

Fall 1979

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The Lighter

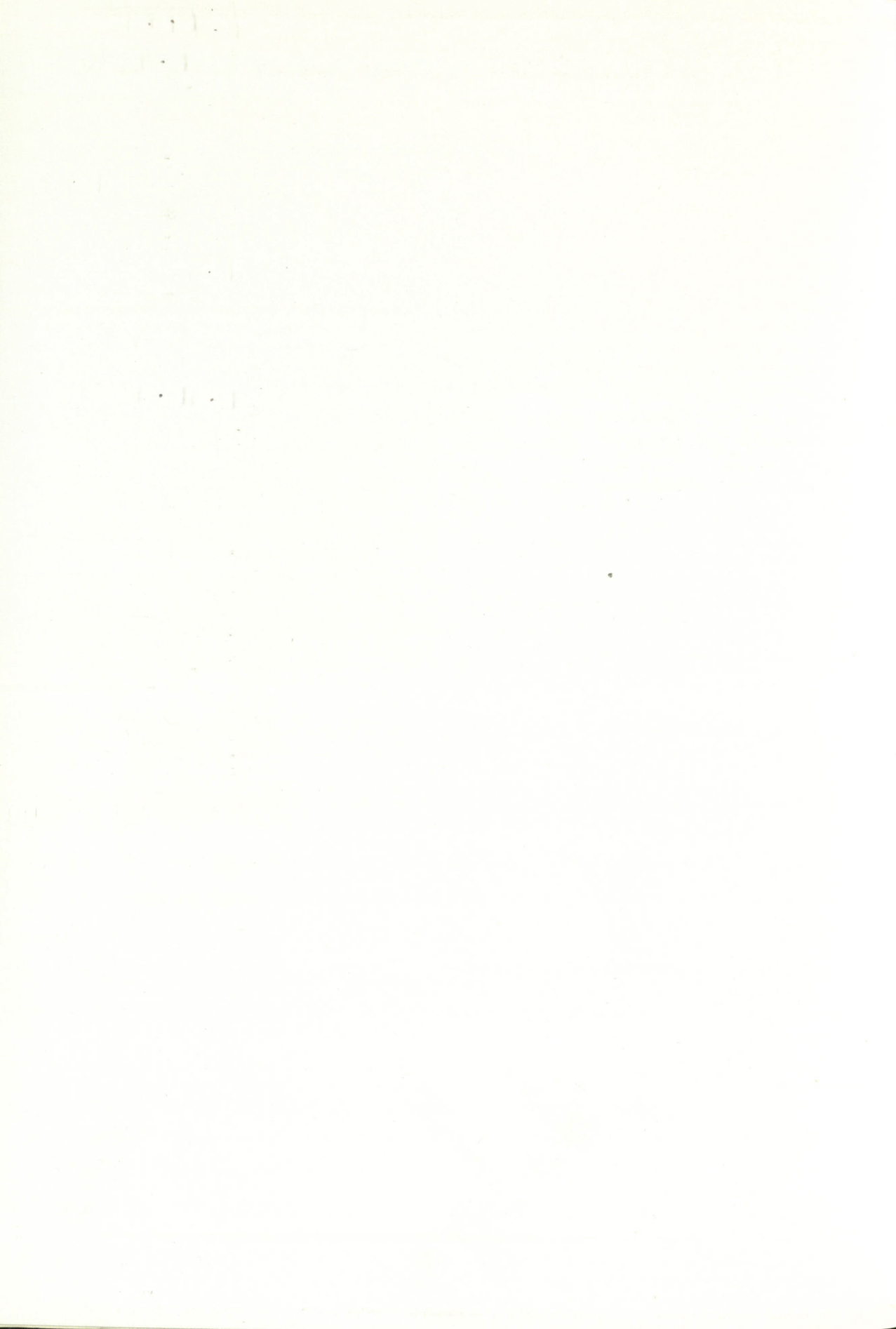
Vol. 22 No. 2 Fall 1979

**Lutherans and
the Identity Crisis**

**'Work' and 'Party':
Where's the Poetry?**

**An Admissions
Brochure for the '80s**

. . . .and more



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EDITORIAL ESSAY

On Writing a Revolution

(Or, Toward a More Radical Rhetoric)

By Jeff Smith

That writing is a political act follows from almost trivial premises. Writing is one form of (language-based) discourse; discourse is an interaction among persons and presumes or creates an array of human relationships; and arrays of human relationships are what we study or try to influence when we act "politically." But how far can we go in calling writing a *revolutionary* enterprise?

Here we pull back. Among my peers, and perhaps Americans in general, I've noticed a certain fear of "the political," some of which may stem from a post-1960s uneasiness about revolution. At one VU student-faculty group's initial meeting, the debate I heard suggested that, for some members, asking for "political action" was like moving and seconding that the math building be blown up. At the very least it struck them as a

call for hostile incursion against a nonaggressive foe — and certainly as opposition to forces that could vastly overpower their outnumbered, vulnerable ranks.

What I wanted someone to point out was the fact that opposition, if such it was, had already begun. Our very presence in the room, with common concerns and discussion before us, was an alteration of the space-time continuum as it otherwise would have configured itself at that moment. It was a political *fact* — hence, our gathering was nothing less than a political *act*. But no one mentioned this, nor its perhaps even more important corollary: That an institution, having already gathered and being already present, commits a political act every moment it exists. The fact that an institution seems to be "just there" and that we have grown used to it may delude us into thinking it is not doing anything, but that is just our limited perspective. Anything that sustains itself into the next moment is asserting itself, carving out a place in its environment, and thus *altering* that environment over against what it

Jeff Smith, a senior Christ College student majoring in English, has edited two student publications and acknowledges that "while writing may be revolutionary, editing is utterly banal."

would be if the thing went away.

So institutions continually argue for themselves by their very presence. Our problem lies in not recognizing such assertions, in not seeing them both as political actions and as kinds of discourse, and in not investigating what underlies them. On the side of almost any institution, especially a thriving one, rests the affirmation of the physical universe and its laws. The buildings have been built and are solid; they occupy a given space and will do so again tomorrow. Persons and materials have been mobilized to whatever task the institution has set for itself. Most importantly, money is flowing in and around the institution. Its ties to its own environment are fiscal as much as anything. As long as it fills the economic niche it has been granted, the institution will survive and be affirmed; in fact, the pocket of temporary physical and financial chaos that would attend its sudden disappearance constitutes an often-used, though only *economic*, argument for its continuance.

But if an institution rests on nothing but the economic order, it is merely decadent, a moral parasite. Economic justification is not moral justification. Often institutions try to circumvent this fact and establish a kind of "rightness" merely by strengthening their physical presence. A new building arises, and enhanced justification and importance automatically accrue to the economic functions it is built to house. The burden of proving those functions worthwhile shifts further from them and falls more heavily on their opponents, even if fundamentally no functions have been altered and no moral relationships changed.

The ambivalent but undeniable disenchantment felt by persons, including members of small, struggling campus groups, toward an institution's various sins and injustices owes much to this elusive, but entirely real and entirely political, "thereness" that is the institution's nature. ("Thereness" may seem a contrived way of labeling what was known during the '60s as

"the Establishment," but I prefer it because of my sense that the latter term tends in common use to name a *thing* rather than an *act*.) It is hard to isolate what one finds disaffecting precisely because the cause of disaffection inheres more in the very nature, the *way* of one's surroundings, than in any particular, identifiable push or shove. To assert one's disenchantment, therefore, against what seem to be passive surroundings, or a passive controlling entity — an institution — within those surroundings, is to risk coming off as the aggressor. Combating thereness is in this sense the hardest fight of all.

It is also the easiest, given that one's very presence, especially in coordination with others', counter-asserts against a thereness. If disenchantment thus becomes focused, and if a new discourse takes hold in which that disenchantment is expressed, the revolution is half over. Institutions are dragged along behind; in every real revolution, the actual restructuring follows this social re-actualizing. All that remains is to expand on the togetherness and the discourse until they take root and show themselves to be truer, more respectable, and closer to real human needs than the passive, purely economic argument that at all moments obtains on the side of institutions.

I don't want to suggest that one's goal should be the establishment of a new thereness, although this may be what ultimately comes of most revolutions. The proper and only effective way to combat thereness is by summoning what Paul Goodman calls *legitimacy* — inherent justification based not on economic viability, but on the *moral* relations of ownership and proximity. Goodman's discussion of legitimacy in *New Reformation* (1969) is his response to the condition of the young, the black, the poor, the over-urbanized, and the victims of technology he observed in the '60s. Goodman saw alienation perpetuated by "social engineering" and management tendencies, which centralize

control ever further from those who actually *do* and *know* and *need* and feel responsibility toward an activity. His analysis was as straightforward as the notion that farmers know what is best for their crops, city dwellers what is best for their neighborhoods, the young what is best for their lives. And his solution was as simple as "anarchy": return of control to the grass roots, and "guild socialism": supervision of professional and technical activity by committed, honest professionals rather than administrators or managers. In the guilds and in communities — and in faculties and student bodies — is legitimacy; in executive offices and presidential suites is thereness.

Research and education, the discourses of a university, in theory stand for as much, at least insofar as they are liberal. If I correctly have absorbed the babble about "liberal arts," I take these to be activities that promote creative control and ownership of experience, or "leisure" in the classic Aristotelian sense. The liberal arts set about to engage man's highest faculties toward the shaping of positive identities for the individual and community. Formulating an identity means coming to self-awareness, invariably *being* in a stronger and sharper sense than is otherwise possible. Hence, it means self-assertion of the individual or community within and toward an environment that is otherwise "just there."

Writing represents a similar engagement and identity actualization, and in fact it forms an essential part of liberal education. Writing and education are forms of *moral* discourse in that they create new arrays of relationships based on the personal and communal, rather than on economic and institutional, norms. They invariably set themselves against any thereness that is merely decadent — any that is alienated and alienating from experience.

Goodman recognized all this when he called language the human way of *being* in the world. Writers use

Writers use language to confront and grab hold of experience, and thus find themselves; in so doing, they re-create their world. What besides such re-creation do we mean by "revolution"? If the writer truly has engaged experience, he cannot help but challenge the merely decadent.

language to confront and grab hold of experience, and thus find themselves; in so doing, they re-create their world. What besides such re-creation do we mean by "revolution"? If the writer truly has engaged experience, he cannot help but challenge the merely decadent. But above all, and regardless of whatever he may happen to be *saying*, the writer's writing, both product and act, *is itself a new presence in the world*, an alteration of surroundings. By its very occurrence, any example of moral discourse that draws on the legitimacy and surety of real experience, both author's and interpreter's, models and creates a new world order.

So liberal collegiate education is, in theory, ongoing revolution. And when it happens well it is, even without really intending to be revolutionary. It's just too bad the trappings, from grading systems down to curricular structures down to specific assignments, so often get in the way. Generally these adjuncts arise out of economic or managerial need; usually, they become ends in themselves. We know that in practice a university is largely a managed enterprise, a wealthy, aggressive thereness. Passivity plays a role here, both among students encouraged by years of structure to be passive, and among

faculty members bulldozed or co-opted by the managers.

Faculties can easily cease to function as either communities or professional guilds. They may view it as "non-objective" to protest, not realizing that objectivity of the sort they lay claim to is merely allowing the implicit institutional thesis to stand unchallenged. They may become used to functioning in an enclave and so fear engaging the outside world, or even each other. And they may want to protect their meal tickets. In all, they develop marked fears of "the political." At VU this fall, four highly regarded faculty members went so far in this direction as to warn against the academic tradition's developing "aggressive or imperialistic tendencies." Such fretting over what at base is simply verbal exchange points to something even deeper at work; indeed, it suggests that respect for the power of discourse, if hidden, is pervasive.

All fear, I imagine, finally does presuppose some kind of respect. That words have been so feared — and so important — in the West points to our cultural acknowledgement of the subversive power of language. We Judeo-Christians get hung up on what we take words to be *expressing* — we look for *meanings* as the basis for our pacts, schisms, and heresy trials — but at bottom we must just plain fear the presence words create in the world. Otherwise, we'd never get so worked up over them.

One can't suppose that every act of writing engages experience this far, or that every verbal utterance is revolutionary. In fact, words are a favorite support weapon in the arsenal of thereness. Institutions use words every which way they can, and usually badly, to throw the appearance of worthwhile-ness and meaning around their decadence. (It's not all their fault; universities are verbal by nature, and always find more occasions to speak than they have things to say.) The hollowness of the rhetoric is invariably what gives them away. Classically, metaphor has

succeeded in both elevating the speaker and his subject and clarifying the complex — channeling the abstract through close-at-hand experience. Predictable pieties, on the other hand, serve as mainstays of institutional prose, and the endless repetition of phrases, even (or especially) those with some metaphorical ring, serves rather to obscure than clarify. Finally, among my favorite phenomena is one made famous by the Nixon Administration, though just as likely to obtain among university vice presidents: the vulgar or "leveling" metaphor. Reference to affairs of state or, maybe worse, to the liberal enterprise in terms drawn from sports and the military is, shall we say, probably not what Demosthenes worked to perfect, and certainly not the stuff of psalms. One hopes that when writing and education rooted in legitimate experience and real identities begin visibly to occur, both these horrors of institutional language will be embarrassed out of existence. If so, small but significant ground will already have fallen to the rebels.

The foregoing reflections proceed from both my own collegiate experience and the planning that has resulted in this issue of *The Lighter*. The thrust of our joint effort here has involved asking several thoughtful undergraduate writers to lend similar reflection to their own experiences, both in college and in the larger world, and to generate responses that we hope will themselves "model and create" at least a slightly new communal order. That what these writers actually say, especially as they address themselves specifically to the aims and undertaking of education, overlaps in many cases should amplify their diverse efforts. In terms of our planning, the overlap is altogether coincidental; but where several sensitive observers appear to stand in mutual affirmation, only a foolish institution, or community, would fail to ask itself why. □

SHORT STORY

The Song of the Steel-Mill Shovel

By James Clifton Hale



"I," said Dorian Hell, "would rather go up on the battery than shovel all of this coke." His fellow laborers smiled, knowing Hell's statement to be a rash jest. Everyone in the coke plant knew that anything, even shoveling up a huge pile of coke-rock, was better than going "up top" to the battery, to walk around on the top of flaming ovens, sweeping and shoveling and dreaming of Hades and surcease.

"Dory," said Bonnie, one of his fellow laborers, her safety glasses glinting between her yellow hardhat and filthy yellow fire-retardant jacket, "you shouldn't tempt fate that way."

John, a rather more muscular cokie, looked up from his shovel. "Hell yes!" he said. "You don't wanna go up there and suck those cancer gasses. God! That sulfur makes me choke!" (John's glasses were in his coat pocket. His coat was thrown in a somewhat distant corner. So was his hardhat. John liked to be comfortable while he worked.)

Hell smirked and began to shovel. There is a pleasant rhythm in shoveling. First the shovel's underside scrapes along the concrete floor, then it rasps in under the rocks, then out again. Finally comes the wonderful, slick ring as the stones fly from the tool.

Dory and Bonnie and John were shoveling coke out the window of the screening station. The baked coal, neither anything but gray and porous nor anything but feather light, had fallen disobediently out of the shaker. The shaker not only shook the coke through sizing screens but also shook the entire five-story screening station. The rickety structure seemed quite afraid of being vibrated down.

Besides majoring in English and studying in Christ College during the school year, **James Clifton Hale** spent last summer working in a steel mill.

The three laborers threw coke out the window because there was no place else to throw it. The architect of the place had failed to take malfunctions into account. Below, Payloaders with big hydraulic buckets scooped up the coke shoveled by Dory, Bonnie and John. Actually, the architect ought to have had to scoop it — and without benefit of help or shovel.

The screening station's twin rhythms — the shovel song of *scrape-rasp-rasp-RING!* and the shaker's wild vibrating dance — helped Hell's skinny body to work by itself. Rhythmic hypnosis makes for a fine-laboring eight-dollar-an-hour automaton. Besides, Hell often dissociated his mind completely from his body while the latter performed repetitive, difficult, and, above all, boring jobs. Hell often quoted, much to the pejorative glee of his colleagues in coke, a favorite line of Nietzsche: "Against boredom even the gods contend in vain." Hell often added, with silly giggling, "I am therefore a godly shoveler."

His mind floating free, only dimly aware of the *RING!* and fully ignorant of the rest of the rhythmic shovel-lie, Hell often thought about the gods, God, metaphysics, and sundry sorts of vaguely religious matters. Of late, he'd been thinking about a rash prayer he'd made.

"God," he had prayed in his usual off-hand, careless manner, "please don't let Mom and Frank break up. For Christ's — I mean Heaven's sake — they've only been married since November. It would mess Mom up both emotionally and, probably, financially. See what you can do, OK? In Christ's Name, etc."

First of all — or "first of off" as Dory had heard some other laborers say — Hell wondered whether that flippant sort of praying upset God at all. "It probably does," thought Dory, "but it couldn't any more than those

stuffy 'thee's' and 'thou's' prayed so often by so many hypocrites." "True enough," riposted his artistic side, "but at least the thee's and thou's are beautiful and suggestive of sublime dignity." "It doesn't really matter," replied the steelworker of the moment, "'cause it's all just for the comfort of whoever's prayin'."

Besides the stylistic aspect of the prayer, Hell had to worry about whether it was really the sort of prayer one ought to make at all. It was true that Hell's mother had been remarried only for a few months; true also that a divorce would hurt her at least on the level of feelings. But Hell had not mentioned all of his reasons for asking such a boon as he had. The truth was, Dory was quite comfortable in the big house his mother and Frank had bought together and didn't really want to move out. This house was much closer to the University where Dory was a student, and never before had Dory had enough shelf-space for all of his thousand-plus books. Those four twelve-foot shelves wouldn't be filled for a few more months, either. Dory was afraid that God would be a bit miffed about his not mentioning this selfishness. But, Dory was sure, God'd be cognizant of it anyway. Thus, the "hidden" selfishness was not only a kind of blasphemous deceit, but, almost as bad, also a complete failure as a lie.

Finally, Dory had to sweat out the question of tempting fate. "God moves in mysterious ways," Hell had heard, and believed. Maybe God was providing this imminent breakup as a gateway to something better than could be achieved by connubial bliss between Mom and Frank. For instance, Hell thought, if the divorce takes place, something good might then and only then be able to come of Mom's and Dad's (his real father's) meeting today at Red Lobster Seafood Restaurant. Presumably, his parents' first meal together in years was but an occasion to discuss Aid-to-Dependent-Children payments or suchlike — but one never knew.

Hell's father had told him to remind

Besides the stylistic aspect of the prayer, Hell had to worry about whether it was really the sort of prayer one ought to make at all . . . Dory was afraid that God would be a bit miffed about his not mentioning this selfishness. But, Dory was sure, God'd be cognizant of it anyway. Thus, the "hidden" selfishness was not only a kind of blasphemous deceit, but, almost as bad, also a complete failure as a lie.

Mom of the meeting. Just when Hell was reminding himself to call home and remind her, Steve the sub-foreman walked out from behind the giant pile of coke. "Hell," said he, "get a face-shield and your time card. You're going up on the battery."

Bonnie laughed and wagged her finger. "Told ya not to Tempt Fate!" she cried.

Hell scowled and threw down his shovel. (So to cast down his spade was naught but a great show of false bravado. Hell was unspeakably terrified by the flames and thick gasses of the battery top.) As Dory turned to begin the long walk toward the labor shack, toward his timecard and face-shield, Hell heard Steve address the comfort-loving John: "John, you've got to wear your hat and coat and glasses. I can't warn you again!"

Perhaps a quarter mile lay between the screening station and the labor shack. But the way is always long when one's boots pound a gray soil of

carcinogenic coke dust.

Hell trudged perturbedly along and bumped right into Manny the Labor Foreman. "Watch where you're goin', Hell," said he. Hell nodded and turned to go on. "Wait a minute," said Manny, his safety glasses glinting between his white hat and clean yellow jacket. "Look at this." The foreman held out his hand.

Hell saw a big insect on the brown back of Manny's hand. It was a light green monster. It had many fat and waving limbs. Hell thought he would vomit and then faint. Insects frightened him. Dory shuddered.

"C'mon, Hell," said Manny. "He can't hurt you. He's just a praying mantis."

"Going to make a pet of him or something?" asked Hell nervously.

"Naw," said Manny. "Look at his back legs. There's no way he can survive. A coke truck ran over him."

"Well, what are you going to do with it?" asked Hell, backing off, ready to flee if the hideous and injured gorgon thing so much as flinched in a last death-throe.

Manny smiled. He stroked the awful creature. "I'm gonna find something alive and green and set him down on it so he can die in peace."

Hell smirked. "I wish somebody in the coke plant would be that kind to me."

Manny laughed. "Goin' up top?"

"Yeah," said Hell miserably as he turned to walk the remaining way to the labor shack. "Gonna eat fire and suck gas."

The labor shack was empty except for Earnie the Foreman. He was waiting, faceshield and timecard in hand. "Hell of a thing to do to a guy!" he said in his loud Pennsylvania Dutch accent, "'specially on his next to last day on the job."

Hell was glum.

"Well, cheer up, boy! A couple o' days an' you'll be back in school whar a li'l fella like you belongs." Earnie beamed, having gotten back from an eight-week paid vacation only a week before, and handed Hell his shield and card.

**"Why me?" he asked.
"How does a skinny
English major end up in
number two battery of-
fice in Bethlehem
Steel's Burns Harbor
Plant? Why is an Eng-
lish major wearing a
hardhat?"**

Hell nodded. He attached his faceshield to his hardhat, put his timecard in his pocket and began the long walk up to number two battery office. A foreman was waiting for him there too.

Foreman J. Magnumb looked Hell up and down and took his card. "You been on the battery before, Hell?" On two different days, came the answer. "And how much time you got left before school starts?" Today and tomorrow. "Hmm. Wait here."

Hell sighed as the white hat left the office. "Why me?" he asked. "How does a skinny English major end up in number two battery office in Bethlehem Steel's Burns Harbor Plant? Why is an English major wearing a hardhat? Why are there calluses on his hands instead of ink? And above all, why am I here when my father is battery foreman at *Inland Steel* in *East Chicago*?" (Thus he always ruminated, in full sentences, with complex geographical modifiers. Honest.)

The white hat stuck its foreman's head in the door. "You're not worth training," said Magnumb. "Not enough time left to justify the time to do it. Go back to the screening station."

"Thanks!" cried Hell, joyous that fate had struck with such unexpected kindness.

Hell ripped the faceshield off of his hardhat and ran all the way to the shower building. A pay phone was available there, and Hell had to call his mother. Only after *that* would he return to the music of the shovel. □

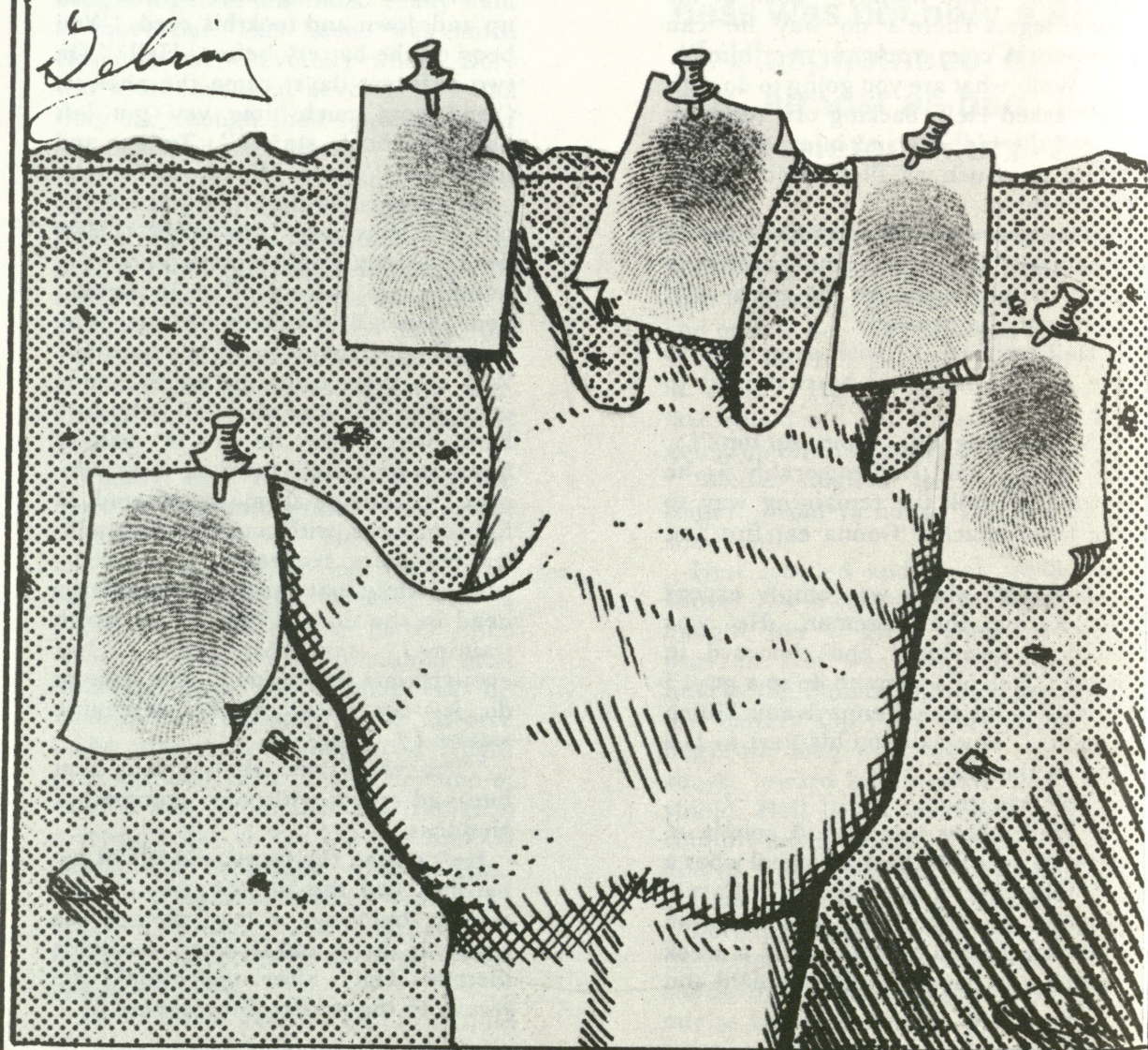
Facing the Question:

Lutherans, the University,

and the Identity Crisis

By Jon Siess

Gabriel



I seize on the term identity crisis because it is important in interpreting much of what happens at VU. Today the term itself is a negative cliché, carrying implications of youth floating aimlessly through a period of their lives and calling it a "moratorium." Like the life crisis it attempts to describe, the term lacks clear focus. Yet young adults are naturally preoccupied with the concept and all that is involved in finding one's identity. Today we may prefer to speak of "finding one's self" or "getting it together" and substitute "stopping out" for "moratorium," but essentially we are talking about the same identity crisis all young adults experience.

Institutions are always more interesting when they reflect something of the self. To liken institutional development to the growth and differentiation of the self in relation to the world is a somewhat dubious and perhaps overworked practice, but occasionally illuminating. Here it is applicable.

Like the young adult, VU suffers from a crisis of identity. It is at a similar moment in its history when resources have to be marshalled, growth analyzed and further differentiation made. During the period of rapid growth and expansion of a decade ago, VU projected a sense of being a vigorous young enterprise, growing and on the rise among institutions of higher education. A stern father figure oversaw this adolescent growth and conveyed the sense of mission to the community. Alumni from the more distant past testify to the fact that to attend VU seemed to mean more than it does today. Undoubtedly this age of expansion re-

flected a time when America as a nation was bursting with youthful energy in the same way that VU's condition today reflects the lack of inner dynamism among our generation. The image of a growing, boisterous adolescent preparing to make its mark on the world is, however, apt.

Today VU's identity as an institution is under fire. Students seem to have a better sense of what it means to attend the University of Chicago or a community college than they do VU. The image it projects to the prospective student is rather amorphous: there's something Lutheran about it, it's medium-sized, and it seems to be a friendly place to get on the right track to a good job. The institution itself is unsure of its identity. In admissions brochures the past is fabricated ("VU has a long tradition of academic excellence") and the future sold by pointing to the heavy investment in the university's physical plant. The activity of a university — freedom of inquiry — is conspicuously underplayed. Pithy sayings, a clever motto, a slick logo and a gimmick or two are supposed to shore up a weak identity. Neither the University of Chicago nor the community college has to expend this kind of energy projecting an identity; in the case of the first it is assumed and with the latter it doesn't matter. Without a clear sense of identity the university tends to attract students who have an equally vague sense of who they are and where they are going. As of late VU institutional rhetoricians have at least acknowledged the problem. It is, after all, practical to bolster a weak identity in preparation for the impending admissions crunch of the '80s.

The process of identity formation for the young adult and the university, when both are Lutheran, is especially interesting. The young adult who happens to be Lutheran and the institution peopled with Lutherans may

Jon Siess, a senior majoring in history and the humanities in Christ College and a newspaper editor, has observed fraternities for the last two years, and Lutherans for the last twenty-two.

find that the Lutheran *Gestalt* puts one at a disadvantage at this stage of development.

The formation of the adult identity is a historical process beginning with the rituals of infancy and continuing through grade school and high school. It may begin to emerge as a fairly solidified entity sometime during the college-age years. During this time values are incorporated by attaching one's self to a community that shares a personal style and provides a feeling of sameness on many levels of mental functioning. Gradually one's identity is differentiated from the larger whole and the individual emerges as a very unique person. As Erik Erikson and others suggest, an identity is not an achievement or a static and unchangeable configuration of conceptions or values. One does not ask, as many popularizers of the term do, "Who am I?" Rather, one must confront the question "What do I want to make of myself and what do I have to work with?" An identity, then, is a self-portrait of sorts, created by assessing one's self accurately and making realistic projections into the future.

A fraternity or sorority is a consciously selected locus for the young adult to experience "sameness" (fraternities call it "unity") and the visual signs of community outside of the family. One becomes part of a group united against common enemies, engages in common activities, and learns a common ideology by becoming acquainted with the history of the community and employing an adolescent ritual that articulates a mystical metaphysic. In facilitating this the fraternity or sorority provides a framework for an identity, albeit a weak one. The young adult gets a better understanding of where one fits in and with whom. As such it is an interesting experiment. That fraternities and sororities dominate the campus social life at a Lutheran university is symptomatic of the thirst for community attachment and the identity weakness inherent in Lutheran culture.

That fraternities and sororities dominate the campus social life. . . is symptomatic of the thirst for community attachment and the identity weakness inherent in Lutheran culture.

In a pluralistic society like America the individual finds many such identity ties in political, economic, national or religious associations. A typical American is many things — a Republican and a middle-class Lutheran with a German background, for example. While there is a severe overlap of influences, the values that inhere in the group ideology coagulate and merge in the self to shape the person's character and identity.

Traditionally a religious worldview was a major component in an individual's identity. A religious ideology, because it systematizes and explains early childhood fears and provides both child and adult with coherent symbols, rituals, and a comprehensive hierarchy of values, is an especially powerful force. It is more than a set of faith claims or an intellectual philosophy; ritual, theology and behavioral expectations are fused into a *Gestalt* that explains inner experience and motivates public expression. It is, in other words, a way of being in the world, a cultural style.

The extent to which Lutheran ideology in its classical sense informs the thought and behavior of the 20th-century American youth is, of course, difficult to assess. A religious ideology does not pierce to the depths of the human psyche, as may biological, genetic, or broader cultural/historical forces. As such it may be only a minor and diminishing determinate in the development of character.

For most Lutherans, though, the religious ideology maintains a fairly powerful impact. Its conscientious

membership, well-developed parochial school system, and middle-class values all help to ensure a significant influence. How much it does so is not really important here. It is safe to say that a religious ideology gives rise to a particular style that, while deflected by historical circumstances, is still operative today. What is important is isolating the elements in Lutheran ideology that are imbedded in the inner workings of the university and hinder the development of its identity.

For Lutherans, more so than other religious bodies, there is the conception that all vocational organization is ordained by God and proceeds from the economic organization of the society, which is likewise ordained by God. The Lutheran student, then, focuses on professional life-calling "out there." While the notion of "Calling" is often expanded to include the full scope of one's existence, it is the daily discharge of one's duty to the brethren that is emphasized in the grade school and here. The immediate associations and situations are what are endorsed. Robert Schnabel best reflected the idea in his first speech as VU president: "The place where we are, our station with its tasks, is the best place for us because it is the one given by God." The life task is assigned by God one day at a time rather than arrived at from the needs and wants of the individual. One does not choose a vocation, one embarks on a "ministry." This self-denial is tolerated by the individual and encouraged by the ideology on the basis that asceticism is finally best for the community. As Luther said, one should "contemplate one thing alone, that he may serve and benefit others in all that he does, considering nothing except the need and advantage of his neighbor."

The idea is carried to an extreme today at many Lutheran seminaries and teaching colleges with a ritual known as "call day." While other Lutheran institutions do not follow suit — the assumption being that the clergy and teaching have a special

purpose in God's plan — the ceremony reflects a way of thinking that permeates Lutheran culture. Here, prospective servants of the Word, upon graduating from the institution, passively wait for sealed envelopes containing information about their first assignments. For the outsider it is difficult to understand how decisions of this magnitude can be made finally and almost arbitrarily by others, and done with so much joy and anticipation. It is understandable, though, when one realizes that be receiving God's revelation through divine appointment all anxiety about what one is to become and how much one has at stake personally in the decision is literally swept away.

VU as a Lutheran institution reflects a similar kind of thinking. A record jacket for the vocal group Schola Cantorum's Christmas album, for example, mirrors the Lutheran conception in the statement: "The University does not exist for its own sake but for the sake of the Church and the society of which it is a part. These we must serve, not as we choose to serve them, but as they request and are willing to support in our service." Although this is not the official manifesto for the university, it may reflect most truthfully what it means to be a "Lutheran university."

The notion is, of course, debilitating to the emerging identity. Much of the individual's power and meaning is found in the imaginative projection of the self into the future. The Lutheran worldview, with its emphasis on devotion to duty and "service to society," robs the self of this necessary play. Scant attention is paid to future goals because the earthly kingdom and the individual's life have clear, foreseeable ends. Moreover, choices and values in this realm are not based on the individual's needs, but on the immediate contribution to the community. (The janitor at the Lutheran grade school is consistently more esteemed than the energetic visionary.) While the assumption that each individual has a specific function to

serve in the social order virtually eliminates competition and makes the world a more comfortable place to live, the emerging identity is denied the opportunity to know its relation to the world. For Lutherans such hierarchies are not important; in fact, they are resisted on the assumption that one's relationship to God far outweighs one's rank in the social order.

The doctrine of the call and all it entails is possible because Lutheran culture teaches exceptional individualism. Man is assumed to be evil and powerless. Hence, getting into the fray of competition has little lasting value. "The first concern of every Christian," Luther said, is "to strengthen faith alone." This cherished inner liberty most often finds its expression through submission to external authority. Thus, the social ethic is essentially spiritual, emphasizing the relationship between God and the individual, not the relationship of persons to each other.

Because of this intense individualism, fellowship in community is also resisted. One submits to the community only out of love for that community. This might explain why Lutherans make heavy investments in the communities they do consciously attach themselves to. Fraternities and sororities here unwittingly play on this aspect of the Lutheran character type nicely by turning the social commitment into a public display. At most universities the decision to attach one's self to a fraternity or sorority is a more private matter. Here the energies of the entire community are absorbed. "This is the community I love," says the VU freshman rushee. This hard and fast commitment is probably detrimental to the emerging identity because it severely prohibits a free floating from one group to another, testing values and identity strengths.

The Lutheran ideal, if taken literally, is to be free from the world — the Lutheran catechism doctrine goes something like "to be in the world but not of it." This pietistic indifference to external things is only possible, how-

Lutherans are naive in this respect because they base all social organization on the family model. . . the quality of leadership is not thought to be important, which may explain why Lutherans as a group do not engage in politics and tend to select bad managers for their own institutions.

ever, because of a firm confidence in the smooth functioning of the social machinery. Lutherans are naive in this respect because they base all social organization on the family model. The much-emphasized fourth commandment neatly links the family structure to all social needs. Love of father and mother ensures "clothing and shoes, house and home, wife and child, fields and cattle, and all goods. . . etc." Hence familial love is thought to govern political relationships. Domestic and civil authority, like the family, is assumed to be appointed by God and directed by human reason. The quality of leadership is not thought to be important, which may explain why Lutherans as a group do not engage in politics and tend to select bad managers for their own institutions. Even when power is scandalously abused, it is thought to be tolerated by God; we are taught that any resistance to this authority may undermine the divine harmony with which institutions are intended to function.

This feature of the Lutheran temperament is prominent in the manner of public debate at VU. Maintaining a facade of harmony is crucial for Lutherans to feel confirmed in the notion that God's work is being seen to fruition by the institution. Institutions

are, after all, thought to be ordained by God to operate harmoniously like families in the same neighborhood with a common set of values.

Individual institutions, too, are thought to be governed by the family model. Hence, at VU the president functions as the father and all matters of any importance are eventually taken to his study for consultation. Like most Lutheran families, it is the father who in turn infuses the community with its identity. Matters of minor importance are handled by mature sons, called vice presidents, who supervise the energetic brood of students. Women band together in a Guild and perform the role of a good parson's wife. Together they make a cohesive self-sufficient unit. In the case of VU, however, the family apparently begins to lose cohesion when the father dies and is replaced by his eldest son.

The institution-as-family causes a number of difficulties. While persons connected to the alma mater may indeed feel a special kinship with the institution (those who never manage to emancipate themselves apparently come back as teachers), assessment of the "family" is difficult because it is so much a part of one's subjective reality. Moreover, opposition in the family is not handled well. If there is conflict, God's authority is presumably undermined by "sinners." As in most Lutheran families, a clear hierarchical structure is established with the father as the head. But the authority, in theory, is entangled with a measure of affection. External control is then transformed by love and internalized into a kind of self-control. The Lutheran dissenter, then, is not merely analyzing a set of values or principles, but calling Mom, Dad, and God into question. Thus public debate takes on cosmic proportions.

Given this temperament, the Lutheran will assert his self and his identity only when the ultimate, final truth has been arrived at. In this respect Lutherans' historical beginnings — like all historical beginnings — have a power exceeding all other moments in

that history. Luther, being the spiritual ancestor and social archetype, suffered years on his own religious odyssey before taking action against the Catholic church and thus establishing his identity. The drama is recreated annually at Reformation Day celebrations. Having arrived at the final solution, the Lutheran may act with a deliberate assertion — "Here I stand . . . I can do no other," according to Luther.

This compulsive quest for certainty can never be satisfied and will inevitably get one irrevocably bogged down in method. Yet the Lutheran mind demands the certainty. Instead of facing the fact that one can never know for certain where one is going and who is going along, the Lutheran mind occupies itself with the concerns of the immediate moment. The imagined solution to the key identity question is further study. Through careful analysis and a frugal husbandry of time and money, Lutheran administrators say, survival will be ensured. Survival to the end of the earthly kingdom — at least through the treacherous 1980s — will be ensured, but it comes at the expense of ever arriving as a differentiated institution with a firm conception of itself and its role in the world. Instead, the past continues to be fabricated and the future sold.

Solution to the identity question requires stepping back from the duties of the immediate moment — a distance the Lutheran mind may have difficulty apprehending — and an acceptance of conflict. The reluctance to do so manifests itself in very Lutheran phrases like "Priorities and Planning." The immediate situation is scrutinized thoroughly with the illusion of actual progress toward a goal maintained. Fragmentation continues, however, and identity questions go unanswered. A firm identity would, after all, be contrary to the Lutheran spirit. Besides, it would require yet another task force to squarely face the identity question — this one called "Possibilities and Actualities." Anyone for a Lilly Endowment grant? □

You Can Challenge the Social Ethic

(If It's OK With Everybody Else)

By Dan Friedrich

What do travelling salespersons and participants in public discussion at VU have in common? For one thing, they both presumably have something to sell from time to time — goods in one case and ideas in the other. The way they go about this selling can tell us a great deal about their strongest values.

Self-confidence, self-reliance, independence, toughness, straight-forwardness, "stick-to-itness" — these are the traits that are today in abeyance both among travelling salespersons and public discussion participants at VU. In their place have appeared characteristics like cooperativeness, moderation, toleration, timidity, cautiousness, carefulness, respectfulness, and agreeableness.

This dominant set of traits — what we might call the group-conscious view — may be observed in a host of university meetings. As everyone directly taking part in the formal proceedings of a committee settles

into comfortable chairs, a light-hearted breeze of petty discussion is invariably generated. Jovial quips and whispering interrupted sporadically by little bursts of chuckling characterize the early exchanges. The sense that anything important — not to mention controversial — is to follow is seldom present, even when such business is, in fact, to be dealt with.

Presentations are made apologetically — frequently with prefacing remarks to the effect that what follows isn't really very good and is certainly subject to revision, suggestions on how to improve it are welcome, and so on. Following a presentation of this sort, several members of the committee ordinarily pipe up with short remarks about the thorough and generally excellent job done on the report.

After these preliminary reactions, a trickle of suggestions or criticisms sometimes emerges. These, like the original presentation, are framed with disclaimers about their probable irrelevance or insignificance. At this point, other members of the group, finding themselves torn between the viewpoints presented, generally call for

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a compromise in the interest of gaining consensus on the matter. This suggestion, meeting with the nodding approval of the group, allows the business to be disposed of.

Particularly indicative of the dominance of the group-conscious characteristics is the frequency with which organizational or administrative — as opposed to substantive, intellectual, or philosophical — matters are the topics of discussion at these meetings. VU General Education Models task force meetings, for example, have been dominated by deliberation about desirable times and places for future task force meetings, public hearings, and document releases, as well as discussion about appropriate task force activities, strategies, and so on. Little time remains to discuss education literature, to debate the merits of alternative or innovative general education practices at other universities, or to research and discuss VU's status where general education is concerned.

Behind the urge to prepare a sound procedural strategy, of course, is a desire to avoid public explosions of controversy. Instead, it is hoped, by carefully proceeding, making sure at every step that the footing is sure, a program can be proposed that will have the support of the overwhelming majority of the community.

And, indeed, to continue to look at the GEM example, the strategy seemed to be working. Public meetings to discuss a statement of aims for general education at VU and later documents drawn up by the task force were well attended, moderate in their tone, and often positive.

The strategy seemed to be working, that is, until a recent University Senate Educational Policy Committee meeting. That meeting, at which committee approval for the GEM task force to develop a specific pilot project recommendation was on the agenda, was attended by more than 50 visitors, many of whom joined into the heated discussions that transpired. Charges and countercharges — “intellectual dishonesty, “stratospheric idealism”

and “gross immorality” were just a few — punctuated the meeting. In fact, the traits earlier described as dominant — cooperativeness, agreeableness, moderation, and so on — seemed to play no part in this. . .or did they?

Certainly the posture of those who most actively participated was not cooperative. One professor, for instance, reinforced his objections by saying that if the proposed program were put into effect, he could not recommend to his own children that they attend Valparaiso University. Timidness? One task-force member said, “People with objections (to the proposal) haven’t read the material we circulated closely enough. . .You underrate our intelligence.” And to that remark, one faculty member responded, “I *have* read this material and. . .I don’t buy what you’ve tried to tell us. . .We cannot afford. . .to jeopardize incoming freshmen with experimentation.”

Obviously, then, the meeting took on a tone that seems to be just the opposite of what we might have expected if those in attendance subscribed to the group-conscious view outlined earlier. But underlying that observable behavior, I would argue, is a desire on the part of most to abide by the canons of the group-conscious creed. Those who abide by it practice so often the skills of compromise and consensus and conflict suppression that the quite different skills of open public debate, of battle on the field of ideas, of unobstructed rational discourse become, like the skill of an idle musician, less sharp, less confidently used. Lacking practised movements, the musician intent nevertheless to play paws at the keys. Similarly, those thrust suddenly by the force of real concerns into the public dialogue exchange insults rather than ideas.

To use the terminology of William H. Whyte Jr. in *The Organization Man*, these meeting participants subscribe in large measure to the “social ethic.” This ethic, as Whyte defines it, makes morally legitimate the view that “Man exists as a unit of society. Of

himself, he is isolated, meaningless; only as he collaborates with others does he become worth while, for by sublimating himself in the group, he helps produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts." Because of this relation, "There should be, then, no conflict between man and society. What we think are conflicts are misunderstandings, breakdowns in communication."

This social ethic, Whyte says, has in many ways overshadowed the former moral code, the "protestant ethic." This ethic holds that by struggling against the environment the individual can reap both material and spiritual rewards. In this openly competitive contest, only the fittest survive; only those with the drive to go on when others quit make it to the top.

The protestant ethic is perhaps most clearly visible in the behavior and attitudes of the ambitious travelling salesperson. Whyte, recounting his experiences in the late thirties as a salesperson for the Vick company, notes that among the Vick sales staff, "Combat was the ideal — combat with the dealer, combat with the 'chiseling competitors,' and combat with each other." " 'You will never sell anybody anything,' " Whyte was told, " 'until you learn one simple thing. The man on the other side of the counter is the enemy.' "

In contrast to this approach, Whyte points to long-standing General Electric training programs based on principles of teamwork developed by the "human relations" school of management thought. As he describes it, I would guess this program is grounded in principles similar to those upon which a sales training program I was involved in a couple of years ago was based. This program, developed by the Alcoa corporation, was designed to produce effective salespersons who, as members of sales teams, would sell various company wares door-to-door.

A sense of comradeship, rather than competitiveness, was encouraged between us. We were told reassuringly that, since more than eight million

people lived in the Chicago area we would work in, there would be an ample supply of customers for each of us to call on for many years.

Nothing, our leader said, would be required of us before we were fully prepared. Sales tactics and effective responses to anticipated questions were rehearsed at frequent initiation meetings. A sales talk, which included a quite extensive set of demonstrations, was memorized and practised. Even when we were, as Whyte calls it, "dispatched to the hinterland," we did not, as he did, go alone; the team leader went with us to handle any problems that might arise.

The self-concepts we were encouraged to adopt were also quite different from those suggested by Vick managers. We were not in a "gladiators' school," as Whyte says he was. We were, in contrast, preparing to be consumer "team teachers," according to our leader. An Alcoa salesman does not treat consumers as the enemy, he said, but as pupils who we were to teach how to save money by spending it. Who would teach them, we were asked, about the kinds of steel used in cutlery if we didn't?

And by selling these products, we could help everyone else on our team. Prizes were available for all the sales team members if the group's overall sales reached a certain point. District managers and award-winning salespersons from other cities came to tell of their successes and to suggest that we too could win prizes if we worked together.

To objections from some of us that we did not feel well suited for door-to-door sales, our leader responded that we really did not go around knocking on unfamiliar doors the way rough-and-tumble Fuller Brush salespersons might. Alcoa salespersons called prospective buyers and set up appointments before stopping in. We were always *invited* into homes, he said.

Not only were different ideals held up for us than for the Vick sales team, but examples of "cutthroat" salespersons were pointed to as negative

role models for us. One absolutely ruthless salesperson he knew, our leader told us, actually had made people cry during his sales harangues. Our techniques were much more humane, he said.

In a sense, he was correct. Rather than creating open hostility in customers, we would psychologically sooth them, assuring them with assertions punctuated with the perfunctory, "Isn't that right?" In this way, we could lead the unsuspecting customer along a not altogether unconvoluted path of logic leading to the conclusion that thriftiness, that old tenet of the protestant ethic, will, in this case, be best achieved by purchasing the largest package of kitchen "necessities" available. (Since modern salespersons have quite proven that no less than 12 knives are needed to properly perform kitchen duties, think how impoverished must have been the lives of American pioneers who got along with only one!)

In short, there were to be no conflicts between our interests as individual salespersons — to gather in money and prizes — and the interests of our fellow Alcoa salespersons, our team leader, or our customers. Better yet, our separate interests could be satisfied without the tooth-and-nail competition that the protestant ethic had held to be essential if both the private and common good were to be served. Like the soft-spoken participants in public discussion at VU, the belief among our Alcoa sales team was that we could succeed by presenting ourselves in non-threatening, fluffy soft garb.

To be loved and successful: that is the utopia the social ethic offers. Like Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, those who abide by this ethic hold the view that "the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked and you will never want."

People like the sharp-tongued salesperson who made customers cry are

neither successful in gaining material goodies nor in winning friends and supporters, according to adherents of the social ethic. Similarly, an experienced scholar who, in a public meeting, offers a lengthy and well-reasoned critique of programs, regardless of how measured and mild-mannered the delivery, is a rabble-rouser, say the social ethic disciples. Such scholars disrupt the gentle flow of well-ordered committee business. They perhaps complicate excessively the otherwise simple thinking being focused on particular programs.

But if one can easily point to problems with adhering to the protestant ethic, the proceedings at the recent educational policy meeting clearly expose the weaknesses of the social ethic tenets. Ignoring conflict in the interest of reaching an expedient consensus only covers up real issues, allowing them to fester. When we follow the practice of members of present-day Bruderhof Christian communes in America and treat differences of opinion like spiritual weaknesses, like breakdowns in community bonds, we exaggerate both the divisiveness of civilized rational discourse and the cohesiveness of a superficial kinship of minds.

By honestly and openly discussing issues at every level, we at once hone our communication skills, learning to direct them effectively, and begin to understand the kind of respect that comes, not from noting that there is a comity of thinking between oneself and a speaker, but from realizing that the speaker consistently offers honest and straightforward reactions.

Willy Loman advises his son, a football player, to turn in an impressive performance. "Now when you kick off, boy," he says, "I want a seventy-yard boot, and get right down the field under the ball, and when you hit, hit low and hit hard, because it's important, boy. *He swings around and faces the audience.* There's all kinds of important people in the stands. . . ." We must learn to think about the game, not the audience. □

Change for the Women's Movement

**(Or, A Susan B. Anthony
Won't Do Your Laundry)**

By Jana Stade

One Friday evening I found myself sitting in a Valparaiso laundromat with five or six other women, most of them middle-aged, who were briskly folding clothes and attending to other laundry tasks, and talking among themselves. As I watched, one woman walked over to the change machine and dropped a coin into the slot. The machine consumed the coin and snarled briefly but returned no change. In vain, the frustrated woman hit the coin return, then strode over to the attendant and related what had happened. Soon the problem was explained: The woman had fed a new Susan B. Anthony dollar into the slot, and, as the attendant

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commented, "That machine don't like them Susan B. Anthony's."

It isn't difficult to find rather striking, if inadvertant, irony in the incident. A Susan B. Anthony dollar is discriminated against by a machine located in a laundromat, the long-time haunt of women (one need only look at the publications displayed in the magazine racks to confirm this). Yet there's more to it than a case of simple discrimination.

In a sense, the women's movement, like the inflated dollar that bears the likeness of one of its founders, has been consumed, even commercialized to a degree; and yet, the frustrated woman who waits for results may well feel she has been cheated, even betrayed, by the process.

The cause of women's equal rights, with roots reaching back into the days of Jane Addams, Elizabeth Cady

Stanton, and, yes, Susan B. Anthony, too, has emerged in the 1970s as a dominant political and social movement. Nearly every aspect of American life has seen reform, and many gains have been made. At the very least, most Americans are aware that some potential power the women's movement have been examined, called into question, and then either revamped or rejected by a substantial portion of the citizenry. And on a more pragmatic level, this decade has witnessed the passage of a considerable quantity of legislation directed toward granting women the human rights they had theretofore been denied, and dedicated to the proposition that, at least in the eyes of the law, not only are all *men* created equal, but women, too, may lay claim to the premise (and, after all, Blind Justice shouldn't be concerned with the more obvious external differences).

That positive changes have occurred is encouraging and testifies to the potential power the women's movement could wield in the future. As I perceive it, however, the movement has encountered some very complex and puzzling problems that threaten to eat away at that power and reduce its effectiveness.

For instance, on a surface level the problem of language is a persistent one. Putting raw ideas and feelings into cogent verbal form is a perplexing task and one, it seems, fraught with pitfalls, for women often fail to reach agreement on terminology and focus. (Are we set on *achieving* legal equality or on having our already existing equality *recognized*? Is the phrase "traditional role" necessarily a pejorative term? etc.) Such differences make communication and consensus difficult to achieve.

But the language problem, though significant in its own right, can be seen as symptomatic of a more comprehensive problem, that of excessive caution. In my experience, I have found that women's groups often spend more time quibbling about language and method than they do in almost any

other activity. The reason often cited for this is a fear of alienating beyond necessity the community in which they function, and as a result rendering themselves ineffectual within a community context. (Maybe such a thing would, indeed, happen; but I've never been involved in any women's group militant enough to alienate, so I don't really know.) In consequence, many women's groups move so slowly and carefully that they end up in danger of becoming ineffectual in the context of their own membership.

What makes women's groups so cautious? One needn't go very far to find reasons.

About a year ago I attended a scholarly lecture in history at which the speaker summarized his talk by denouncing the "strident voices of the feminists" and calling for preservation of the older chivalric way. The message is clear: Women who protest and raise the cry for equal rights are unattractive; they disrupt; they alienate; their voices are "strident." The message is echoed everywhere, not only by those who openly oppose the women's movement, but also by those who claim to be sympathetic to the cause. For instance, I have an acquaintance who periodically feels it's his duty to warn or remind me for my own good that my kind of woman must take care not to make anyone feel uncomfortable, and thus risk "intimidating" or "turning them off."

Women themselves seem to have built-in (conditioned-in?) doubts about the propriety or femininity of taking action and speaking out, and they are often their own worst enemies, so to speak. For the sake of appearing gentle, ever-tolerant, and feminine (in a "traditional" sense), women often put up with all manner of insults and offenses, both great and small. And I'm amazed that after the movement has fought for years for the right of a woman to choose her lifestyle, whether that be one of mother, scholar, businesswoman, housewife, artist, or lawyer, I still hear women complain that the movement excludes those who

choose "traditional roles." I'm amazed, too, by women who hastily reassure those around them that, although they "believe in a lot of what the movement stands for," they *are not feminists*.

At the root of the problem is fear: fear of alienating people, fear of letting go of old ways, fear of appearing too outspoken, fear of taking action. (One need only drop the word "political" at a women's group meeting to discover this.) Yet, why should a group with legitimate complaints and legitimate demands be afraid to speak out or to apply pressure where it counts when necessary? I sometimes wonder if many women aren't ultimately afraid to succeed.

As I pointed out earlier, the women's movement gained momentum in the '70s and was responsible for many desirable changes, including the growth of large women's groups and foundations, ratification in many states of the ERA, and achievement of new polish and sophistication among activists and its own leadership. Today the good work of the movement continues, and the organizations are flourishing in terms of membership, performance, and finances. On the other hand, the ERA *still* hasn't been ratified nationally, exploitation of women continues, and the media are still insensitive and sometimes hostile to women's issues — even the pages of *Ms.* magazine contain sexist ads that could just as easily be placed in its "No Comment" feature. And the fear remains.

It appears as if the momentum, the vigor, and the emotional commitment characteristic of the women's movement in the beginning have waned considerably of late, even though so much still needs to be accomplished. Unfortunately, I wasn't involved with women's groups on a grass-roots level in the early '70s, so I'm unable to compare women's attitudes then with women's attitudes now. But I suspect that it's at this level — the "local" level — that the greatest degree of paralyzing, enervating fear has set in.

On a higher level, sophistication has replaced raw fervor, and the hard line has been dropped in favor of greater palatability. From both cases, the concentration and drive of the past are missing.

It may well be that any social or political movement coming of age in the insipid 70s was doomed to decelerate from the start into a state of equilibrium. But the women's movement, which is actually a *human* movement in its final form, is a special case, and probably is suffering now because of its earlier successes. The strong push at the beginning led to reform, to the abolition of the most blatant and basic injustices. Thus, it has become easy for many to point to what has been done and say they are satisfied, instilling members of the movement with the most devastating fear of all: the fear that their complaints and demands are actually no longer legitimate.

Defensiveness, then, lies at the base of the inactivity and caution, and presents a *very* knotty problem to the movement. I find it likely that the leadership has failed to impart any sense of real urgency to the lower level membership of late, and so the average woman no longer feels she has clear goals to pursue. Or, seen from another perspective, her "fear" of being treated unfairly or as a second-class human being no longer outstrips her fear of taking action or committing a discordant deed. When such a phenomenon becomes widespread, it can have a damaging effect; witness, for example, the unhappy plight of the ERA in recent years.

The women's movement must regain some of the momentum it has lost, overcoming women's and men's fears (and other attitude problems) and stressing once again the pressing need for continued efforts toward the elimination of sex bias. Revitalization of this humanist cause is necessary, for it has the potential to work a great deal of good in the long run for both men and women alike. Otherwise, *everyone* will end up being shortchanged. □

The Poetry of Existence: Filling Up On Empty

By Tony Betz



American life is characterized by a dichotomy: work and party. The college student certainly leads this dichotomous existence. After a dull week of classes, he fervently participates in weekend drunkenness. The dichotomy continues into his adult life — a miserable day at the office, a martini in the evening. In a broader sense, the structure of America rests on this dichotomy. We all work to create the material wealth that we can enjoy only after enduring the drudgery of making it. We first endure existence; then we enjoy it. We suffer the miseries of the first half of existence in anticipation of the pleasures of the second half; our enjoyment of the second half is unfortunately diluted by the dreadful prospect that we will soon return to the gloom of the first half. It is not surprising, then, that boredom and emptiness are at the heart of American

life. What kind of “meaning” do we find in an existence that is a continuous sequence of work-party, drudgery-hedonism? It is this emptiness that I tackle here. I attempt to offer an insightful description of it and discover how to fill it. I begin with a simple statement of the problem and a glimpse of the solution.

Contemporary life in America is impoverished, empty. This impoverishment extends to the university; students are bored, miserable, complaining, unresponsive. Why the impoverishment? We are materialists obsessed with objects and ends; this is obvious. What is not so obvious is the devastating consequence: the neglect of our spirits and the denial of our inner reality, a denial implicit in the very way life is conducted. We live for objects; we are therefore enslaved by them. Existence is thus reduced; life is constrained. In particular, college life is reduced to a means to an end: graduation, the acquisition of a job and the material comfort it allows. But life lies in consciousness, not in objects. Only the recognition and development

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of conscious reality can fill the emptiness of our world.

To start with nothing and make something is the essential ability of the human spirit. Without this creative power man is a mere animal. Of course, behavioral psychologists tell us that man is indeed an animal, his brain a mere switchbox: in goes a stimulus, out comes a response. I respect these psychologists as scientists; I do not dispute with them. Their concern is for scientific reality, i.e. law-like phenomena or constant conjunctions of events (in the case of behaviorism, "stimulus 'A' is always followed by response 'B' " is the statement of one such conjunction). As far as science is concerned, man is an animal; if he is to be scientifically describable, he must be "deprived" of his will and spirit. More accurately, the notion of "spirit" cannot serve as a category for scientific theorizing.

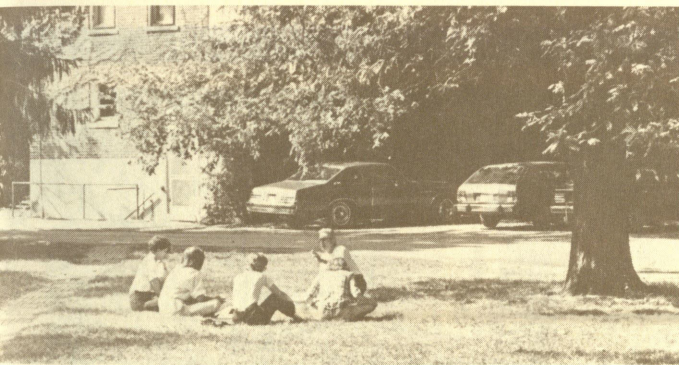
I will not assert that man is not scientifically describable. Whether he is or isn't is of no consequence here. My concern is not for scientific reality, but for *concrete* reality, the reality of consciousness. Science, no matter what it discloses about the physiological or behavioral aspects of man, cannot deprive his consciousness of its density or richness of being. Science does not employ concepts referring to elements in consciousness; therefore, no scientific assertion can possibly be a denial of the existence of one or more of those elements. Suppose I am sad. I am handed a complete physio-chemical account of my condition. Physiology has discovered a definite correlation between state of consciousness "A" and molecular configuration "B". I am told, "Your sadness is reducible to configuration 'B'." I quickly retort, "My sadness is not configuration 'B' ". It is a fact of consciousness: 'I feel sad.' And do not tell me that configuration 'B' has caused my sadness; I have *reasons* for being sad, reasons that weigh heavily on my consciousness; hence, reasons that are very *real*." Thoughts and feelings are not molecules. Successful scientific

There does exist a reality internal to man. . .an implacable reality not vulnerable to scientific attack simply because it is not reducible to scientific categories.

description does not spear the reality that can be described in concrete terms, nor does it vitiate the truth of concrete description.

There does exist a reality internal to man, a reality in his mind, an implacable reality not vulnerable to scientific attack simply because it is not reducible to scientific categories. The will and the spirit, because they reside in consciousness, are real, even though man, when viewed from without himself, may be an automaton whose actions are entirely predictable (i.e., scientifically describable). If my reader does not think I make sense, I invite him to carefully examine his own breast and ask himself whether he can ever truly conceive of himself as a being without a will. I must stress here that "having a will" means much more than "not being predictable." What it means to have a will is directly and fully appreciated only by the consciousness. The term "will" acquires its full meaning when it refers to that something residing in consciousness. We simply cannot avoid the notion that we do as we choose, even though our actions may be predictable or predetermined. The meaning of the term "will" is not reducible to an instrumental definition (i.e., a phenomenalist definition in terms of the observed regularity or "randomness" of behavior). The will is inseparable from consciousness; only consciousness has a full understanding of it. The instrumental description of the will is sterile; it does not capture the substance or content of the conscious will as we know it.

Can we say anything more about the

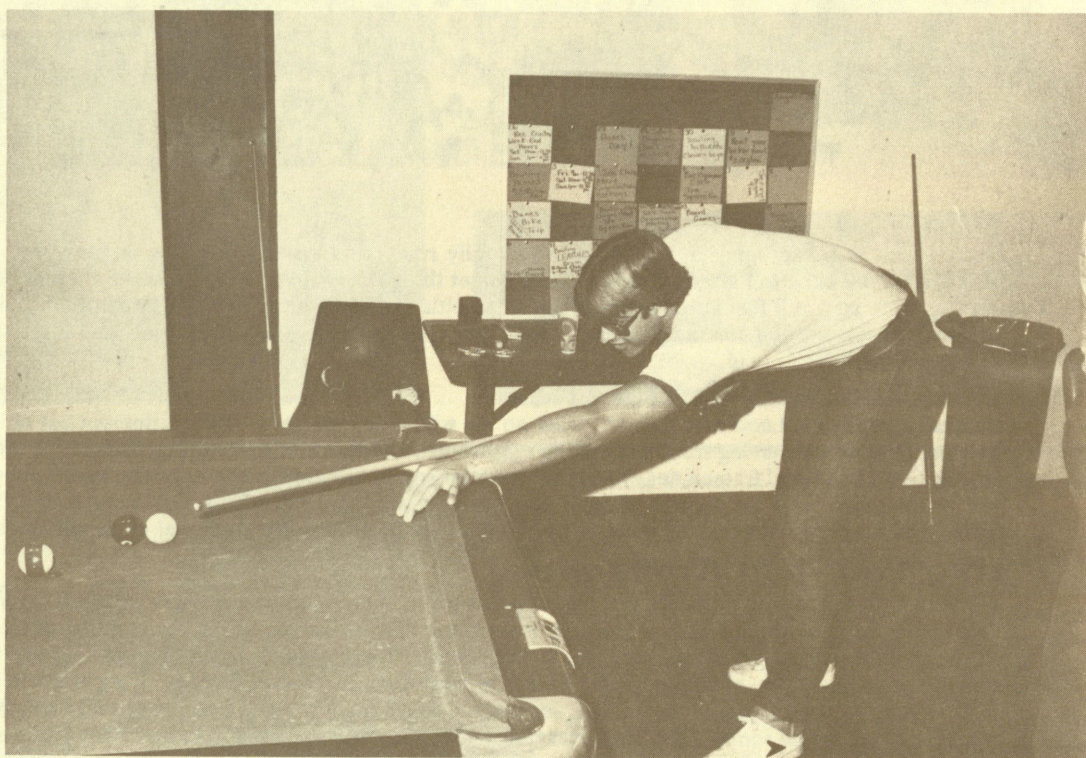


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properties of a willing consciousness? The existentialists already have. Sartre has pointed out that the consciousness is constantly forming attitudes about everything: events, objects, newspaper articles. Of course, an attitude may appear in the consciousness without the consent of the will; there still remains, however, the opportunity to take another attitude toward that attitude which has appeared in the consciousness. For example, I may find a particular piece of music extremely offensive. Yet I may ask myself, "Should I feel this way about that music? Many critics praise it highly; doesn't that mean I am missing something?" I may now decide to give the music another chance. This decision-making and attitude-forming capability of the consciousness is an unmistakable sign of its creative power. Decisions and attitudes come from nothing but the operations of the consciousness. Certainly there is a sense in which we can say that a decision is provoked by external conditions, but it is the individual who must manufacture the "being provoked." He is provoked because he chooses to be provoked.

I trust that those who understand me will readily accept all I have so far said. Of course, some may find fault with my specific way of expressing these ideas about the will and the consciousness. I ask to be excused on the grounds that my pretenses are modest. I want only to offer a rough sketch of consciousness and present general ideas readily understandable by anyone. I do not treat details; I do not pretend to treat them.

I now desire to apply my previous results to the conduct of life and discover how existence can be enhanced. I have established the existence of a conscious reality and a creative faculty within consciousness. These are realities that are vital to life, but in modern technological society they are ignored because science and business *as institutions* ignore them. (I define "institution" as an assemblage of men with similar world views devoted to common, occupational

Life is reduced to an endless cycle of consumption and production. It is limited by external reality; more accurately, it is maimed by the all-pervasive metaphysics of science and business that governs the attitudes of the individuals within technological society, one that does not take into account the inner life of man.

goals. Science and business *as activities* require the participation of the creative faculty.) Phenomenal reality (that of sense perception) becomes the only reality. Life is reduced to an endless cycle of consumption and production. It is limited by external reality; more accurately, it is maimed by the all-pervasive metaphysics of science and business that governs the attitudes of the individuals within technological society, a metaphysics that does not take into account the inner life of man. The spirit is consequently bound by material shackles; it hibernates within the gloom of a reality enclosed by walls of appearances. The emptiness of man's world goads him into his hedonistic, materialistic pursuits. He becomes a passive organism because his creative ability is wasted.

Passivity pervades every part of American life. Our music, film, literature, and television are mere entertainments that appeal largely to the vulgar appetites (I am sure that my reader can supply his own list of examples). The typical American sits back in a content stupor and lets these entertainments swarm over him. None of them demand any thought or response from an audience; they are tailor-made for the mentally and emotionally lethargic

American. These criticisms of modern America are of course clichés; nevertheless, their truth is undeniable. Now, these clichés can be expressed in a different language, a language that freshens them and gives them depth. What we see in America is a society that occupies and contents itself with surfaces, sensual surfaces. This occupation with surfaces is a fitting complement to the pervasive metaphysics that maintains only surfaces exist. The result is a society of people who are themselves surfaces, people who do not fill their existence with imaginative depth. This theory well explains the exaltation of non-art and the lack of respect for real art. Non-art is purely sensuous, at best a mere pleasure, like a glass of wine. Real art makes use of a sensuous surface to express an underlying imagination; the sensuous surface in itself is subordinate to the theme of the work. The sensuous surface, being conformed to the imagination of the artist, is not conformed to pure sensuousness. It may happen that the sensuous surface of a work of art, being in a sense constrained, or, better, controlled by the expressive intent of the artist, may not be totally satisfying sensuously, or may even be sensuously offensive; the American, seeking only sensuous satisfaction, therefore has no need for art, which aims at the imagination of the appreciator. In the case of music, he wants only a beat, a melody, a slick arrangement, expensive production. He has no toleration for sounds that do not conform to his top-forty M.O.R. standards. Such sounds may not be appealing in themselves; they acquire their appeal only when the listener has exerted his imagination in the comprehension of the artist's imagination that lies behind them. The mentality of America proclaims that this imagination cannot be seen, therefore does not exist, and consequently is of no importance.

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When a man refuses to recognize the consciousness and creative power of the artist, he also refuses to recognize his own. The very thing that can enliven America is thus ignored out of existence. Consciousness and its creative power, if only we learn to recognize and develop them, allow us to escape our self-imposed gloom. In the face of meaninglessness we manufacture meaning. In the absence of God, we construct God . . . there is only one kind of reality for man.

existence. Consciousness and its creative power, if only we learn to recognize and develop them, allow us to escape our self-imposed gloom. In the face of meaninglessness, we manufacture meaning. In the absence of God, we construct God. I am not mad. In a sense, there is only one kind of reality for man, the reality that touches his consciousness. You object, "Certainly there are objects that exist independently of my mind." I answer, "Yes, but the 'objectivity' of these objects must arise in consciousness. It is you yourself who must assert that these objects are outside your mind." Reality is known only through consciousness. An unknown reality, as far as man is concerned, is a non-reality. Sounds do not exist for the deaf man. That is not to say that the deaf man posits the nonexistence of sounds, but that the existence of sounds for the

deaf man is only an abstract existence. Because he cannot hear, sounds do not enter into the realm of his concrete reality, the reality felt by his consciousness. (By "sound" here I mean an air movement; by defining "sound" in this way, I can sensibly talk about a sound that exists independently of observers. For purposes of the above discussion let us suppose that air movements are heard.) I now draw my conclusions. Given that things in consciousness are accompanied by their reality, it follows that anything that arises in consciousness through an act of creation is also real. God can therefore be urged into existence through an effort of the conscious will.

Man has the poetic ability to create hope out of hopelessness, to build unity out of a shattered cosmos, to evoke happiness out of gloom. By manipulating his own consciousness, he manipulates reality, creates in himself a universe of happiness. But he cannot create unless he recognizes the existence of his creative power and chooses to use it. In contemporary life in America, he does not. He confines himself to objects; he suffers from the *malady of ends*. Life is oriented not around intensity of immediate, conscious experience, but around the attainment of practical ends. Man devotes himself to what is external; he is thus enslaved. Life is given in consciousness, immediate and continuous experience, a continuous creative act. Looking toward external, material goals deadens it, takes away its vigor. Attachment to ends is neglect of the inner life, the life of real value, the life where the spice of immediate thought, feeling, and experience intensifies existence, gives it depth and richness.

That is not to say, however, that genuine existence is necessarily otherworldly, in which life one lives solely inside his mind. (There is nothing wrong, however, with otherworldliness; it is certainly far preferable to worldly ennui.) One does indeed live in his mind in genuine existence (again, living is experience; experience is thought and feeling; thought and

feeling arise in the consciousness, rather, are created in the consciousness; vigor of consciousness brings intensity of life), but he need not exclude things and events external to him. He can make them his own. Through a creative effort he makes them a part of himself and an integral component of his conscious reality. This phenomenon of creative possession is best described as the phenomenon of spiritual outflow. (I remind the reader that my terms are descriptive of concrete reality; by "spirit" I do not mean a mystical, ethereal essence of humankind. I mean simply that part of consciousness to which the term owes its true origin. Everyone has at one time or another felt his "spirit." It is not an abstraction; it is something of which we are at times concretely aware.) In this phenomenon, the soul of the observer lends color and depth to the objects of his view. It reaches out to them, flows into them, and imbues them with life and brilliance. The clearest illustrations of this phenomenon occur in romantic poetry about nature. I faintly recall reading a poem by Walt Whitman in which he condemns the scientific description of heavenly bodies. He expresses his resentment toward the attempt of scientists to strip them of their beauty and reduce them to analyzable phenomena. Walt's stars are plainly non-scientific. When he views them in the night, he makes them his own. They are then no longer impersonal phenomena subject to astrophysical analysis, simply because Whitman's experience of them has made them a part of a fuller reality, the concrete reality of his non-scientific person.

This faculty of spiritual outflow enables a man to transform a cold, empty, meaningless universe into a warm and friendly personal haven. If he chooses, he may provide it a god (immanent or transcendent). The world becomes what he conceives it to be, or what he wants to conceive it to be. There is, however, another form of genuine life which involves the otherworldliness I mentioned earlier. In this form of life the individual divorces

himself from the world and places his faculty of spiritual outflow on a shelf. He occupies himself by either constructing ideas and playing with them or by building imaginary worlds and living in them.

An ideal existence includes both forms of creative life ("Variety is the. . ."). What is common to both is the exertion of the creative faculty. There are two elements of creative activity: *construction* and *creative resonance*. Creative resonance is inseparable from construction; resonance cannot occur without construction, and construction often arises from resonance. The artist is our paradigm. He constructs, i.e. brings an idea into existence. He constructs again, i.e. expresses the idea through a medium that strikes one or more of the senses. Since art is a discovery of the world, the work of the artist must arise out of his creative resonance with it. Just as Walt Whitman is brought to tears by the very stellar spectacle he constructs for himself, the artist is influenced by the very reality he influences. He must take an attitude toward reality and view it in a very special way. His own soul then jumps back at him from the objects of his experience. Out of this experience the idea emerges.

For example, the style of cubism arose out of a dim view of the modern world. In the eyes of these painters, the world is mechanistic and fragmented, an agglomeration of pieces lacking design, structure, and unity. Human beings are themselves maimed by the fragmentation, their bodies ugly composites of angular forms, quite unlike the bodies depicted in the sculpture of ancient Greece. Viewed through the lens of fragmentation, the world becomes a disordered assemblage of cubes, the kind of world represented in the paintings of these artists. (An artistic idea like that of cubism is a *discovery* of reality because the artist, like everyone else, is human; therefore, everyone has the capacity to view the world in the way the artist views it. In this way the artist's reality gains a kind of universality or "objectivity.")

We deny that we are artists and poets; therefore we are unable to lift ourselves out of our material misery. We do not make life rich and meaningful.

All of genuine existence is art and poetry. We are all artists and poets, but lately we haven't been doing much painting or writing. We suffer from our self-inflicted ennui. We cry because the very God we destroyed doesn't exist. We lament our materialism, yet we remain materialists. We deny that we are artists and poets; therefore we are unable to lift ourselves out of our material misery. We do not *make* life rich and meaningful; therefore it isn't.

Of particular sadness is the attitude the typical student holds toward the very thing central to his life: his chosen field of work. This student suffers the malady of ends in its most acute form. He treats his work as a means, not as a form of creative endeavor, a fountain of immediate experience. He is a slave to his work because it is directed at ends — survival, material comfort, raising a family — not his life. He does not experience it, he endures it out of what he conceives to be material necessity. His ends may not be selfish. Suppose he is an engineer. He may design and build bridges out of service to the community, out of his Christ-like disposition to bear his cross like every good person. No matter. He is still a slave to ends.

One's occupation has a single real purpose: the exercise of the creative faculty and the joy and exhilaration that accompany the act of creation. Spiritual outflow and creative resonance are inseparable from genuine work experience. In the case of the engineer, his soul permeates each girder, each beam of the bridge. He participates in a dynamic relationship with *his* bridge; he resonates with it. He is awed by its life and beauty, exhilarated by the realization that he is

responsible for its life and beauty. Of course, he derives even further satisfaction from the knowledge of the usefulness of his bridge; the usefulness is inseparable from the beauty (it is of the engineer's aesthetic taste to create things useful). But the end is not the usefulness; the proper end is the *experience* of creating something useful and perceiving it as one's own. The end is not an external fact: "Cars may now cross the river." The end is the experience that always evokes a keen aesthetic awareness of one's own work and the pleasure that is derived from the realization that one's work is an outward expression of his soul. Work is properly a form of egoism. As a form of egoism it contributes to life and experience.

I must stress that the work experience does not occur automatically; one must make it happen. He must manufacture the experience through the employment of his creative gifts. If one finds that, try as he may, he cannot evoke this experience, he has chosen the wrong line of work. He then has a moral obligation to himself to change over to a field of work that complies with his aesthetic tastes.

Creative resonance is a phenomenon of every form of occupation. For the businessman, the corporation is the creation, the expression. For the real businessman, the end is not wealth and the growth of the corporation; the end is the very experience of making wealth and building a corporation. Deriving an exhilarating satisfaction from the product of the managerial activities is also important: the thrill of having done something is justification for the having done it.

For the mathematician, the symbols and their logical relationships are the objects of resonating experience. To the student they appear dull, sterile, and lifeless, but the experienced mathematician perceives in them a unity, a working together in elegant fashion. He perceives their power. Take for example the symbol of integration. For the student, it is a means to an answer. For the mathematician, it is the sign of an extraordinary,

mysterious operation: finding the area under a curve, or finding the volume under a curved surface. It is a human invention that offers this power. Every mathematical symbol represents a creative act. The ways in which these symbols are employed in science and engineering are also creations. Behind every equation lies an intuition of nature, a created way of looking at the universe. The successful student must re-create this intuition; he must provide the bare bones of the formula with the intuitive flesh. In this way he resonates with the equation, experiences the meaning that he himself has given it. For many students, however, the symbols remain inert, mere tools with which to "crank out" answers to problems. So conceived, they remain without the student. They are not taken into his consciousness because he has not filled them with thought.

Among students is the perverse idea that the theories and laws of science and engineering are brute facts, descriptions of cold, impersonal reality to be memorized and catalogued as a disparate array of phenomena. But among all these laws and theories is a unity that discloses their human origin. The entirety of classical mechanics stems from a single law: $F = ma$. With this law, a tremendous variety of phenomena is described and understood in essentially the same way. But this order is not apparent in the sense world, in which world phenomena are detached and unrelated. Newton *created* order out of disunity. He imposed order upon nature. The soul inclines toward unity. Creation is, after all, a unity or unification. This connectedness indicative of the poetic foundation of science and engineering also exists between distinct fields of investigation. For example, there is a connectedness between electronics and mechanics. The equation that describes the flow of current in a resonant circuit is the kind of equation that describes the motion of a mass on a spring.

Science and engineering, like all other activities, are inseparable from artistic and poetic creation. As poetic

activities they contribute to the vitality of existence. As activities directed at material ends they are not worthwhile and contribute nothing to existence. The material worth of an activity is not sufficient to justify that activity. You say to me, "But don't you enjoy having lights, automobiles, stereo systems, etc? I am an engineer; I make them for you." I reply, "No thanks. Don't sacrifice yourself for me. I feel very guilty and depressed when I see that you have to suffer for me. If, however, you love your field and are wrapped up in your work, if your very existence depends upon the fact that you are an engineer, I shall happily accept the fruits of your creative labors. I *do* enjoy cars and stereo systems, but not at the expense of the life of another."

I hope that by now I have shown my philosophy to be essentially practical. I must here again stress that my concern is for concrete reality, reality immediately experienced. I am not attempting to impose a metaphysics on my readers. I do not assert, "All reality is subjective. The universe is rational only because we choose to conceive it as rational. Knowledge is impossible. God is merely a useful illusion, a pleasant mental fiction," nor do I affirm that the tossing away of all rational, metaphysical systems is a necessary prerequisite of intense, religious experience. I aim merely to perhaps instill in my readers a certain disposition of the mind that improves the quality of human existence. This disposition need not exclude belief in a "real" God, nor does it require the rejection of "objective" knowledge. My ideas are thoroughly practical. They are not designed to have any implications in the theory of knowledge or in the investigation of the fundamental nature of the universe.

I do assert, however, that a certain flexibility of the intelligence accompanies this disposition of the mind. As I have shown, inflexibility of intelligence has been our problem in America. Our fast adherence to the notion that nothing but sense objects exists has had a devastating outcome: the neglect of our spirits and our inner reality. We

A certain flexibility of the intelligence accompanies this disposition of the mind. Inflexibility of intelligence has been our problem in America. Our fast adherence to the notion that nothing but sense objects exists has had a devastating outcome: the neglect of our spirits and our inner reality. We are surrounded and constricted by the phenomenal walls we ourselves have constructed.

are surrounded and constricted by the phenomenal walls we ourselves have constructed. We have also yet to recognize that as far as we are concerned as living and experiencing beings, the character of the world of sense objects is influenced by ourselves, because we take attitudes toward what we observe. For poets, stars are splendors in the night; for scientists, spheres of gravitationally bound gas undergoing thermonuclear processes.

Our attitude-forming creative faculty opens up a universe of infinite possibility. Ennui becomes inexcusable. If you are bored, create your excitement! If your world is empty, give it depth! Don't complain of the superficiality of existence; superficiality is your superficiality. Your reality is how you conceive it.

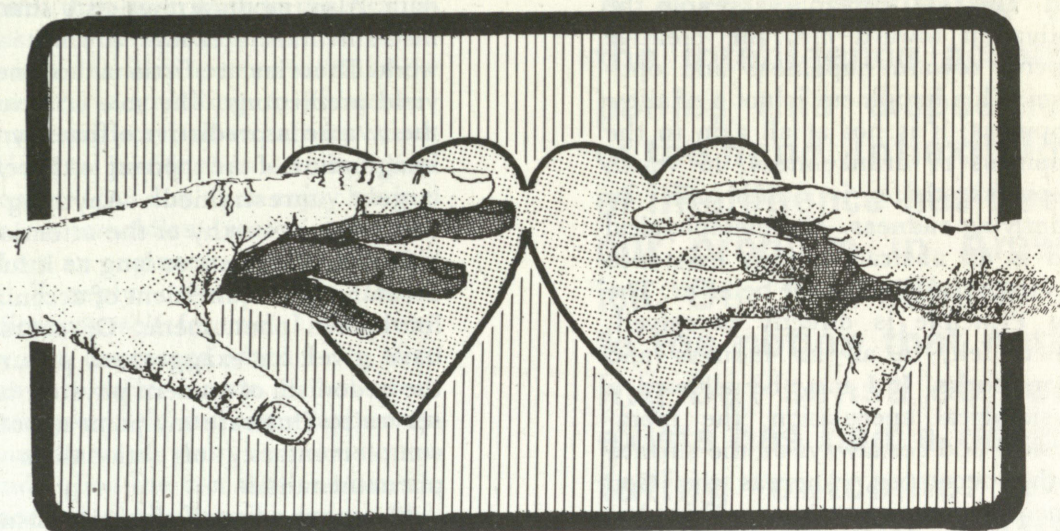
Whether or not one chooses to install a god in his metaphysics, he will certainly experience a concrete god if his existence is genuine. This god I now call the God Principle in order to distinguish it from the metaphysical

God. The God Principle is simply the motivation toward life, the creative impetus toward happiness and optimism. This happiness is not a shallow happiness; it is not at all akin to the happiness of drunkenness, in which happiness there is, after all, an underlying sadness. The metaphysical God is an abstraction, his existence held in the intellect of the believer. The God Principle is directly perceived, rather, felt, in all its fullness and concreteness. If I may be allowed a physiological speculation, the metaphysical God lies always on the surface of the neocortex, whereas the God Principle rests somewhere within that vital link between the cognitive apparatus of the brain (the neocortex) and the limbic system (the apparatus of emotion).

Finally, one may hold two opposing sorts of attitudes in life. The creative spirit is flexible; it is not deterred from contradiction because it is amorphous and all-encompassing. The spirit can manufacture meaning out of contradiction; it need not be constrained by logic. The opposing attitudes held by the spirit are those of phenomenalism and rationalism. In the phenomenalistic mode, the mind chooses to be skeptical. It asserts that only sense appearances are objects of knowledge; rational systems of thought are absurd. Yet in the end phenomenalism contributes to rationalism. Skepticism prevents adherence to any one metaphysics. Thought is unrestrained and ideas proliferate. One may freely create his own metaphysics without being crushed by the stigma of "being wrong." Of course, he will not necessarily acquire the status of being universally right: others have ideas, too. Particle physics affords a very special example of phenomenalistic rationalism. Experimental technique has not been developed to the point where it offers firm conclusions about the nature of matter. The data are incomplete, hence subject to a variety of interpretations. Ideas about matter proliferate. The imagination of the theorist is limited only by the weak constraints imposed by the scanty

data. Also, modern physicists share an instrumental attitude toward their work. Theories are fictions designed to yield predictions. The sole criterion of their value is predictive efficiency. The imagination of the theorist is therefore largely unrestrained. Anything he conceives is worthy of the attention of his fellow scientists so long as it fulfills the minimal requirement of accounting for known phenomena. Of course, I have given an exaggerated picture of the hedonism of modern physics, but it serves to illustrate my point about the complementarity of rationalism and phenomenalism.

This phenomenalistic rationalism allows man his freedom and his life. Sense phenomena leave us in uncertainty; they do not provide all the answers to the questions about the world that the human being naturally feels compelled to ask. He is therefore free to speculate, free to create the answers to his own questions. This is his rationalism. Yet, he remains fully aware of the uncertainty of his condition; he therefore does not place absolute, unwavering faith in any one metaphysics. In this way he prevents his bondage to any one rationalistic system, including the one he himself constructs. This is his phenomenalism. Through phenomenalistic rationalism reality retains its freshness; it is continually created and created anew. Old systems, old ways of looking at the universe are torn down and replaced by new ones. Each new construction carries in it a new exhilaration, a revivification of existence. But it is only in consciousness that the construction is performed and the exhilaration experienced. In America, this new construction has been long overdue. It is time that we throw off our material metaphysics, snap out of our material stupor, dissolve the maiming dichotomy and integrate existence. We will then enjoy work as a part of life, a source of rich experience. It will no longer be a dismal non-life endured for the purpose of achieving a hedonistic non-life. By achieving this integration, we fill the emptiness and create a uniformly bright existence. □



*The Farewell moving in judicious robes
just out of touch
but just close enough
for white-haired, black-cloaked beckoning,
same as back then and now again
with a should-eye winking must
and a sly-sided eye.*

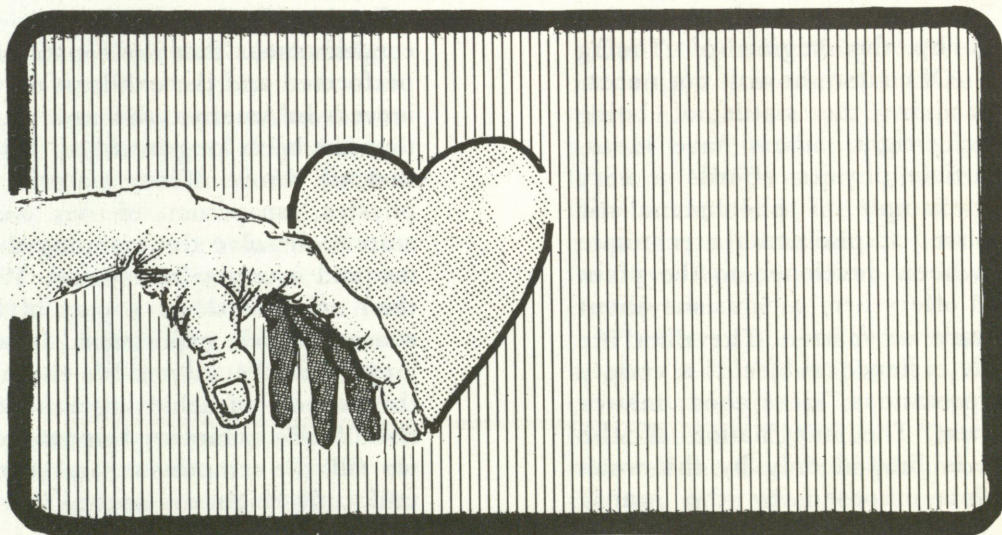
*The Farewell silently piping an untune logic
with postulates in end-rhyme,
leading a following
of those born leaving.*

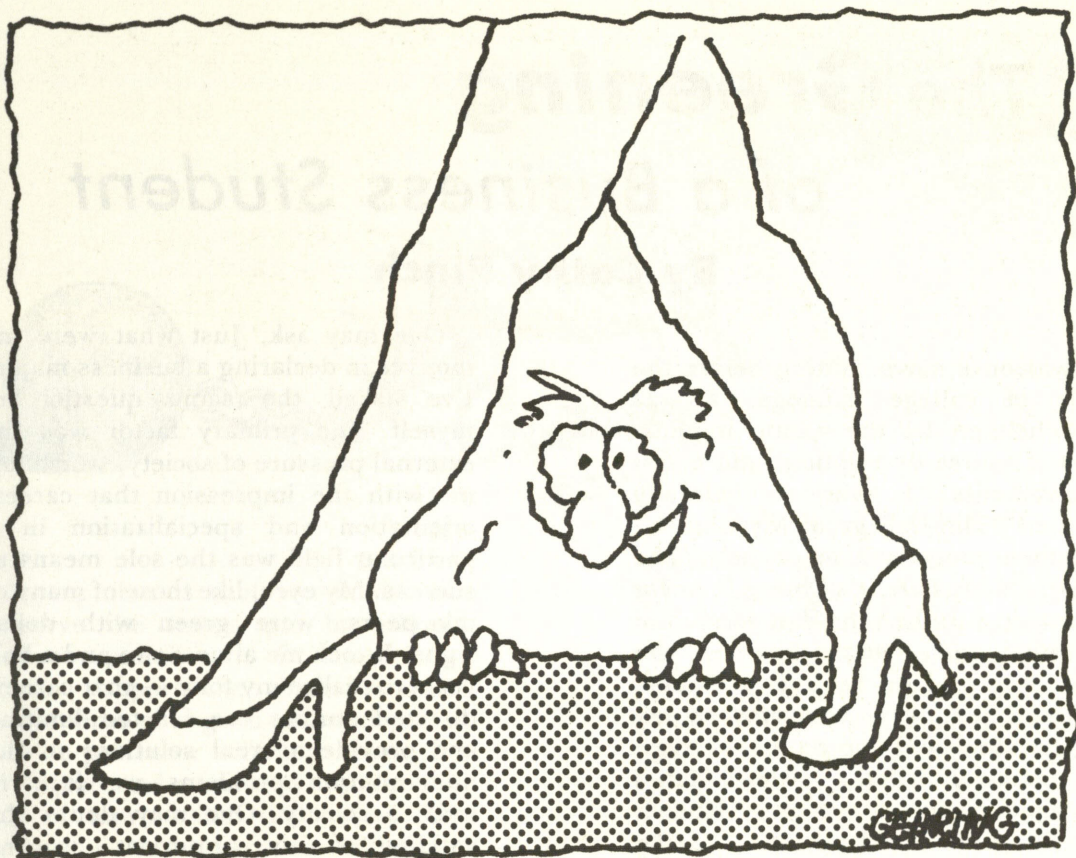
*The Farewell toward mecca,
The moses not arriving,
with swarms in mimicry,
going their coming,
amiss among departures.*

*The Farewell's sweeping eyes watching
their watching their hearts'
rhythmic recession.*

— Janet Malotky

POETRY





*Contestant number almost won
 was round white and firmed
 as she played an old keyboard overture.
 It was a natural talent they said,
 inbred and refined since.
 It was in her jeans,
 and danced over the ivories
 across her face.*

*Later as the envelope pleased
 Goddess Beauty hung suspended
 on the held breath of Her believers.
 And the thunder of the hall
 was the relief of us all —
 as if Atlas had nearly slipped,
 but caught Himself
 as the Dove descended like a crown,
 and america was once again at ease
 with a Queen.*

*Contestant number almost won
 teeters now on pinnacle shoes
 like a long pillar of Midas,
 invoking tight trousers at her feet;
 her shadow filling with mirrors
 and the teeth of rehearsing rivals.*

— Janet Malotky

The Greening of a Business Student

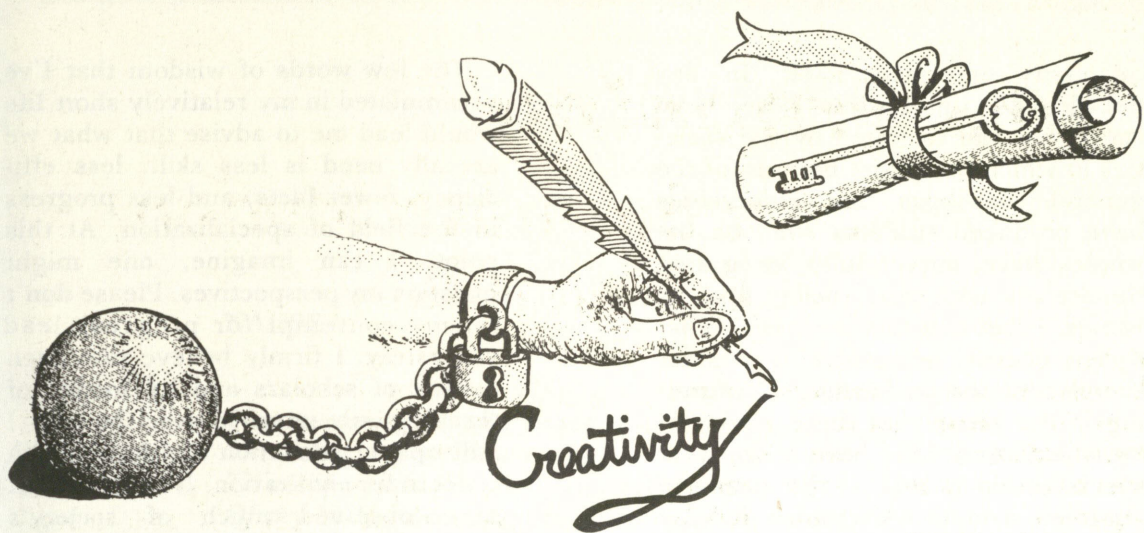
By Cathy Pinch

I was once naive. Sitting before the stack of college catalogs, I was overwhelmed by the exotic implications of course descriptions and major requirements. I, ever so carefully selected "The College of My Choice" and then proceeded to attend "The College of My Father's Choice." As for my major, I probed the dim corners of my mind and deemed business the most appropriate avenue to take. Avenue it was — but as narrow as any avenue one would find on a road map, and ultimately it led to a dead end. I was adamant in my pursuit of Knowledge, however, and persisted to the point of obsession. Yes, I was obsessed with books, and yes, I was obsessed with attaining Truth — the truth about man and God and politics and society and nature. My eyes were tightly closed, for I did not want to expose myself to any ills or evils that might interfere with my beliefs or goals, lest I lose myself and inevitably conform to those "evils." But one eye, and then the other, eventually opened, and my suspicions were confirmed. I finally saw the irreverence towards the true ambition of a university (and that I was supporting this irreverence by pursuing business education); I saw that society and its high regard for career-orientation and specialization were eroding true intellectual and humanitarian progress; and I finally realized that the university itself had developed flaws in its structure that had prevented many a student from attaining true perspectives on life.

One may ask, Just what were my motives in declaring a business major? I've asked the same question of myself. The primary factor was the external pressure of society, which left me with the impression that career-orientation and specialization in a particular field was the sole means to success. My eyes, like those of many of my peers, were green with dollar signs. It took me almost two and a half years to realize my folly — that career-directed studies are far too limiting and provide no real solutions to the humanitarian problems we face in today's society. One may doubt the validity of my argument on the grounds that I have had such a narrow background. But I have seen enough in liberal arts courses and elsewhere to formulate a belief that the academic enterprise has lost the ability to recognize learning for learning's own sake and is in need of reform.

John Henry Newman said the true purpose of a university rests "in demand and supply, in wants which it alone can satisfy, and which it does satisfy, in the communication of Knowledge, and the relation and bond which exists between the teacher and the taught." Nowadays, if one enters a university with this expectation, one may become discouraged. My disillusionment with the academic system was gradual. On occasions too numerous to mention, I heard students asking each other what courses and professors were easiest, with replies like "This is a blow-off class," "The prof is senile," "I never do any homework," "I'm pulling out with threes and fours." This phenomenon did not occur just within the business college. They reverberated through the halls where liberal-arts classes are held as

Cathy Pinch, a junior, recently left the College of Business Administration to pursue a philosophy major.



R. LUCHT '79

well.

My opinion is that we should not preserve the status quo but should seek to question it. Of course, we should support the three essential components of a good university: The learned professor willing to teach, the intelligent and motivated student willing to learn, and the successfully integrated administration willing to cooperate in the functioning of the above components. As I see affairs today, faculty members divide loyalty between the faculty and the institution they serve. One "cannot have professional schools without professionals, and a professional's first loyalty is to his guild of other professionals." Therein lies the nature of some of the irreverence toward education.

Despite faculty shortcomings the fault also lays, in part, with the students themselves. Hesiod expressed with clarity my general feeling towards those students when he wrote:

"Far best is he who knows all things himself; good, he that hearkens when men counsel right; but he who neither knows, nor lays to heart another's wisdom, is a useless wight."

Students are now fairly unreceptive to the abstractions of the liberal arts. They are rushed and consider studies of the past as irrelevant. Their time is devoted to engineering or business or whatever. True, society does encour-

age such pursuits in order cumulatively to progress in terms of technology, or politics, or business procedures. My peers and I, at an impressionable and tender age, were exposed to instant meals, instant this-and-that; we had easy access to money and to the delights it can buy; we were exposed to long hours of television, and to the sex, violence, and glittering abuse of morals that television so explicitly displayed. We were the victims, the products of this portrayal of decadence. And today's students are primarily interested in easy, snap courses, in fraternities and sororities, and afterwards, in soft jobs with easy profit. Though I'm reluctant to admit it, I once fully believed in the sciences of the mind and reality, in evolution and cause and effect. (Even more reluctantly, I admit that I still do.) I complied with educational standards and the wisdom of my professors, though I have yet to meet the professor who can inspire moments of exhilarating truth. But who can justify the futility of such acquiescence? Today, I reproach the expertise of dullards who hide behind the title "professor" and I reproach the complacency of hollow students. And I also feel that while education does involve the interchange of ideas between teachers and students, this interchange has been hindered by the attitudes on both their parts.

Some of the blame for such negative attitudes can be traced back to the

university enterprise itself. In any decade, all universities have been supported and tolerated by the societies in which they exist because of the general consensus that universities have produced students who, on the whole, have successfully integrated themselves with that society and its values. I feel that this is wrong. What society deems "acceptable" I consider complacent and conforming. Conforming in the sense that these students, mass-produced, have been taught that specialization is best — the means to progress, a myth universities do very little to dispel. Perhaps we are instructing on too large a scale, with variations among students, faculty, and departments too great. The technology and specialization toward progress in society has a way of narrowing and limiting greater vision, with the emphasis coming to be more on quantity and less on quality in education. Jose Ortega y Gasset spoke of the barbarism of "specialization" and wrote that "when there are more 'scientists' than ever, there are much fewer 'cultured' men. . . because the specialist is ignorant of the inner philosophy of the science he cultivates." And as a result of the emphasis on successful career planning, creative teaching and the challenging pursuit of Knowledge have suffered. Unfortunately, the university enterprise itself supports this doctrine of progress and neglects those departments devoted to liberal arts. The unbalance evident between the transient interests of this society and the enduring truths of past civilization were reflected in the poor attitudes of counselors, professors, and students I encountered when first arriving at college. And I recall distinctly the time I questioned a university administrator who had once been a political-science instructor. I asked him whether or not I was on the right track by declaring the major that I had, and he told me, "Business is a highly potential field. There's a lot of room for growth, and you'll learn a lot about the world in general by following the subject." What poor advice.

The few words of wisdom that I've accumulated in my relatively short life would lead me to advise that what we actually need is less skill, less efficiency, fewer facts, and less progress in the field of specialization. At this point, I can imagine, one might question my perspectives. Please don't let my contempt for progress lead you astray. I firmly believe that each decade of scholars and its modes of teaching only improve over the last. I still uphold education and have much concern for civilization. It is just that I have observed much of society's "virtues" serving to hinder civilization rather than substantially improve it. And all in the name of progress.

My enlightenment was as gradual as was my disillusionment. I was encouraged by speaking with a few very perceptive and sensitive students in liberal-arts programs. I learned from them, and from some inherent quality of self-preservation I possessed, that liberal arts allow one to grow emotionally and intelligently and to live a life richer in content and meaning. As far as the educational enterprise goes, I've learned that we've been given freedom of choice in selecting the path to wisdom, but that sometimes these choices are too fragmented, too narrow. Like Rollo May and other existentialists, I would place more emphasis on the whole rather than on the fragmented ideals of society. We must broaden our scope and our concern to encompass humanity as a whole, not concentrate solely on our own selfish needs and desires. I've also learned, in reflecting on the enthusiasm I had upon entering college, that my desire to pursue knowledge simply could not be accomplished through business studies, and so I've changed my major. As for my unease about our social and the complicit academic process, I contend that there is nothing man might not do if he renewed his vitality, rediscovered his respect for the quest of Truth, and reorganized schools the better to develop, implement, and intelligently direct themselves to the fostering of individual growth. □

NAUSEA

*Tiny demons with sharpened claws
Shredding my insides, trying
To escape from the confining walls
Of my belly, vacuating my stomach,
A cathartic for body
And soul.*

*Is it an after-effect of wine,
More wine, the wine
Red and sweet in which I all-too-happily
Indulged last night? And eyes:
Mine red with drink, and yours sweet
With your ineffable sweetness.
Oh, the pain.*

*Or is it rather the premature rustlings
Of the child I long to carry in my womb?
Empathy is sweet, they say, and woman's
Blood, woman's life-giving blood,
Is red as wine.
Oh, the pain.*

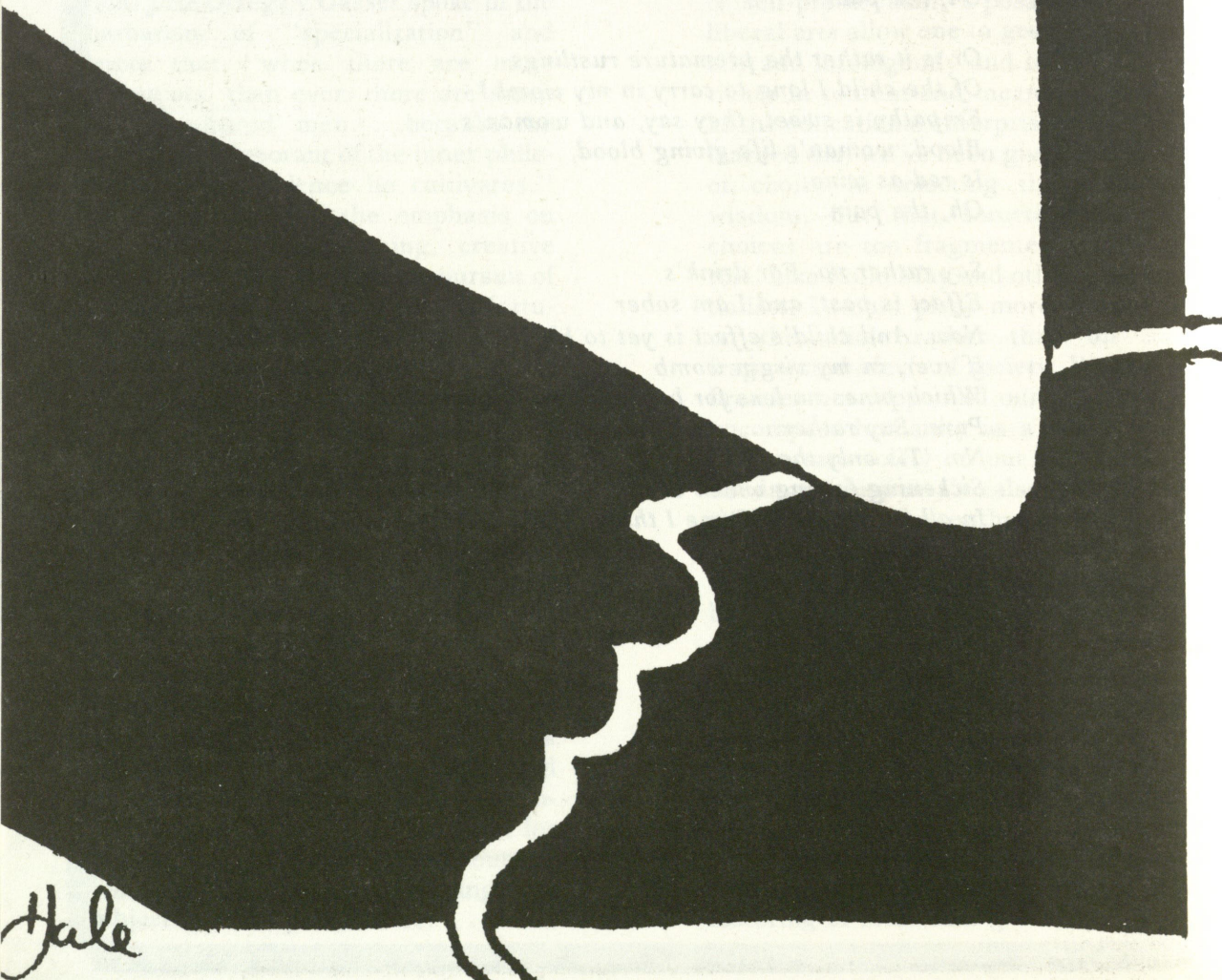
*Say rather no. For drink's
Effect is past, and I am sober
Now. And child's effect is yet to be,
If ever, in my virgin womb
Which pines no less for being
Pure. Say rather
No. 'Tis only the sinking,
Sickening feeling which comes
In all its force each time I think of you
And doubt.*

— Kathryn Kleinhans

Reason Is ***Suicide:***

An Ontological Manifesto

By James Clifton Hale



Hale

I often dream of a particular wood. Important dream-occurrences have taken place in that stand of trees. I always recognize the wood when it comes to me in the depths of night. Thus, the tundra between Brandt Hall and Meier Hall has precisely the same status as my wood of dreams: discrete events have happened to me upon the tundra; and I always recognize the tundra when it intersects my consciousness. What is it that leads me to believe that the tundra is real while the wood is a dream? Personal choice.

Obviously, without my decision that a given group of sense-impressions portrays truth, that group remains a mental construct. Sense-impressions alone are not the basis of reality. My free choice decides existence. Constant choice eventually builds up a world.

It is the place of a general education to assist in the construction of a personal, and thus valid, world. This education, in order to fulfill its role, must present ideas and concepts that can help the student to choose his world wisely so that his personal view can be of interest to society at large.

A flawed education is one that prevents uniqueness of conscious creation. Any study that constricts the budding personal world is an improper study. I submit that all completely and objectively reason-based studies — the whole of math and science — are unsuitable in an education that seeks to allow growth. Objective reason forms the "mind-forged manacles" Blake feared so much. Objective reason is destructive rather than constructive. It has no place in a successful general education because it is contrary to the creation of

consciousness.

Reason is the wish to organize thinking into a universal system which applies equally to all minds such that, if proper procedure is followed, no matter who the thinker is, he will arrive at precisely the same conclusion as anyone else. Two elements in this disturb me. First, I contend that thinking ought not to be based on something external to the thinker. Second, I contend that there is not always one universal correct, or true, answer.

Objective reason is intensely anti-human. He who reasons destroys his own subjectivity. Thus, reason is a sign of profound weakness. The self-destruction of subjectivity, born of reason, is not a cumulative effect, but the result of constant choice. To reason, one forms one's thought to fit not one's natural subjective pattern of thought but to fit the external structures of rationality. The natural, authentic mode of thought is ego- or self-based: it is an introspective, intuitive and constant choice. It is based on personal response, subjective. Reason is self-inflicted objectification and dehumanization. Reason is a form of suicide. The Intuitive Method affirms subjective life.

I do not propose an unthinking method of preserving an initial personal response or First Impression. I propose no method at all. Method is structure. No structure except that which one makes for oneself is congruent to subjective and fully human thought. Thus, my Intuitive Method is not a method, but a thought the gifted reader will infer from my following observations. There is no such thing as "proving." There is only explanation.

One's First Impression of a given thing, person, or communication is the foundation of truth. It is built upon or cast out: It is to be judged as a

James Clifton Hale, a junior majoring in English and the humanities in Christ College, has been interested in ontology for as long as he has had the faintest idea how to spell it.

cornerstone. The truth of an Impression — and thus of a given, for a given exists only in the self's sense-impression of it — lies in its relation to the structure not of reason, but of self. An Impression is judged in terms of self. Thus is a given conceptualized or cognized by the self through internalization. Givens are absorbed in terms of the self. Else, one is the slave of objects.

How then is the First Impression to be judged? Let me describe its motion. A given radiates a sensible aura: it is visible, audible, etc. The aura *as sensed* becomes the First Impression. It remains a mere First Impression until the self understands, internalizes, the given-as-sensed, transforming it into an Impressive Truth. This transformation is achieved by the finding of the natural place in the self-structure for the First Impression. Truth, then, comes from introspection.

What if the First Impression is absolutely incongruent to the self-structure? In this case, more impressions must be gained. If these are not available, then the First Impression moves no closer to Impressive Truth. Personally untenable, the First Impression becomes a mere Fact, to be forgotten or toyed with as the self pleases. However, if after further investigation, the Impression does not change, as it may, and remains incongruent, it, and therefore the given, becomes a Mystery.

In the case of a Mystery, the self has three rights. It can ignore the Mystery, transforming it into a mere fact, Factualizing it. Or the self can doubt its senses, thus negating the existence of the given or modifying it until it is suitably congruent. Choice of either of these is legitimate, though not useful in the self's building of Impressive Truth. Only choice of the third right can assist in the construction of Truth.

The one effective way of dealing with Mystery has two facets — Introspection and Intuition. Through these Mystery becomes Impressive Truth. A Mystery, if one chooses neither to ignore it nor to doubt one's senses — chooses not to "Factualize"

Intuition is the defense against madness: It is the source of new shapes and structures. It is like what is called "soul," and what is called "Romantic Imagination." Creativity in self-structure, then, is both greatness of soul and, ultimately, sanity.

it indicates a flaw in the self-structure. Impressive Truth leads to the bringing of the self into oneness, to "getting the head together," to Wisdom. To the true genius, all things are congruent to himself.

Introspection searches for the flaw. It finds the flaw by locating, through deep and careful investigation of the internal structure, the exact point which blocks the entrance of the Mystery under consideration. This point, which is itself a previously internalized First Impression or Mystery, must immediately revert to the status of First Impression. The option of ignoring this First Impression is no longer available if progress toward Impressive Truth is to continue. One repeats the process of further investigation.

It may well be, however, that the Blockage Point cannot be remolded even in light of new investigation. Thus the Blockage itself is transformed from First Impression into Mystery. When this occurs, the entire complex of internalized givens based upon and upon which the second Mystery is based must be reinvestigated. A Mystery of this type can necessitate a massive re-structuring of the self. If the secondary Mystery, which cannot be ignored, also cannot be reshaped to mend the flawed self-structure, the system collapses and the mind goes mad.

Intuition is the defense against madness: It is the source of new

shapes and structures. It is like what is called "soul," and what is called "Romantic Imagination." Creativity in self-structure, then, is both greatness of soul and, ultimately, sanity. Intuition is acquirable in two ways: It is, to a limited degree, inherent in the human mind, providing the human difference from animalistic instinctual structures; and it can be got by long experience in transforming Mysteries into Impressive Truths. Natural Intuition is inborn according to heredity and chance, but Experiential Intuition, which is unlimited, can come only to those with strength enough of Will (or impulsiveness great enough) to choose not to Factualize Impressions, to choose the third right.

Thus, already soul-like and imaginative, Intuition is also like intelligence and "personality" or temperament — it is gained both by heredity, which is to say in-born ability, and through exper-

ience in one's environment.

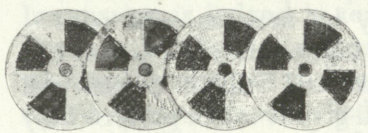
Cognition, then, is the non-rational bringing of givens into the matrix of self through intuition and introspection. The capacity of self-structure is limited only by heredity and will — much can be ignored by the weak. But the expansive and brilliant person will seek to fit all givens into a pattern fully congruent to his Intuitive Ego. Of course, he risks madness in his attempt, but if he is a true genius he cannot fail: as reason is a form of suicide, Introspective strength of will and Intuition gives birth to genius.

Thus, any education that seeks to produce geniuses must not impose on students constrictions of math and science. These force objectivity to be assumed by the student. Objectivity is destructive to being and hostile to genius and growth. Thus, it is unsuitable for inclusion in a general education. □

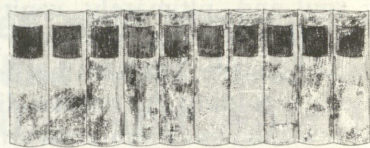
THE TRANSIENT TANGENT

*the transient tangent
meeting points,
touching circles.
points move along
their circles,
remembering with
fondness, gratitude,
the tangent,
whose sides ache
with the memory
of wanting to curve,
to join, to move.*

— Peggy Favorite



REVIEWS



He casts out Pythons, too

Monty Python's "LIFE OF BRIAN." A film starring Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones, and Michael Palin. Directed by Terry Jones. A Warner Bros./ORION Pictures release.

If *Life of Brian* is blasphemous, I'm the archangel Gabriel. Yet there are critics who seem ready to deck me out with wings. The new movie, set in "Judea, A.D. 33" and recently released by the British "Monty Python" comedians, has been criticized by several Catholic and Jewish organizations and branded "grossly offensive" by critic Robert E.A. Lee of the Lutheran Council/USA.†

Such reactions would be questionable even if the film did spoof the Jesus story and its incredible romanticization over the centuries, but given what *Life of Brian* is, they are not even questionable — just ludicrous. The filmmakers obviously took pains to avoid the aforementioned story, even paraphrasing the very few lines they could be accused of having lifted out of Scripture. The movie is not about Jesus at all; but, as critic Lee acknowledges, it is at moments about us, about some of the stupider and more dehumanizing tendencies to which messianic religion is prone — including, in Lee's words, "pietistic biblicism." Insofar as Monty Python sticks it to this side of Christianity, *Life of Brian* does indeed have some satiric

(= artistic) value, and "Some truths are surely revealed" (Lee again). In my book, dogmatic intolerance toward satire and art is the real blasphemy.

In skirting Jesus the filmmakers create Brian, a hapless half-Roman Jew who through a series of "misadventures" — some as trite as the word itself — first becomes involved with the freedom-fighting People's Front of Judea ("PFJ") and later is mistaken for a messiah. Like any farce, the film has a plot that is about as easy as it is worthwhile to recount: it is neither. The laughs come from characters, funny lines, and a couple of good scenes. Organic development is not at issue — so obviously, in fact, that the movie really suffers from a lack of either the coherent pointedness or the recurrent themes, the *leitmotifs*, that could potentially improve the humor and satire and perhaps even make it a real drubbing of something importantly Christian.

Some jokes are far too predictable, like the confusion between the PFJ and a rival group, the Judean People's Front, when both set out on a kidnap effort. Others, like Pontius Pilate and his fay mannerisms, are silly and show a Pythonesque doneness-unto-death. Still others, including those based on grotesque subjects like crucifixion, are sure to seem less than funny to some viewers despite being well handled in spots.

What redeems the movie is its poke at slavish devotion and thoughtless reverence — the perverse side of messiah-worship and source for much

†Reported in Missouri In Perspective, a publication of Evangelical Lutherans in Mission, Inc. (St. Louis), Sept. 24, 1979.

of what corrupts the Christian tradition. The picture of Brian's brainless followers venerating objects — a gourd he accidentally obtained, the footgear he lost — and then disputing over their meaning and nature, over whether they have found a "shoe" or a "sandal" — effectively hands it to traditional Protestant word- and work-oriented theology. (Several VU theologians need a field trip to see this film.) A priest's fumbled effort to pronounce sentence on a man condemned for saying "Jehovah" without himself saying "Jehovah" and inviting the stones becomes a similarly effective piece.

But the best scene is Brian's speech to his followers. "You must not follow me. You are all individuals!" he pleads. "We are all individuals!" they repeat. "Tell us more, master!" How much of Christianity is not just such worship of writings and utterances *in defiance* of their content? Or, turning that around: How much of it is not just such censure of utterances deemed not properly worshipful, despite philosophical or artistic value?

I don't want to get carried away on that point because, whatever its occasional cleverness, *Life of Brian* is still Monty Python and still a reminder of why I've never been a devotee. But that others have taken it seriously enough to condemn is significant, and it may be the film's final satiric (though unintended) point. Critic Lee asks, "What is happening in a world where nothing is sacred anymore?" I would answer that he needn't fear: *Too much* is apparently still sacred. Lee speaks as the priest in *Murder in the Cathedral* who wails, "The Church lies bereft, alone, desecrated, desolated, and the heathen shall build on the ruins, their world without God. I see it. I see it." He needs to hear his fellow priest's response: "No. For the Church is stronger for this action. . . It is fortified by persecution: supreme, so long as men will die for it." Or, shall we say, so long as Monty Python will pull punches for it, rendering innocuous what could have been damn good parody. The "blasphemy" fear is still

strong, too strong for the normally irreverent comedians. But is this fear, which churches seem to want, a sign of continued spiritual health — or just the opposite? — *Jeff Smith.*



Haunting for an identity

THE GHOST WRITER. A novel by Philip Roth. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979. 180 pages.

For whom does the writer write? A complex and inaccessible question, and one whose answer for a particular writer probably changes during the course of his life. Could one study a writer in rebellion — a James Joyce, for instance — and discover that that writer made his earliest works, the little rhymes or stories or fingerpaintings that were his first art, to please papa, to win praise from those whose values and attitudes he later rejected?

If so, his later work would presuppose a shift. "Now I come to the root of the matter, the reason for my starting a diary: it is that I have no such real friend. . . but I want this diary myself to be a friend," wrote one precocious 13-year-old writer shortly before her family packed off into hiding. Had Anne Frank survived Bergen-Belsen, what would her diary have meant to her? A lesson for the living; a testament to the dead; or a plea to make her "loved mercilessly and endlessly, just as I'd been debased"? And loved by whom?

Anne did not survive; the question is speculative. But it (literally) haunts the young authorial alter-ego called forth to narrate *The Ghost Writer*, Philip Roth's 11th and latest novel and, in a

sense, his anniversary. Roth uses the occasion of his 20th year since publishing *Goodbye, Columbus* to carry his readers through a brief but intricate journey into the writer's mind and the sources of art. Unfortunately, the journey bears some resemblance to the time one spends picking through a garden labyrinth only to feel let down at finding nothing at the long-sought goal but a bare, unpeopled pavilion.

No matter: Garden labyrinths still make for fun afternoons. So does Roth's polished wit, this time focused on and through himself in the person of aspiring 23-year-old writer Nathan Zuckerman. Zuckerman narrates the tale of his overnight pilgrimage in 1956 to the home of his aging and venerable role model, the Jewish writer E.I. Lonoff.

Lonoff's household, and Roth's brief novel, also include Lonoff's wife, Hope, and a young student/assistant, Amy Bellette. Zuckerman has come to Lonoff awestruck and still smarting from an unexpected, if inevitable, turn of events in his artistic life. Always the object of his elders' praise, Zuckerman's story-writing has suddenly earned both paternal and community rebuke for its candid portrayal of Zuckerman's Jewish relatives. The young writer lusts (I use the word deliberately) for approval from the older, hoping Lonoff's "patriarchal validation" will justify him to his family and, perhaps, to himself.

What he finds is a reserved and persnickity old man who is no one's father. Lonoff devotes himself to art at the expense of life. "I'm not even walking when I'm walking. The truth is I don't even see the trees," he says. Lonoff's married life has consequently demanded of his wife a heroic and ever more straining sacrifice.

Encouraged by Lonoff but still failing of paternal love, Zuckerman retires for the night and struggles to write placatory lines to his real father. Unable to do so, he eavesdrops on a bizarre scene in which the young student, Amy, attempts to seduce her "Dad-da" Lonoff but is sternly refused.

Unfortunately, the journey bears some resemblance to the time one spends picking through a garden labyrinth only to feel let down at finding nothing at the long-sought goal but a bare, unpeopled pavilion. No matter: Garden labyrinths still make for fun afternoons.

"Oh, if only I could have imagined the scene I'd overheard! If only I could invent as presumptuously as real life! If one day I could just *approach* the originality and excitement of what actually goes on!" exclaims the narrator just before the novel turns a corner into fantasy. If only art could imitate life *better*, could beat life to the punch, as it were. But Zuckerman next tries the opposite — the grafting onto life of imaginative constructs. In a long and admittedly contorted fantasy, he imagines Amy Bellette to be Anne Frank, a spirit resurrected from the Holocaust to spurn her own father, play foil to Zuckerman's like passion for Lonoff, and ultimately to redeem the young man in the eyes of Jewry by marrying him.

"Anne's" story, or Zuckerman's fantasy, gives edge to the question of who the writer writes for. Zuckerman imagines an Anne struggling with her famous diary's postwar meaning — and with her consequent need to stay concealed from her living father, that news of her survival not destroy the book's magical power. Anne is a perfect projection of Zuckerman's own need to reject both his literal and his cultural "fathers." Roth carries the fantasy so far that Anne becomes a key character. His technique here is brilliant; Anne Frank and her book, a work as surely rooted in dreadful *real* life as any ever written, supply the perfect

embellishments to Zuckerman's own identity struggles as both Jew and young writer. The main problem may lie in the fact that making the question marks more distinct does not answer the questions.

Roth clearly does say: You can move from life to art, but not vice-versa. The attempt through fantasy to move the "wrong" way finally unravels, leaving Zuckerman back where he started. He cannot escape either the tension with his own father or the fact that his Anne is not Anne but Amy, Lonoff's immature, surrogate granddaughter/girl-friend. He must witness Amy's own failed attempt to move from art to life, an attempt embedded in *her* doomed fantasy — a "life for life's sake" future with Lonoff.

Lonoff does finally offer something like paternal affirmation. Chasing after his runaway wife, he urges Zuckerman to take notes on the scene:

"I'll be curious to see how we all come out someday. It could be an interesting story. You're not so nice and polite in your fiction," he said. "you're a different person."

"Am I?"

"I should hope so."

Lonoff, art embodied, explicitly affirms life as the source for art, and art as the uncensored transmutation of life.

But none of this delivers the promised treatment on Roth's deeper issue — the question of spurning the culture, of turning one's back on one's father as a crucial step in achieving artistic power. The complex of foils drawn around Zuckerman highlights the issue but does not develop it. In the end this giant step in the artist's life seems like a matter too simple and with too few implications or resonances.

The thesis that art proceeds from life, along with the cultural father's inevitable failure to accept this, implies that sooner or later the father must be rejected. As Zuckerman confronts this reality, he also discovers Lonoff's innate inability to become his new father. Lonoff has far too much art

The thesis that art proceeds from life, along with the cultural father's inevitable failure to accept this, implies that sooner or later the father must be rejected. As Zuckerman confronts this reality, he also discovers Lonoff's innate inability to become his new father. Lonoff has far too much art and too little life in him. . . Winning love, in fact, can no longer be the young writer's purpose, and art must account itself to someone or something else.

and too little life in him; he can offer a kind of professional blessing, but never a father's love. Winning love, in fact, can no longer be the young writer's purpose, and Zuckerman sees that his art must account itself to someone or something else. But I don't think we find out who or what. The Anne Frank fantasy falls apart before it delivers its promised answers to this question. We are indeed left probing for substance in mere "ghosts."

This, for me, is where the book fails. I still very much enjoy the intricacies; in fact, I'm sure I have hardly begun to explore them. One can further guess, for instance, that once art comes into being, it alters the artist's situation — and that finally, perhaps, his new life also becomes art: this novel itself. And on and on. It's quite interesting, and if I'm a bit disappointed with the outcome, I'm nonetheless eager to run the maze again in search of paths and circuits bypassed on the first trip. — *Jeff Smith.*

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