for new insights into a world forever changed by disease,
For the blessings of serenity to be granted to the victims
and their families, for the researchers who seek vaccines
and cures, and for a human community that will not be
ruptured morally and spiritually.

And we can and must
Be more charitable to those who are forced to turn to
their families, friends, co-workers, and society to
support them as they die and we must make Tzedakah our
guide in responding to the urgent needs of those who are
made so vulnerable by the disease.

Let us proclaim the sacred power of this day—
It is awesome and full of dread.

Let us understand that our lives are changed forever and
Reflect somberly on our desperate need for God and one another.

Amen.
Dissing the Dinosaurs

Charles Vandersee

Dear Editor:

Are you as bemused as I am, and as irrationally and irreverently preparing for change?

Seen from the outside, the Roman Catholic Church is a large, rather old, mysterious organization, accustomed to being run, as Time magazine recently said of GM and IBM, by means of a "rigid, top-down management style."

Like the big motorworks and the big mainframe company, the Roman Catholic Church impinges upon consciousness. You yourself drive a Chevy or know somebody who does, and if you're not one of IBM's workforce, becoming (until recently) a stock-option millionaire, your cousin or classmate is. People who are not Roman Catholic assume that Sunday morning may not be a good time to contact friends whose roots are Irish, Italian, Polish, or Hispanic.

The Catholic Church is a presence, and since last November's Vatican reaffirmation of celibacy, and the decision of U.S. bishops not to make a statement about women, I've been wondering more than ever what the Presence thinks of itself.

Or do organizations think? If religious organizations think, do they propel their thinking in certain directions? GM, for example, is a mainline denomination in the religion known as American capitalism. Which must mean propelling its thinking toward profits. But profits, like happiness, seem not attainable directly. Apparently you have to design vehicles that people want, and attach a price that makes them buyable. And if GM "thinks," doesn't that really mean a few guys in the boardroom or on the executive floor, rather than the vast "middle management" or the "dealer network"?

If the Roman Catholic Church "thinks," does that mean the Pope and his advisers, or does it mean that certain past councils and the weight of tradition have produced thinking, and that popes and advisers serve as conduits? If the Church propels its thinking, is it propelled toward God, or potential "customers," or what?

And what would God's vision of a successful religious organization look like? Bruce Barton, in the 1920s, the legendary—nearly deified—advertising king, understood the legendary, often deified Nazarene as "the founder of modern business." Jesus famously "picked up twelve men from the bottom ranks of business and forged them into an organization that conquered the world." But is Barton (or even someone named Barth, for that matter), a reliable guide to what it means for a large multinational organization to be about Someone's Father's business?

What does this Organization in the year MCMXCIII C.E. think of itself? Toward what is the Church propelling its thought? Toward the salvation of souls? Toward the better acculturation of its young service reps into a particular worldview and lifestyle? Toward preservation and transmission of an impressive continuity in doctrine and practice? Toward growth? Toward a "universality" that will be recognizable anywhere in the world, both container (liturgy and praxis) and contents (doctrine)?

A new catechism has come, in 600 pages, but is that just an arcane operating manual, such as IBM writes? Shelf stuff, that is—a text surely "right" but in language and detail that only the service rep understands, and maybe not always, and who, anyway, may have a few unwritten shortcuts?

When the Catholic Church propels its thinking, does it figure it has something "at stake"? Is there something "right" that it's supposed to be doing, with consequences if it fails? Surely not "profit," or "satisfied customers," but possibly the "will of God." Yet the will of God does not seem to be available in the form of an institutional "mission statement" or "bottom-line directive" for the 1990s. In Micah's time a message came forth focused on justice, mercy, and humble faithfulness, but that was propelled toward the Hebrew theocracy. In the Gospels you have Messiah to be followed, and evangelism to undertake, but that directive was for a small num-

Charles Vandersee, at the University of Virginia, is in New Orleans during Holy Week, at the American Culture Association, encompassing the cemetery work of Henry Adams and Augustus Saint-Gaudens.
ber of marginal and timid individuals within the theocracy.

The Hebrew Scriptures and the Apostolic writings mandate worship of a common Creator, but the Hebrew mandate is heavy-laden with prescriptions and proscriptions—a very great deal to organize your thinking around, if you are an organization. Since Rome evolved its own vast assemblage of doctrines and practices, is it therefore more the business of the Roman Church to preserve these than to figure out how to become more of a "presence"? Or vice versa?

Today's Pontiac Grand Am is not much like my father's 1954 black Pontiac sedan, with outside spare tire, fabric top leaking over the rear seat, and oversize tires nearly impossible to find after World War II. In 1949 when he finally gave up and replaced it with a secondhand 1946 Pontiac, the "new" car—with column shift and an actual radio—was not much like today's Grand Am either. But it was definitely a Pontiac, GM said, not a Ford or Chrysler, much less a marginal presence like Hudson, Nash, or Studebaker.

What actually does the Roman Catholic Church today think about priestly celibacy, the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption of the Virgin, birth control, an exclusively male priesthood, papal infallibility, and other accessories—after World War II and the Holocaust, after Vatican II, after the Church's traditional presence in Latin American nations is destabilized by activist priests and by evangelical stridenties?

The Church's uncanny era is in the distant past, the time when it "managed to choose the 'right' side," as historian Jaroslav Pelikan indelicate ly puts it, in The Melody of Theology—referring to "the doctrinal controversies of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries." Rome, says Pelikan (a partisan of the old destabilizing called Lutheranism), possesses an "unchallenged track record of orthodoxy," meaning (he explains) that in the olden days there were other strong cities of Christendom, but Rome, in the early disputes, took the sides that won. Is that also how GM and IBM got their big market share?

But still, what actually does the Church think? And toward what does it propel its thought? Does the Church, for example, think that clergy should and can be only male? We hear what the Church says on this subject, but the Church may be currently affirming this 12th-century innovation because to do otherwise would seem to compromise its present identity. Buick for a long time kept those innovative postwar portholes, and Cadillac its superb, if aerodynamically doubtful, fins.

Or, as I sometimes think, does the Church propel its thought toward the internal beauty of its human infrastructure? That is, theologians and logicians will always be in a minority, just as policy-making execs will be, in an operation like GM and IBM, but there is beauty in the way that a strong home office functions—an almost palpable reverence for the sanctum sanctorum. Any change shall be stately, congruent with certain venerable and delicious principles, pleasing to the current hierarchy, smoothly plausible to anyone with an investment, unchallenging to the "identity" or "mystique" or "image" of the outfit.

Even in America's huge corporations, supposedly propelling their thinking toward profits, there seems to be a reverence for certain principles and the corporate mystique. IBM, as I understand it, said to itself for a long time, "We're mainframes (and white shirts)." The rest of the industry ran away with the customers, who wanted agile PCs networking with each other rather than wired to an ineffable power source in a sanctum somewhere. GM clung to dozens of seaworthy models of five makes, because that's what GM was, while Germany and Japan catered to needs and desires. There is something apparently quite powerful, perhaps suicidal, about corporate reverence of itself.

But again, what does the Church, in its apparently self-reverential way, think about its thinking? In the case of male clergy, its thinking seems to have something to do with Jesus' disciplines. All, including rock-hard Simon, were male, and doesn't this mean that clergy forevermore would be male? But couldn't a good serviceable rock be hewn out of a different proposition? Since women are so prominent in apostolic writings—the Virgin herself, her cousin Elizabeth, Mary and Martha, Mary Magdalene, Dorcas, Phoebe— couldn't this imply that as soon as secular society became more tolerant of women, then women in the Church should be compelled to take on the responsibility that goes with ordination and ministry?

Isn't Scripture, especially in the voice of Paul, the first pope, propelling us to think that the clergy is destined by God to be as much feminine as otherwise? That is, Paul's drawing our attention to his local treatment of the "gender issue" can be read without anguish for what it could have been to him: a problematizing that each generation, each congregation, would wrestle with, rather than a status quo to revere.

Perhaps, of course, not. Perhaps Paul expected the Kingdom daily, and in the short interim thought women should keep their hands clean. Maybe he is as unreasonably unanticipatory in his thinking as was, apparently, Roger Smith at GM, consummate engineer of much of its recent implosion.

Perhaps, perhaps. All this "perhaps" because, again, the outside layperson like myself does not have much sense of Vatican thinking. Writing in the New York Times Magazine last winter, the Times bureau chief in Rome thought he detected in Pope John Paul II's implacable moral conservatism a calculation: "The Pope, according to one European diplomat accredited to the Holy See, feels that, in an amoral world, 'he must ask for the maximum to get the minimum.'" The way labor unions, corporate negotiators, car salesmen, indeed everybody in the world behaves, except one-price Wobegon Protestants, heads as it were under rigid ice caps rather than soft biretta s.

In the Times Alan Cowell also depicts the Vatican as holding to certain permanent values and truths. The
voice of Jozef Cardinal Tomko, in charge of worldwide evangelism: "The church cannot change the moral principles coming from God's law... The church does not change its own moral teaching according to the situation and has not different moral teaching for north and south, Europe and Africa."

Which again raises the question of how the Curia—Cardinal Tomko and the others in the home office—traditionally thinks of itself. One assumes that every church deliberative body thinks of itself, finally, as Quakers do, gathered in meeting: a group "mystically united in the presence of God, aka the Spirit, the Truth, the Light Within," as Paul Elie brightly puts it, writing in Lingua Franca about faculty meetings at Quaker-founded Haverford College. Except Quakers don't count votes ("God couldn't be 51-49," says a Haverford exec), while the Curia might.

Everybody grants that the Catholic laity have propelled themselves away from Rome; the center has not been holding. Whatever Rome thinks of itself (bastion of the immutable, voice of the will of God, definer of faithfulness, arbiter of morality), it is increasingly faced with thinking of itself as absurd. Not "aniquated" or "rigid" or "reactionary," all of which are acceptable epithets to Truth, Inc., but absurd, which is not acceptable, because it connotes the possibility that what the Church says is not as knowable as it historically has asserted.

The Church cannot know that God prefers a celibate clergy, with more free time for service and mischief than a wedded priest has, or that God prefers the male layman's organ uncondomed. As Quakers can't know the will of God either, as can't the prayerfully convened assembly of any Protestant denomination. The Church can pretty much know what it has thought in the past on these subjects—how it has reasoned, analogized, cited, and won this or that council battle—but that kind of knowledge will less and less convince itself, much less its service reps and their quizzical customers worldwide, that what it asserts is right and fitting.

I have the feeling that the Church is going to be saying, in Century XXI C.E., that it will continue to try to discern and promulgate the will of God, but confess also that there is nothing so irredeemably wrong with God's will being in some respects coruscating. Maybe, even, God can be 51 to 49. What is right for the Church and for God in the 51 states of the Union (here in Virginia we're already adding the District) is not necessarily right for Mexico, Poland, or the African countries the Pope has so eagerly visited.

Suddenly very timely, in this era of GM and IBM imploding: opportunity for other institutions to make stately admission of how difficult it is to know what is right and fitting. The Church claims to know much by analogy, for example, but analogies, like the parables of Christ and the rabbinical reasoning (of which we've heard Jesus was a master), propel themselves centrifugally rather than implode in a contained sort of way. They seem to tell us that we should propel ourselves in their multiple and hazy directions, as if polydirectionality rather than perfection of dogma matters more.

Whether Rome slouches toward the bereft reasoning of the past or propels itself confidently into the future may be a revelation awaiting us early in Century XXI. I suspect that Rome will manage to find eloquent language for affirming such continuities and traditions as it deems—well, fitting—while letting others slide into invisibility. Bye-bye, tailfins, portholes. To do otherwise is to propel thought toward the aforementioned absurdity rather than toward God or human images of God. Absurdity: the most alluring of institutional sins, the ultimate risk arising from rigid self-reverence?

From Dogwood, faithfully yours,

C.V.
Father At The Seashore

You crab for hours
in the salt creek,
bucket brims
with sermons
fiddlers hear, not
understanding
you can’t relax
the tongue anymore
than they can play
a saxophone.

A southeaster
stirs beyond the beach,
you loath ending
the clash with blue claws —
a battle of wits
you are winning
with a fish head,
as if existence depended
on dominion.

After the storm blows over,
you take your annual swim,
body, flounder pale —
a dog more master
of the sea. Your face
warped by waves
has a familiar look
of disappointment:
even the ocean
has let you down.

Paul David Steinke
The British are depressed. Not that depression or pessimism are new strains in British character. Since the end of the 19th century, British power, influence, and standard of living appear to be on a downward slope. Perhaps it began with the decline of empire, but maintaining a “stiff upper lip” seems etched on the British forever, as a coping mechanism for decline. For some in the United Kingdom there have been glimmers of hope. The defeat of fascism in 1945, the entry into the European Community in the early ’70s, and the discovery of oil in British waters in the North Sea stimulated optimism in many. For some, the coming to power of Margaret Thatcher held the promise of great change, maybe even for the better. Every decade has even had a few years of prosperity.

A recent trip to Britain revealed greater despair than usual. This depression was illustrated by a Gallup opinion poll that appeared in late February of this year which indicated that 49 per cent of the British would emigrate if they could! Evidently for a majority of the British a stiff upper lip won’t do it any longer.

Some of the reasons for the despair are more familiar than others. The Irish Republican Army’s terror campaign goes on, with terrorist acts and threats in London a regular feature. On the day we started our visit, February 27th, a bomb went off on the High Street of the London borough of Camden, injuring 18 people. Harrold’s had been attacked a month earlier.

The recession persists. Gross Domestic Product has declined for nine straight quarters, lasting almost two and one-half years. This is longer than any recession since the ’30s. Unemployment remains at over 9 per cent.

Some new ingredients have been added to the bleak picture. The most discussed of these is crime. The big news in Britain over the last few weeks has been the murder of a two-year-old boy by two other children in Bootle, in the north of England. Though crime has been rising in Britain, ironically under the “law and order” party, the Conservatives, this horrible crime by juveniles seemed to be the last straw. The Economist captured the mood surrounding this affront in a headline in its February 27th issues, “Moral Panic.” Churchmen blamed the Conservative Government for tolerating poverty, unemployment and homelessness. Other moral crusaders blamed the violence on television and current films. However, irrespective of the attention-grabbing incident in Bootie, reported crime has been increasing in Britain in recent years. Between 1990 and 1991 it went up 20 per cent! However, the increase has primarily been in non-violent crimes, crimes against property.

Another new ingredient in the collective depression has been the troubles of the Queen and her family over the last year. One of her principal palaces suffered significant fire damage. Three of her four children have serious marital difficulties. There is great pressure and controversy over the Queen’s earnings and her tax obligations. The same poll reported above, which indicated that almost half of the British would emigrate if they could, also contained an item on pride in the monarchy. The percentage reporting that they were proud of this institution dropped from 86 per cent a decade ago to 26 per cent today! Admittedly, the monarchy is mostly a symbol of the nation and its constitution. Like the system itself, the symbol is tarnished. The Gallup poll (which was published in late February in the London Daily Telegraph) indicated that except for the military and the police, all institutions, including the Church of England, were at low ebbs in public respect and confidence.

A final ingredient in the bleak outlook which most people in Britain hold currently is the failure of the two major political parties to offer policies and leadership toward a brighter future. Britain had a national election only a year ago. They will not need to have another for three or four years. That is a big factor in the despair, little electoral change in prospect. In the run-up to the election in April of 1992, although confidence in John Major’s government was low, the opposition

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Labor Party under its leader, Neil Kinnock, seemed incapable of building much electoral momentum. The Conservatives and the Labor Party went into the election “neck and neck” in public opinion polls. Many commentators were predicting a “hung parliament,” a House of Commons where no party had a majority and a coalition government might be necessary. This worst scenario did not happen, but the Conservative Party’s majority was greatly reduced. It is now down to 21 seats out of 650. The majority is great enough to foreclose the possibility of a vote of no confidence and a dissolution of parliament. However, it is also something of a defeat for the Conservatives who fought the election pretty much on the defense. No one is interpreting the Conservative showing as a mandate for change or a new direction. In fact, as events during our stay indicated, about all the Conservatives will be able to do is to push ahead with some of the more unpopular of their policies from before the election. These include further privatization of the railroads, reform of the health service, and the further integration of Britain into the European Community. These issues not only divide the British public, but they also divide the governing Conservative Party. This is probably a sure recipe for the further decline of the Government’s standing in public opinion.

The perfect illustration of the policy dilemma for John Major and the Conservative Party came, as if on signal, the evening before we were to return to the United States, on March 8th. The House of Commons, pressed by the Conservative government’s timetable, was debating the Maastricht Treaty, an agreement which commits the members of the European Community to further coordination of their domestic policies and progress on monetary union. The Labor Party introduced what amounted to a delaying procedural amendment. The Conservatives, despite the fact that they have a 21-seat majority in the House of Commons, lost this vote on the amendment by 22 votes! Twenty-six Conservative M.P.’s, opponents of European integration, voted with the Labor Party and against their leadership. Nineteen more Conservatives abstained. Because this was a vote on a minor procedural amendment, the Major Government is not obligated to resign. They were greatly embarrassed. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister pledged to see the Treaty through, and will undoubtedly make the final vote a matter of confidence. On a vote of confidence, all of the Conservative rebels and opponents will grumble a lot, but end up voting for the Treaty. This will not unify and inspire public opinion, however. The British remain ambivalent to negative on further integration into Europe. John Major and most of the leadership of the Conservative Party believe that further integration is necessary. This will probably widen the gap, at least in the short term, between public opinion and the Government.

Privatization of the railroads is a similarly unpopular position which the Conservatives will push ahead with. The poll tax was the unpopular policy of several years ago. Americans puzzle over why and how British governments press on with unpopular policies. The basic answer is the almost perfect party discipline in the House of Commons that can turn even a slim 21-seat margin into a dependable majority. Also, in the past there has been an expectation that leaders will lead, even with unpopular policies. However, there is little question that support for these norms is now declining. The vehement poll tax revolt of several years ago shows that the public expects to be listened to more between national elections. That the present Conservative government does not respond better and does not need to leads to greater despair.

That the British are at a lowpoint in morale is beyond question. There have been dozens of articles written on the depression, including this one. That they need to be so depressed is more open to question. Admittedly this is the opinion of an unabashed Anglophile. With the exception of Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom still seems to be a very tolerant and humane society. Despite the National Front and less overt manifestations of racism, cultural diversity is a major and accepted part of British urban life. There is no question that homosexuality is more tolerated in Britain than in most of the rest of the world. In general, there is still more civility in the society than in the United States, though football hooligans and the child murder in Bootle grab the headlines. There is no question that the political and administrative leadership is among the most intelligent and best prepared in the world, and among the least corrupt. This does not mean that it is always inspiring or effective. Finally, the European Community, to an outsider, does present the prospect for positive changes and hopes.

On our next visit, I hope to find the British feeling better about themselves.
The Children Too Grow Stronger Like the Night

And first the darkness grows inside the forest,
And then it spreads and ripens on the meadows,
And it is time to sleep, and children lie
Amazed beside the window, staring out
At Orion or Cassiopeia or the Great Bear.

And then the darkness comes inside their heads,
And their eyes close, and they seem to lose their awe
And entrust themselves to sleep.
As though infinity were something lovely,
As though they had never been afraid of the dark.

Barbara Bazyn

Dianne

Dawn gives its warning, the salt-true black
of the sea's roof is still in motion;
the wavy swellings hide and target
the drowsy phalaropes. The slower shore
curves in acquiescence, the sanderling
teasing its hair while making borders.

You rise alone, you will lie down married.
A sky as brisk as a willet's lore
charges the day as it comes, sure as
shearwaters again this summer, the lining
of Nature's hold on her husband Time.
Like a house wren, you sing while flying.

Daniel J. Langton
Who's Who in The Crying Game

Reinhold Dooley

While much has been said about The Crying Game, much has been left unsaid. In particular, reviewers have been reticent to reveal the secret identity which has caused such a stir about the movie. Those readers who have yet to see the film should be forewarned, the secret identity is the subject of this essay.

Beyond the level of plot, The Crying Game is a film about the relationship between identity and difference or what has been termed "otherness." Director Neil Jordan develops this theme through a pattern of mirror images and doublings. The revelation of the mystery character's identity, for example, requires that we double back and rethink the entire movie from the very first scene and the opening strains of "When a Man Loves a Woman" to the concluding song "Stand by Your Man." Ultimately, through a series of such doublings, the film causes us to see in a new light the ways that difference or "otherness" structures identity in our society.

One of the most significant doublings which crystallize the issue of identity is a fable-like story told at the outset and then repeated at the conclusion of the film. It concerns a frog carrying a scorpion across a river upon its back. Despite promises to the contrary and despite sealing its own doom, the scorpion stings the frog and they both drown. In response to the frog's question "why?" the scorpion replies, "It's my nature."

This story is initially told by Jody, a black English soldier who has been kidnapped in Ireland by the IRA. During most of his scenes he is bound and hooded in a heavy canvas bag. His is the first identity or nature that the film places in question. Beneath his hood, Jody functions as the sign of national and racial difference. As far as the IRA is concerned he possesses only political identity. He represents an oppressive occupying force which thwarts the realization of an independent Irish identity. Jody, however, is an ironic representative of his people, for he himself is a victim of, and denied identity by, the very nation he reluctantly serves out of economic necessity.


Finally, in the most significant

Fergus, an IRA volunteer, alone attempts to discover who Jody is, to literally uncover his identity by removing the hood. He ultimately reveals his own Irish name to Jody and befriends him, for as his captive points out, it is in his nature. At this point the movie expands toward an exploration of Fergus's divided self, his struggle between political identity and private nature as he wrestles with the idea of killing Jody. This in itself would be enough for an excellent film, as each probes the other's character. However, when the kidnapping goes awry, the movie literally explodes into two halves, doubling itself. In a new setting with a new cast of characters the film goes on to repeat Fergus's struggle between political will and personal desire, but with an amazing twist.

In this second half of the film Fergus takes on the role of Jody and becomes his double: Like Jody, Fergus is victimized by the IRA; he too is betrayed by Jude, his Judas-like compatriot and former girlfriend. In a more significant parallel, his identity, like Jody's, is put into question. After escaping the British security force, Fergus expresses his wish "to lose [him]self," to become "Mr. Nobody," as Jude later calls him. He changes his identity from Fergus, an authentic Irish name which affirms his difference, to Jimmy, a purely generic designation which dissipates identity. Ironically, upon hearing his Irish accent, most Englishmen insist on calling him by the stereotypical Irish appellation Paddy. Jody's girlfriend Dil is an exception—she is willing to believe that he is a Scotsman, his accent notwithstanding.

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Doubling in the film, Fergus, like Jody, is sexually entrapped. In the same way that Jody was seduced and betrayed by Jude, Fergus will be seduced and betrayed by Dil. In essence the two switch girlfriends. Thus we move to the heart of the movie.

In what is a very sexually charged film, Jordan makes careful and even prudent use of sexual gesture. Far from being gratuitous, as in so many popular but less controversial films, Jordan's sexually suggestive (but not explicit) scenes always serve the thematic function of exploring identity and difference. Thus it is significant that Jody's entrapment occurs at the very moment he is making his initial sexual advance, when he is reaching between Jude's legs. This specific sexual image is duplicated three additional times within the film and is in each instance associated with identity.

When it first occurs in Jody's physical encounter with Jude, sexual and racial difference are invoked. The image next appears a second time while Fergus guards Jody. Fergus is compelled literally to grapple with Jody, who is bound and unable to urinate without manual assistance. He must also hold Jody's hands during this scene, thus exactly mirroring an earlier moment between Jude and Jody. This episode of comic relief is replete with stereotypical homosexual and racial associations. For example, when Jody thanks Fergus for helping him relieve himself, Fergus responds "It was my pleasure," and the captor and captive break into laughter. It is through their laughter, however, that they seem able to transcend, at least momentarily, the various political, racial, and sexual differences which constitute their identity. When the image appears the fourth time at the end of the film, it signifies Jude's crude attempt to remind Fergus of his heritage and to constrain him within his Irish identity.

But it is the earlier third repetition of this pattern, when Fergus encounters Dil, that is the most rife with irony. For the crux of the film is the question of Dil's identity, and this question is crystallized in the moment when Fergus attempts to touch the locus of Dil's sexuality. She of course must rebuff his advances if she is presumably to protect her identity. It is not until she stands nude before us, that the truth is revealed: The long harbored secret of Dil's identity is that she is a man. But is this in fact her identity? When she stands revealed before us are we to assume that the locus of her identity has been literally laid bare? Jordan rejects such reductive logic. We and Fergus are left with the vexing question: Who is the person that Fergus is in love with and is she still there? (Dil could ask the same of the duplicitous Jimmy/Fergus). What Fergus finds difficult as a heterosexual is that there is something in Dil (shall we call it her true, even essential, nature) which he longs to love, regardless of her difference. Dil, in fact, represents the epitome of difference. She is the classic "other." As a black, "female," homosexual, she is marginalized three times over.

It is a marker of how our society has changed that the difference in Fergus's and Dil's race is a complete non-issue in this film. Instead, sexual difference takes center stage, as it has in fact in the contemporary political scene. One need only recall the remarkably similar questioning of what qualifies as marginal in the military's debates over the integration first of blacks, then women, and now homosexuals into the armed forces.

Whatever our thoughts on homosexuality, Jordan presents us with a perplexing encounter with identity. It is an unsettling situation, to say the least, for Fergus and for most heterosexual viewers, I would presume. We can't help but sympathize with Fergus and feel similarly frustrated by the dilemma he faces. Such vulnerability felt by the audience may account for The National Review's pronouncing the film homosexual propaganda. However, unlike propaganda, Jordan's film never forces a conclusion upon us. There are no fairy tale endings, no sudden sexual conversions. Instead, in a cleverly suspended ending both Fergus and Dil remain in love, but nonetheless true to their nature. In the final prison scene both characters are simultaneously united but also separated by a glass barrier. Far from being brainwashed by liberal propaganda then, we are left to resolve for ourselves the differences of identity; we are left to choose for ourselves how we shall respond to the "other."

If anything, Jordan causes us to realize that we define our own identity by whom we exclude: the center is defined by the marginalized. It is against someone like Dil or Jody that the dominant culture validates itself. Thus, our choice of who is marginalized reveals more about our own identities than it does about the "other."

The charge of propaganda does however rightly point to a danger in The Crying Game. The questions raised by the film do in fact endanger the status quo by threatening to decenter the dominant identity, the white heterosexual male. Like the IRA, the movie is engaged in a subversive action, one which threatens to explode the myths of difference by which we identify ourselves. □
Funerals: The Evangelism
word of God with the unchurched.

I believe the unchurched should be plenty welcome in church. But what stuns me is churches’ willingness, particularly in the case of weddings, to hand over control of the proceedings. I’ve sat through many a telephone session with a seething colleague whose pastor has declared, “They’re paying for the wedding, so if they want a Beatles’ medley, you have to play it.” And here I thought we weren’t in the business of serving God and Mammon. As Jesus said, “If the check doesn’t bounce, it’s worship.”

In Washington, D.C., one method for un-affiliated couples to find a church is to cruise up and down 16th Street and choose one of the 70-plus houses of worship that appeals to them. For thirteen years, I worked at Christ Lutheran, an adorable little Gothic building that looks great in wedding photographs. It’s also a parish with some straightforward wedding requirements, including pre-marital counseling and an actual service. In spite of this, two of the tackiest nuptials I ever experienced were conducted there by visiting clergy, made welcome in the spirit of Lutheran pastoral collegiality.

Ordinarily, I would rather attend a “Worship as Entertainment” practicum than play a wedding, especially one of non-members. “But,” pastors will say with the glint of ministry in their eyes, “how can you turn strangers away when weddings and funerals are the only times they may be in a church?” Coming soon, my hot, new church growth video, Weddings & Funerals: The Evangelism Tool of the ’90s. Let’s be realistic, comrades. I’ve heard you speak about the superb opportunities such events present to share the word of God with the unchurched. The only hitch is I’ve also heard many of your “homilies” (from the Latin, “less than seven minutes long”); the unchurched are in no danger.

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During the first, a photographer roamed the sanctuary, taking flash pictures of people, windows and architectural details during the “down” parts of the service—like the consecration. Never before or since have I seen a photographer actually jostle the presider to get prime shots of the vows. The second was a hippy-flavored Eucharist during which the celebrant (in saffron-colored chasuble) disappeared behind a large floral arrangement, intoned a eucharistic prayer that included Buddha, and then commixed only the couple. The lessons included a prototype 1970s “I am in thee, thou art in me, we are in each other” poem that was noted as having been part of the recent wedding of a Hollywood starlet who had spent four weeks in India meditating. This summer, friends in California located their clergyman through an advertisement—something along the lines of “Rent an Eastern Orthodox prelate and add excitement to your wedding.” The pectoral cross was fabulous.

Whenever I experience one of these nuptial happenings, I think “only in America.” But then I picked up the 25 February Washington Post and read “Something Borrowed, Something New” by T.R. Reid, our man in Tokyo:

The choir sang a hearty chorus of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” The organist swung into “Here Comes the Bride.” And sure enough, here she came—resplendent in a white satin wedding dress with an eight-foot train and an elaborate white lace veil roughly twice as long. For the bride and groom and their families, the wedding earlier this month was naturally an emotional moment. But it was an educational one too—because it marked the first time they had ever attended a Christian religious service.

On my first read through I missed “Tokyo” in fine print, so I assumed Reid was reporting locally. “This is about atmosphere,” says the Rev. Sadao Honda, an ordained Gospel minister who marries about 300 couples each year, almost none of them Christian. “It’s the wedding dress, it’s walking down the aisle on your father’s arm, it’s having all your friends gathered around you in the pews. All that is so chic these days.” I’d pass this off as yet another quaint example of the Japanese love for all things American—right up there with Levis, Mickey Mouse and Dynasty reruns—but who am I kidding? In addition to chic, there’s an image of Maureen Jais-Mick

Support Your Local Organist—Elope!

Maureen Jais-Mick

Ordinarily, I would rather attend a “Worship as Entertainment” practicum than play a wedding, especially one of non-members. “But,” pastors will say with the glint of ministry in their eyes, “how can you turn strangers away when weddings and funerals are the only times they may be in a church?” Coming soon, my hot, new church growth video, Weddings & Funerals: The Evangelism Tool of the ’90s. Let’s be realistic, comrades. I’ve heard you speak about the superb opportunities such events present to share the word of God with the unchurched. The only hitch is I’ve also heard many of your “homilies” (from the Latin, “less than seven minutes long”); the unchurched are in no danger.

Maureen Jais-Mick knows whereof she speaks. She was organist at Christ Lutheran in Washington, D.C. for many years and instrumental in founding the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. Now she works in public relations, writes for The Cresset, and worships in the pew.

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joy of Man's Desiring," Pachelbel's journal young brides usually want (a) the exact least Moon, his staff and his computer And perhaps you read would be a memory worth capturing spend some time deciding a problem, as all the brides had ples are a good match. A colleague remarked that music selection was not typically, didn't care about the cere­mony. They were only interested in how the wedding party had secured front row seats at a sold-out game.) And perhaps you read The Wall Street Journal article detailing preparations for one of the Rev. Moon's wedding marathons—I think there were 14,000 couples in this one. Ridiculous, but at least Moon, his staff and his computer spend some time deciding if the couples are a good match. A colleague remarked that music selection was not a problem, as all the brides had chosen Trumpet Tune by Jeremiah Clarke, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," Pachelbel's Canon and "The Lord's Prayer" by Malotte. Indeed, I've noticed that young brides usually want (a) the exact wedding their friend just had, or (b) the ceremony out of some department store wedding guide. So much for the rebelliousness of youth.

One of my memorable telephone conversations with a young, Catholic bride went as follows:

Me: Jennifer, you've got on your music list a piece by Richard Wagner. I don't think this is a good idea. Remember that your groom's family is Jewish.

She: So?

Me: Wagner was notoriously anti-semitic. It would probably be considered an insult, especially to his grandparents, to use this music.

She [to fiance in background]: Greg! The organist says I can't have that piece I wanted at the end, 'cause the guy that wrote it is anti-anti . . . [to me] What was that word again?

So here we sit, in a time where nearly half of all marriages end in divorce. That's a well known statistic, but the statistic I'd like to have is its relation to the percentage of marriages thoughtlessly performed by pastors whose "ministry" didn't include an effort to prepare couples for life-long commitment. If people seem increasingly casual about untying the marriage knot, our clergy seem equally casual about tying it.

Perhaps we could help by introducing stronger Gospel texts and retiring the wedding at Cana—the point of which, as near as I can figure out, is "Hire a reputable caterer." Trust me, this is not news to the unchurched.

When, exactly, did ministers become reluctant to emphasize that weddings in church have—dare we say it? —spiritual and community significance that transcends the two people being joined? Looking at marriage in this way makes it more worthy of celebration by friends and family. I think our culture is ready for a less fluffy approach to marriage, and this is a contribution that individual parishes —no matter their size or resources—can make.

In my town, people are searching for meaning in their lives and relationships beyond "feeling good." Many attended worship as children, but their religion never made the transition into adulthood. Lest you think I'm pining for the "good old days" when church mattered and people did what their minister said (or claimed to), I'm not. Wasn't it the good old days that laid the foundation for today? (Parenthetically, have you, like me, wondered about the ceremonies confirmation/bar mitzvah at puberty? "Welcome to adult Christianity/Judaism," we say to these folk who can't vote, buy liquor, marry, be drafted or stay out late on a school night.)

Returning to Reid's commentary on the chic Tokyo wedding:

And for the fashionable bride, Christian-for-a-day and glorying in her promenade down the church (or churchlike) aisle, the [exorbitant] price [of a Christian wedding] doesn't matter. "We all dream of that," says Tomoko Yamanaka, a 26-year-old Tokyoite who is just starting to contemplate her own marriage. "Wearing a white gown and standing at the altar—that's what a wedding is all about, isn't it?"

I always cry at weddings.
Shadow-Brother

It was dusk and we could hear the cows moving in their stanchions in the dark barn when he said it: "You had a brother. He died at birth." Only that. I didn’t ask him anything then as we lived our lives in that farm silence, and now he has forgotten both of us as he walks among the soft maples of the farm and feeds the birds that stay the winter with him, or stands in the pasture, the bright axe in his hand. And though I cannot mold that space my father created or give you another gift of breath, I wonder what shadow you might have cast as we grow older together and could afford the tears for our father the young save for themselves. But it will be cold soon, and he will walk on the levee watching the river. Perhaps he thinks of you in the dark water or feels ghosts in the leaf smoke that curls into the frosty air. Later, I will sit in the dark kitchen knowing he holds himself stiffly between the cold sheets, listening in the dark. And in the coldest hours, the foxes will come from their fern-dark hole in Turley’s Woods and move among the old graves in the upper garden. And we will all sleep then, that dark, deep, farm sleep.

J. T. Ledbetter

Fred Feldman is a philosopher highly respected for his rigorously analytic publications in ethics and other areas. In 1987 his sixteen year-old daughter Lindsay died after a serious illness. He reports that during the grim months before she died, he and Lindsay often talked about death: “We of course expressed our angers and our fears concerning death. But we also discussed all sorts of philosophical puzzles about death, including the puzzle about the evil of death.” If the title leads you to expect emphasis on the anger and fear, you will be disappointed; this is a book about puzzles.

For example, the “standard analysis” of death is “D1: x dies at t = df. x ceases to be alive at t.” But it turns out to be impossible to define what it is to be alive. Functional accounts try to pinpoint one or more functions, such as nutrition or reproduction, that are necessary and sufficient for being alive. But nutrition cannot define life because the cecropia moth is definitely alive but is not even equipped with a mouth or a stomach during its few days of copulation and egg laying. And the existence of mules undermines the reproduction suggestion. Increasingly sophisticated refinements of the “life function” approach finally yields this proposal: “LFG: x is alive at t = df, if x is able to exercise at least one capacity that is a vital function of x’s species.” But it turns out that the notion of vital function presupposed the notion of life, so the definition is circular. The other main approach to defining life is the “vitalistic” effort to locate some vital fluid or substance that all and only living things contain. The most plausible contemporary version refers to DNA or genetic endowment: “x is alive at t = df. x contains a genetic representation of x at t.” But then shriveled tomatoes in February that careless Minnesota gardeners neglected to remove are alive because they contain viable seeds. Feldman concludes that no one has found a precise definition of life. “Thus, my view is that life is a mystery,” which makes death also a mystery because it most plausibly is defined as the absence of life.

Moreover, even if we could give a precise definition of life, death would remain a mystery because the same concept of biological death must apply to all types of living entities. And actual or possible ways of ceasing to live without dying, such as suspended animation (it is at least possible that cryogenics is not a ripoff), fission (the way amoebas “do it”), or fusion (you will not believe how green algae “do it”) require increasingly sophisticated refinements of that standard analysis until we reach:

D8: x dies at t = df. (i) x ceases to be alive at or before t, and (ii) at t, x undergoes internal changes that make it physically impossible for x ever to live again, and (iii) it is not the case that x turns into a living organism or a bunch of living organisms at t, and (iv) it is not the case that x is a number of a set of living organisms whose members fuse and turn into a living organism at t (70).

But the counter-example to D8 is the cell that a researcher takes from a frog and causes to divide into two daughter cells. Since you have read this far only if you enjoy logic chopping, I leave it as homework to show that D8 entails that the frog cell has died. But clearly it “gets out of life deathlessly.” Conclusion: “The Reaper remains mysterious.”

A fascinating game, one might say, this puzzling over a definition of...
death. But is this what the painful death of a beloved daughter would precipitate in a normal person? And is this what it means to meditate on the mystery of death?

In his *Confession*, Leo Tolstoy complains that when he turns to philosophy for answers to his searching questions about the meaning of life and death, "all one gets is the same question, only put in more complicated form" (Jane Kentish translation). "Precisely the point," Feldman would reply. In the last two pages of the book he addresses those who are "impatient with my plodding style." Quoting G.E. Moore's claim that most difficulties in philosophy are due to the attempt to answer questions without discovering precisely what question it is which you desire to answer," he provides what some of us might think of as a poignant portrait of an analytic philosopher at a deathbed:

Suppose a beloved friend has died. Suppose we are moved to reflect on the nature and value of her death. We may want to understand this monster that has destroyed our friend, and we may want to reassure ourselves that our friend is now safe from harm. We may thus ask what death is, and whether a person can survive it; if it is truly a great evil, or whether it can sometimes be a benefit to the one who dies... As I see it, these questions are puzzling in large part because they are so obscure and ambiguous... Some may be satisfied merely to savor the sounds of the words and to allow memory and imagination to wander... But if, like me, you want reasonable answers, then you must be more patient... You must engage in painstaking philosophical reflection. Anything less will surely be fruitless. (227-228).

I suspect that some readers are appalled at this picture, seeing it as an intellectualizing way of avoiding Kubler-Ross' stages of anger and depression by suppressing feeling with thinking. Surely here is where religious faith can and should allow affirmations as well as questions. Even atheists who are in touch with their feelings may prefer Dylan Thomas' fist-shaking cry of "Do not go gentle into that good night," Edna St. Vincent Millay's lament that "You as well must die, beloved dust," or William Cullen Bryant's soothing metaphors about a summons to join the innumerable caravan in the silent halls of death. At least the poets recognize that death has as much to do with our emotion as our cognition. This point was made by Eric Cassell (*Hastings Center Report*, April, 1989) in a review of Jay Rosenberg's *Thinking Clearly About Death* (Prentice-Hall, 1983). In a book that I find more witty but less careful than Feldman's, Rosenberg warns his readers that it is "chock full of arguments" in a style "one might call 'hard core' analytic philosophy." But Cassell asserts that this sort of "sterile reductionism in analytic philosophy," which views thinking as an "active (logical) function of the mind that is liable to contamination by [reactive] feeling," results in thinking about death the way one might appreciate the perfection of a wax apple: "an abstraction so far removed from the real thing that it gives us no insight into smell, savor, texture, or heft, without which we know nothing important about apples." Whatever clarity emerges from books like these, Cassell would say, will provide precious little knowledge about real death.

I suspect that Feldman would respond by saying that one can distinguish thinking from feeling even if one cannot separate them, by patiently making a distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions for knowing something, and by agreeing that appreciating what he sometimes specifies as the conceptual (vs. phenomenological) mystery of death is a merely necessary but nonetheless important condition for knowing about death. Deep methodological issues arise here and I confess an ambiguous sympathy for both sides. However, I do think that Feldman's conceptualizing chews a lot more than it bites off because of his extremely stringent strictures on a good analysis. It must express a "metaphysical necessity," which means that a definition of death must apply to *anything* that can die and must be *eternally* true. Combine this intergalactic, indeed, cosmic scope with all the quirky phenomena that biological evolution has provided (to say nothing of science-fiction hypotheticals), and you will find that no proposed definition, however carefully qualified, can survive counter-examples. But Ludwig Wittgenstein enjoyed showing almost all notions are ambiguous or vague and that efforts to find necessary or sufficient properties even for such mundane things as games and chairs cannot survive counter-examples. I suppose one could conclude that we are surrounded by mysteries, but another might object that we would then confuse the category of mystery with the stubborn fact that, like reality itself, our language is open-textured. Perhaps this does not reduce the mystery of death to what Gabriel Marcel would call a problem, but it does give it the flavor of a conceptual puzzle. So, if you find working on puzzles to be as fascinating and therapeutic as does Feldman, this may be the book for you.

However, do not let the subtitle lead you to expect puzzling over that grand and ancient question whether mortality is a fortunate or miserable aspect of the human condition. Tolstoy's great spiritual crisis came when he asked whether there is "any meaning in my life that will not be annihilated by the inevitability of death which awaits me" (*Confession*, Kentish translation). But some optimistic humanists, such as William Hocking, assert that it is precisely our mortality that gives us a sense of time, values, and priorities, a view which contradicts the Kierkegaardian claim that these very features of our finitude come precisely from our hope for eternal life. The closest Feldman comes to this debate is when he rebuts the Epicurean argument that, since nothing can be harmed unless it exists and, since when you die you no longer exist, your own death cannot harm you; so why worry. Feldman argues convincingly that, although no intrinsic harm can affect you when you do not exist, you can still be extrinsically harmed. Just as someone could harm you before you existed by causing, say,
a change for the worse in your genetic endowment or circumstances of birth, so could someone harm you by depriving you of a segment of your life that you would otherwise enjoy. There are some interesting puzzles associated with this "deprivation" rebuttal of Epicurus (e.g., are you harmed if you are brought into existence later rather than earlier?) but, as you can imagine by now, Feldman comes as close to anybody to piecing together plausible solutions.

The discussions of euthanasia, abortion, and suicide are plagued by what strikes me as one of the least promising moral theories I have ever seen. "Justicized act utilitarianism" asserts that "an act is morally right if and only if it maximizes universal justice level," which means that knowing the right thing to do requires knowing what everyone affected by your action deserves to receive. Given the pervasive influence of what philosophers call "moral luck" (and what theists refer to when they say "There but for the grace of God go I") only an omniscient being could be confident about doing very much. Here is how we less knowledgeable folks must struggle to apply Feldman's theory when asking, for example, whether aborting a late-term fetus is morally worse than aborting an early-term fetus:

We can say that a day-old fetus has . . .not yet exerted any efforts, undertaken any training, undergone any pains, or even endured any boredom. . . .In virtue of its minuscule investment, it deserves relatively little. On the other hand, an eight month-old fetus probably has made a much greater investment. She has endured the boredom of a long, claustrophobic, underwater captivity. She has exerted energy and other resources to the tasks involved in growth and development. . . .but she has not yet had an opportunity to enjoy the benefits of her prenatal labors. . . .To abort her now would be to perpetrate a huge injustice upon her (203).

I swear that my editing is fair to Feldman's position. Not to belabor the point, but even after birth one can be just as mistaken about precisely who is doing precisely what (to say nothing of precisely why). Thus, assigning just desserts to people after birth can be just as difficult, inappropriate, and dangerous. Parents, teachers, and judges must do it sometimes, but only in fear and trembling, only in very circumscribed areas and ways, and without linking it to the general distribution of all basic goods and harms. Even St. Paul, not noted for his shyness about praising and blaming, reveals a wise and refreshing humility about judgments of innocence: "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time, wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts" (I Corinthians 4:4-5). I suspect that if Feldman's moral theory is the best we could do, we would have a new moral proof for the existence of God, because only one who believed in an all-knowing and all-good higher court of appeals should be willing to turn almost every decision about what anyone should do into a calculation about what everyone deserves.

If you have a passion for clarity that is not merely a yearning for simplicity but also enables you to watch as obscurity is slowly, carefully, and knowledgeably transformed into (numbered) complexity, then you will enjoy this book. Its materialistic metaphysics and utilitarian assumptions will seem implausible to most regular readers of The Cresset, but you will find it instructive to see how a clear-headed thinker uses these meager resources while wrestling with a monster.

Edward Langerak


When properly done, theological ethics is a rich and rewarding enterprise. It combines the best of contemporary and classical philosophy, the substance of traditional theology and the concreteness of both ethics and literature. And it has a centrality to Christian life and thought that little else can claim; for in essence it is simply the attempt to determine how the faith we hold should shape our lives and our actions.

Among the sins of omission of contemporary Lutheranism we should not number a neglect of theological ethics. Two recent efforts by Lutherans display the richness of the enterprise in a manner that is both rooted in Lutheran theology and accessible to those who are not specialists in the discipline. Both also share the characteristic accents of contemporary theological ethics: an assertion of the importance of community; an insistence on the centrality of character in the moral life; renewed attention to the virtues; and the belief that moral education is best accomplished, not by learning rules and principles, but by opening ourselves to what is conveyed to us by narrative.

The book by Childs is an introduction in the more obvious sense: it is intended for those within the church who have had little or no previous study of Christian ethics. It attempts to provide a more or less complete account—complete at least in outline—of Christian ethics and to illustrate that implications of this account for a variety of contemporary moral issues.

According to Childs, the foundation of Christian ethics is faith—in particular, faith in the promise of the coming kingdom of God which will fully realize the basic values of "life, wholeness, peace, equality among all,
community, unity, joy and freedom from sin and evil.” Christian ethics is essentially an attempt to realize these virtues, not to bring about God’s kingdom on earth, as in the liberal theology of an earlier day, but to bear witness to our trust and hope in God’s final action. Thus, Christian ethics is essentially eschatological in structure.

The Christian life, however, is not just a matter of faith; it is also a matter of formation in which this basic orientation comes to shape our character. While this suggests the more classical scheme of the virtues, Childs takes us in a slightly different direction. The central virtue is love, which he understands in a somewhat Kantian sense as equal regard for the welfare of all human beings. The other virtues are distilled out of the Beatitudes. So in the place of the more usual faith and hope, Christ puts poverty of spirit, solidarity in suffering, mercy and peace.

But the Christian life is even more than becoming a certain kind of person; it is also a matter of making ethical decisions. Consequently, Childs rounds out his account with a theory of Christian decision-making he calls “dialogical ethics.” The basic principle upon which decisions are based is love and its more specific implications are wrung out of his creative interpretation of the Decalogue.

When we put all of this together and ask for its ethical implications, we arrive at something that is too often an uncritical endorsement of the contemporary liberal social agenda, including what may be its most questionable tenet, equality of outcomes. This may commend it to some readers, and it is tempting to attribute to Childs a certain, subtle apologetic intent. But judged as Christian ethics, it is disappointing; for what Christian faith has to say in question and qualifications of liberal social agenda rarely appears in Child’s discussion.

Behind this lies some fundamental theological weaknesses. The theological inspiration for much of what Childs argues is current Biblical theology closely associated as it is with the basic themes of liberation theology. What needs further attention is first the eschatological tension of Christian life. To wit: how does the reality of our present sinful condition shape and limit the social policies we would be wise to pursue? Apart from more careful attention to this issue, Childs’ theology comes far closer to “the old liberalism” than he would like. Even more worrying is that, true to his theological inspiration, Childs neglects altogether our rootedness in, and relation to, nature. The most egregious result of this omission is that, in a work that discusses most of the serious moral issues of our day, Childs has almost nothing to say about our sexuality.

In many ways, Meilaender’s work stands in clear contrast to Childs’—being strong precisely where it is weak. It is not an introduction in the sense that it attempts a complete account of the moral life. And unlike Childs’ work, it eludes easy outline and summary—in part because it is a collection of essays, some of which have been published previously. However, it is introductory in another sense—the sense best captured by the word prolegomenon. What Meilaender does is what all Christian ethicists must do first—and continue to do—if they are to be theological ethicists and that is to articulate those foundational theological beliefs that make Christian ethics truly and distinctively Christian. Consequently, his work is more theological and philosophical than Childs’. And he offers us not specific conclusions but a theological framework within which we may do Christian ethics.

Part of what Meilaender does in these essays is to develop a Christian moral theory—what he calls a “two-tier ethics”—in part general and able to be defended on grounds not peculiarly Christian; in part singular, making sense only within the shared life of the faithful community.” Accordingly, its central insights come uniquely from the Christian story, but it continually seeks to express, clarify and interpret these insights in terms more universally human. Some of the chapters help to fill out this theory by distinguishing it from the two most common philosophical alternatives, deontic and consequentialist ethics.

The other chapters explore the basic concepts of a Christian understanding of human existence: sin and justification, justification and sanctification, our place in the natural world, the meaning of death, the nature and legitimacy of our loves, the limits of our freedom and moral knowledge, the relation of the church to the world. As this list would suggest, Meilaender’s underlying concern is a Christian anthropology, and his unifying theme is a human nature best understood as a careful balancing of several central tensions: we are finite yet free, justified yet sinful, firmly rooted in this life yet destined for more.

While Childs mentions or alludes to these tensions, Meilaender explores them, holds fast to them, and worries about anything that looks like a prema-
ture resolution. In fact, dualities-intension is a fundamental pattern in his theology, and it suggests an important similarity between it and the dialectical theology of an earlier day.

The most basic difference between Meilaender and Childs, though, is their theological rigor. Both sound the same themes as we would expect from two Lutheran ethicists. Childs, however, is finally unsuccessful in turning aside the nagging suspicious that much of his ethics was arrived at independently of his theology and could well survive without it. In Meilaender's case, less of the language is that of traditional Lutheranism, but the work itself is a careful and faithful probing of its central notions.

Yet, for all their differences, these two works share a common weakness: a neglect of the Lutheran notion of the two kingdoms. Childs seems to be largely critical, and in many ways it runs contrary to his basic position. While we find much of it deeply embedded in Meilaender's discussion, it still does not receive the central and sustained attention it deserves. So we must wait for a fuller discussion of what is perhaps the most criticized but possibly also the most instructive Lutheran contribution to theological ethics.

Robert Holyer

The integration of Christian and psychological perspectives on human behavior is a difficult but potentially rewarding task. In the new book entitled *Death in the Midst of Life*, Lucy Bregman gives us a fine scholarly work that attempts to develop a Christian perspective on death which considers the resources available from psychology.

One of the strengths of this book is that it has a focus which is specific and well-articulated. Bregman wisely chooses to limit her coverage of psychological perspectives to a consideration of depth psychologists, such as Freud and Jung. The connection between Christianity and Jung has frequently been explored, but the author does an excellent job of explication and critiquing a Jungian view of death while making an original contribution.

Another welcome feature of this book is its scholarly treatment of the topic. Many popular or practical books on the subject have been written from a Christian perspective, but few have attempted to deal with the theological and philosophical underpinnings of the topic. The book provides welcome substance on the issue.

Bregman deals at length with the "ethical naturalism" of Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and the perspectives of transpersonal psychology. The inclusion of Kubler-Ross in a book on death is natural, but seems out of place given the author's stated goal of focusing on depth psychology. Nevertheless, her analysis is insightful and accurate when she notes that much of the contemporary Christian literature on death "duplicates secular psychological writings, and makes no attempt to discover underlying incompatibilities between historical Christian theological assertions and Kubler-Ross' ethical naturalism."

While the precise focus of the book is one of its strengths, it also tantalizes us with other possibilities. Depth psychology is only a minor part of contemporary psychology as a whole, and so one must ask if there are other theories or areas of research that are critical. For instance, more modern and currently popular psychoanalytic writers such as Kohut and Fairbairn focus on the development of the self and how our life is affected by images of early relationships and people. These authors have much to say that is relevant to the dissolution of the self and the coping with the loss of others. Another relevant area not covered by Bregman is the considerable empirical literature generated by medical psychologists who deal with illness, death and dying. One of the weaknesses of most Christian literature attempting to integrate psychology and theology is that writers tend to focus on theories of psychology which are not widely influential in the discipline. This limits the meaningfulness of the dialogue from the point of view of psychologists, and sets aside resources which could be invaluable in developing an informed Christian view of death and dying.

This is a thoughtful book, well worth a read by anyone with more than a passing interest in the topic. I recommend it.

James M. Nelson

Already known to many through his *Celebration of Discipline* and *Freedom of Simplicity*, Richard Foster now has written a book with an amazing range of topics on prayer. This range is indicated by the volume's structure. Foster organizes the text into three parts in which he loosely correlates a movement in prayer with the trinity; every part has seven chapters each on a particular form of prayer. Part I is entitled, "Moving Inward: Seeking the Transformation We Need," and is seen as prayer to God the Son in his role as savior and teacher. This section includes chapters on Simple Prayer in which the focus is on us, our needs and concerns, the Prayer of Tears (compunction), and Covenant Prayer in which a person commits his or her life to God in holy obedience. Part II is called "Moving Upward: Seeking the Intimacy We Need" and is linked with Prayer to God the Father. This begins with chapters on the Prayer of Adoration and the Prayer of Rest, and ends with Meditative Prayer and Contemplative Prayer. Part III "Moving Outward: Seeking the Ministry We Need" is connected with God the Holy Spirit, and includes chapters on Petitionary Prayer, Intercessory Prayer, Healing Prayer, and the Prayer of Suffering.

*Prayer* is filled with good insights
into the Christian life of prayer, insights drawn from Foster's rich personal experience, extensive reading of Christian classics on prayer, and wide contacts with other Christians. These insights are accompanied by sound practical advice on how a person may enter into each particular form of prayer and cope with difficulties. For instance, in chapter two, "Prayer of the Forsaken," Foster reflects on his own 18 month experience of God being silent, "As best I can discern, the silence of God month after weary month was a purifying silence. I say, 'as best I can discern' because the purifying was not dramatic or even recognizable at the time." Such sensible interpretation of his own experience is a comfort to others who in darkness struggle with the absence of God. Foster supports this judgement with brief references to the dark night of the soul in St. John of the Cross, and adds helpful suggestions on how to pray during such a time.

Prayer is a very fine prayer guide which will challenge many to extend their practice of prayer beyond what is familiar to them. While Richard Foster is a Quaker familiar with meditation and contemplation, he also seems at home in evangelical and charismatic circles where healing prayer and authoritative prayer (faith that moves mountains) are generally accepted. The latter phenomena challenges the theological convictions under which so many of us influenced by the Enlightenment operate. Unfortunately, Foster is little help in the theological rethinking that deeper experience in prayer often generates. For example, his correlation of three movements in prayer with the triune God remains so suggestive that it ends up being merely a superficial organizational device for the book. Prayer should run ahead of theological formulation, yet I wish the gap between them were not so wide. I also regret Foster's decision to use only male pronouns for God; I think a better way to keep our God language personal is to alternate male and female pronouns. Nevertheless, Foster's Prayer is valuable, for its breadth of prayer forms challenges believers and scholars to widen their experience and understanding of Christian prayer.

Bradley Hanson


When the German historian Bernd Moeller coined the Phrase "no humanism, no Reformation" some years ago, he was confirming not only his own work, but also that of Lewis Spitz, premier American scholar of the relation between the culture of the Renaissance and the religion of early German Protestantism. Best known for his monographs Conrad Celtis—the German Arch-Humanist (Harvard, 1957), and The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists (Harvard, 1965), as well as for his magisterial survey The Renaissance and Reformation Movements (Rand McNally, 1971; Concordia, 1987), Spitz has had a profound and wide-ranging influence on younger scholars, both through his publications and his mentorship. He has also earned affection and a place of honor among his fellow Lutherans. At a time when conservative evangelicals turned "humanism" into a dirty word, and American Lutherans had to reckon on the distance between Athens and Jerusalem, Spitz's work has reminded many within the flock of the debt they owe to Renaissance humanism and the liberal arts. Mark Edwards and Robert Kolb, for instance, proclaim here in their laudationes that Spitz proved to them that as it had once been possible for humanists to become Reformers, so it was still possible for Christians to become scholars.

This is a collection of papers offered in praise of Spitz at the Huntington Library in January 1990, written by thirteen of his colleagues, former students, and admirers: Manfred Fleischer, Robert Rosin, James Kittelson, Robert Kolb, Kaspar von Greyerz, Arlene Miller Guinsburg, Joseph Freedman, Abraham Friesen, James Parente, Derk Visser, Frank Baron, Jeannine Olson, and James Michael Weiss. Perhaps the best place to begin reading this book is the essay by James Kittelson, "Humanism in the Theological Faculties of Lutheran Universities during the Late Reformation," which, though buried in the very middle, succinctly introduces and sets into context the theme of all the essays—the legacy of Renaissance learning in the later Reformation. As Kittelson explains, the prevailing opinion on the fate of humanistic scholarship after Luther's death is that it was tamed, housebroken, divorced from theology, and tUCKed away in the intellectual basement of German culture. Taken as a whole, the essays go a long way towards dispelling this negative myth: they convincingly argue that Renaissance learning continued to shape the history of Protestantism well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both among the clergy and the laity. Though their geographic reach is largely confined to the German-speaking world, their thematic range within the bounds of cultural history is extensive, covering topics from philosophy and theology to art, literature, theater, education, book publishing and occultism.

Festschriften are difficult to review principally because they contain too many disparate pieces, leaving the reviewer with little chance to comment adequately on each and every essay. Often, a mere listing of the titles can take up half of the allotted space. In this case, however, due to the consistently high quality of the essays, part of the reviewers quandry is eased: since none of the essays can be singled out for praise or blame, none needs to be slighted or to receive special attention. Each piece follows upon the other much as wave after wave at the beach, wiping out misconceptions about late humanism through the sheer weight of evidence. Yet, the very thing that makes this book commendable as scholarship—the heft and force of its
documentation—makes for ponderous reading at times, for in their effort to prove that humanism did not die out after the mid-sixteenth century, these essays tend to favor narrative detail in place of analysis, attention to detail in place of the larger picture.

Spitz’s response to these papers and to the gathering held in his honor is included at the very end of the book. This responsio is unlike any other in academic literature, and deserves to be read: it is a staggering display of Spitz’s erudition, wit, and high spirits. Those who have not met Lew Spitz in person probably do not know that he is one of the funniest and most irreverent scholars on earth. Here, now, he reveals this side in print, as an act of humility in the face of praise, perhaps also as a gesture of affection.

Disciples who gather to honor their master with a collection of essays do not often turn out work that is accessible or useful beyond their intimate circle. This festschrift is an exception, for the papers are carefully focused on a single theme, and serve as an elegant, learned tribute to the scholar who inspired them.

Carlos M.N. Eire


George Woodcock is one of Canada’s great men of letters. He is best known to many as the editor of the Anarchist Reader, a popular book in the sixties, and one many of us still possess if only in a box in the attic. But Woodcock has toiled in fields as diverse as literary criticism, political science, history, poetry, travel writing, and autobiography. His influence, however, is not limited to the printed page. Over the years he has presented his views on the airwaves as well. While writing this review, I was able to listen to the author discuss a writer congenial to him, Tolstoy, on the CBC program, Ideas.

What is remarkable about Woodcock’s output (besides the range of the output itself) is the consistently high quality of everything he does, whether it be an edition of Orwell’s 1984, a biography of Kropotkin or of Proudhomme, a history of the Doukhobors, travel notes from India or China, or volumes of his own excellent verse. When an individual of such wide-ranging curiosity turns his attention to the world of Sixth Century B.C., the odds are that those who follow Woodcock there will come away the wiser for it.

Woodcock sees the period between 612, the destruction of Ninevah, and 479, the battle of Platea, as a crucial transitional period between the older mythological way of experiencing the cosmos and the newer analytical and historical world view. The old way is characterized by polytheism and anthropomorphism; the new Weltanschauung is concrete, direct and subject to a critical logic. The mythopoetical explanations of why things happen, the old tribal explanations, are superseded by universal laws and a universal morality. As well, a new style of writing, prose, comes to record the new ideas and sensations. This period also witnesses, if not always the genesis, then at least the ideal types of the world’s great political systems: autocracy (Sparta), democracy (Athens), and anarchy (China). Even Marxism, Woodcock claims, would have been impossible without the eschatological and activist vision of Zoroaster. The Persian prophet is only one of the luminaries who command the historical stage and bring about this great sea change in human thinking. Woodcock also turns his attention to Xenophon, Solon, Herodotus, the Buddha, Confucius, and Lao Tze, among others.

In the case of Israel, Woodcock concentrates on Jeremiah and Second Isaiah. These prophets are Sixth Century individuals, and under their spiritual leadership, the Jews emerge from tribalism to individualism while rejecting polytheism for good. The book of Jeremiah is the first experiment in autobiography as well as an attempt to find answers to the problems of the age with the aid of history. Woodcock is sufficiently impressed by the prophet to liken him to Tolstoy.

Second Isaiah is the first indisputable monotheist, a view often expressed, though not everyone will cling to Woodcock’s assertion that Isaiah was “sophisticated enough to accept Ahura Mazda as Yahweh under another name and that the example of Persian monotheism strengthened him.” According to Woodcock, the very notion of suffering, which the two prophets emphasize, is emblematic of a new, worldwide, critical questioning of the old stories. “The arts and commands of Jehovah are seen as arbitrary and not in accordance with human concepts of justice. The great gap between what is and what, according to human reason, should be, which more than two thousand years later would haunt the Christian existentialists, now appears for the first time in the Judaic consciousness.”

In a book as wide-ranging as The Marvelous Century, it is natural that there are some things with which one might choose to argue. Woodcock places too much emphasis on the political activities of the early Buddhists, necessary for his assertion that the new thinking always had a social and political counterpart. And although the most empathetic of commentators as a rule, Woodcock’s sympathies do not encompass Pythagoras. The mystic/mathematician/politician receives a surprisingly cold and brief treatment. The personal chemistry between human beings remains one of life’s great mysteries. A surprising omission, giving the nature of the book, is Woodcock’s failure to allude to Karl Jaspers. After all, it was Jaspers who first brought our attention to the Axial Age, a notion that impressed Toynbee, Burn and others of whom Woodcock is aware.

A work such as this cries out for maps. Unfortunately, we are given only two of them (Penguin editions quality) along with the advice to go elsewhere to find the many places noted in the text. Additionally,
Woodcock has not been well-served by the publisher's awkward style of insufficiently highlighting single-space quotes. They are virtually indistinguishable from the rest of the text. Further, the reader who wishes to pursue a quote is out of luck, for although there is a bibliography at the back, the book lacks footnotes.

The overall impression of this book, however, is overwhelmingly positive. It is well-written and interesting. A great body of material is placed before us in an objective and entertaining manner. The material is subject to analysis and speculation, a process in which the reader is invited to participate. Undogmatic and eclectic, Woodcock turns to thinkers and theories as diverse as Julian Jaynes and bicameralism, Carl Jung and synchronicity and paraenvironmentalism as possible explanations for why events took the turn they did. His comparative approach extends up and down the time line. Woodcock illuminates the personalities of ancient times by comparing them to his modern heroes: Orwell, Gandhi, and Tolstoy. (Pythagoras is likened to a California cult leader.) For those who wish to re-acquaint themselves with, or to learn something about this "marvelous century," I can think of no better place to start. Were Stephen Spielberg an author of history books, he would most certainly write like Woodcock.

Frank Vatai

Notes on Poets...

Regina Lederle lives and works in Milwaukee.

Rita Signorelli-Pappas lives in Valparaiso, where she writes poetry and fiction.

Paul David Steinke is a poet from New York City.

Barbara Bazyn writes in Chelsea, Iowa, and, in addition to writing poetry, publishes occasional pieces in the Des Moines Register.


J. T. Ledbetter teaches at California Lutheran.

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