

# PRISM

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## ENCOUNTERING PYNCHON

Dennis M. Martin

Thomas Pynchon's first novel was *V*. I call it "Vec" but perhaps it should be called "Vee Period" or perhaps even — if *V* is a roman numeral — "Five." Usually we know what titles of books are because the authors tell us when they talk about their books. But Pynchon doesn't do the usual things. No one has heard his voice, seen his face, asked him any questions since he disappeared down some tear in the fabric of modern America about thirty years ago. At least no one who will share the experience with us has seen him. If you would know Pynchon, look at the jacket of his sensational new novel *Vineland*, published last spring: the front shows us the title and author's name, but on the jacket back is a universal product code and about one square foot of blank space. No picture, no face to see behind the words.

We know that he grew up on Long Island, that the Pynchon family is distantly related to the Judge Pynchon depicted in Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*, that he studied engineering and English at Cornell — where he was a student of Vladimir Nabokov — that he served a hitch in the Navy and worked for a time at the Everett plant of Boeing and then sank

slowly into the obscurity in which he is still lost to us. He had all his records at schools, work, and in the Navy officially sealed so that no details of these episodes in his life may be known. Eventually rumors replaced facts, of course. Pynchon was a committee of academic critics playing a joke on the reading public; he was "really" J. D. Salinger, whose literary output had ceased roughly as Pynchon's had begun; he was in Mexico, in California, in New York; he had threatened to charge publishers if his whereabouts were revealed. The only known photograph comes from his Cornell yearbook, published by *Newsweek* in the seventies. When I went to the PLU library in 1989 to look up the microfilm that included that issue of *Newsweek*, the box was empty. "No," I thought. "It couldn't be."

I found the microfilm, but I remembered my reaction recently when, after waiting for fourteen years since *Gravity's Rainbow* had been published, I opened Pynchon's new book, *Vineland*, to find that it was set in California and Oregon. Given his penchant for describing settings down to tree species and weather reports for specific days, I usually presume that Pynchon must live in the places he describes, and *Vineland* seems the perfect place to hide out. He describes it as a place where there are "plenty of redwoods left to get lost in, ghost towns old and new blocked up behind slides that are generations old and no Corps of Engineers'll ever clear, a whole web of logging roads, fire roads, Indian trails for you to learn" (305). How tempting to imagine Pynchon living and working in the north-coast-redwood, tie-dye-Hippie-heldover, Grateful Dead loyalist sub-culture. But maybe not. He seems to be able to describe wartime London in the same detail. Having been born in 1937, he couldn't have had the



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# THROUGH THE PRISM

How does the university shape society's values? As part of the centennial homecoming celebration this October, the Divisions of Humanities and Social Sciences invited Russell Edgerton, President of the American Association for Higher Education, to address this question.

Drawing upon Philip Nordquist's history of PLU and his own remarkable understanding of higher education, Dr. Edgerton suggested that the university is "the place where students are invited to intersect their autobiographies with the life story of the world," where they "acquire the stories they will live by." Thus equipped, our students go on to shape the values of the larger society.

Nothing could have illustrated the process better than the centennial alumni recognition, which also took place at homecoming. One hundred honorees representing the diversity of PLU alumni were saluted for their lives of service. Among them were seventeen humanities graduates—individuals who have made outstanding contributions within business, the church, higher education, law, and public service.

One honoree, Gretta Goldenman (1966 graduate in German and literature), described the "stories," or themes, around which she has oriented her life as the "desire to get beyond orthodoxy to root causes of social and environmental problems, the pleasure of bridging the gap between other cultures and my own, and the fulfillment of working for a better world." These emphases have marked Gretta's work with organizations like the European Community's Directorate-General on the Environment and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

While the campus culture at large has much to do with the themes our students choose to emphasize, professors play a distinct and central role. In this issue of *Prism*, we pay tribute to two colleagues who are completing their final semester of teaching. Kenneth Christopherson and Curtis Huber have provided impressive leadership for the university and for their students. Alum Maria-Alma Copeland (1979 religion graduate) celebrated this influence when she wrote, "Religion prof Kenneth Christopherson assured me I could meet and surmount the challenges as an African-American female parish pastor."

Together with a revealing discussion of Thomas Pynchon's novels by Dennis Marcin and examples of recent research publications by other humanities faculty, the essays by Curt and Ken point to yet another way in which the university shapes society's values—namely, through the ongoing intellectual discourse which fosters new ways of viewing the world.

Janet E. Rasmussen  
Dean

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experiences he describes Tyrone Slothrop having in *Gravity's Rainbow*; evidently he looked up the weather reports in the *London Times*.

Much of this interest in Pynchon's life is generated by the kind of novels he writes, densely detailed and explicitly located in concrete places amid often obscure, but nonetheless quite genuine, historical events. Pynchon's 1966 novel *The Crying of Lat 49* recalls the story of midget submarines with midget crews attacking the Turkish coast during WWII, an episode I considered a twisted joke until I looked it up and found not only that the midgets and submarines had really mounted this attack but also that the story is widely known and reported in authoritative historical sources; the same novel also includes perfectly plausible stories of people going about their everyday lives that, presumably, are wholly invented. Implausible history and plausible fiction: that's Pynchon. How does he know the things he knows? His novels consistently put readers in the position of asking, "Is this for real?"

I'll offer you a chance to know what Pynchon readers feel like by asking you to read the following brief episode from midway through *Vladimir* and to decide as you read it whether this is an historical event that the novelist is bringing into his novel or a bizarre invention of Pynchon's. The scene involves the hero, Zoyd Wheeler, driving down a previously undiscovered secret freeway in Southern California and seeing pictures posted along the side of the freeway of famous anti-communist Americans. The highway, presumably kept secret to avoid panic among the populace, is known as FEER (or Federal Emergency Evacuation Route), "a disposable freeway that would only be used, to full capacity, once." One of the portraits is of Virgil ("Sparky") Floce, 1923-1959, famous for his plan "to have offered to Castro, and then let for him, a giant Cuban cigar that actually contained an ingenious bomb . . . made of plastic explosive, detonator, and a length of primer cord. Unfortunately for freedom-loving people everywhere when the fuzzy-faced Latin tyrant bit off the wrong end and pulled out the primer cord with his teeth, security guards were immediately alert to the danger." This couldn't really have happened, could it? Pynchon does nothing to convince readers that this episode with an exploding cigar and Sparky Floce are any more authentic than the invented, fictional events in the novel. But this story does have a strangely familiar ring; personally, I think I've heard the story before. And it isn't really more implausible than the Bay of Pigs fiasco. You could look it up in an authoritative source to see if it really happened; I haven't looked it up yet because until I do I am still free to believe it or not. If you're the kind of person who craves "yes or no" answers, Pynchon's technique might sound frustrating, but it isn't frustrating for me. It's liberating for a reader to be allowed—even forced—to invent and apply his or her own standards of credibility: shall I believe the events that are delightfully improbable, the ones that are comforting because they conform to my expectations, the funny ones, the violent events, the detailed descriptions, or what?

In novel after novel, Pynchon has measured the price we pay for submitting to authorities of all sorts in order to determine what's "really" going on, or, if the authorities are historians, what "really" happened in the past. Like one of his protagonists in *V*, Pynchon sees the world of human experience as a jumble of events, a Situation, an "N-Dimensional Mishmash" (443). Living seems like a jumble to us, and we don't even know how many dimensions it has because of how strictly limited our sensory information about the physical world is. In one of Pynchon's characteristic epistemological metaphors, humans live at the bottom of a phonograph record's groove. We can see up one side of the groove. And we can see up the other. And we can see a little way down the groove in each direction. What we can't see is that we are in a groove that spirals in toward a center, that we are located somewhere along the groove near its beginning or end, or that there is a record at all. Our physical senses limit what we can know about our place in the world, so we must use our imagination to know about the record, and the other grooves, and the center. Yet Pynchon realizes people are frightened that their imagination is tricking them, *inventing* centers and edges that don't exist. So they look above, out of the groove, to authority figures who claim, and seem, to be placed so high that they can see the edges and the centers for us. But Pynchon also knows that we fear being fooled by authority as much as by our own imagination and that we recoil from the claims of authorities too, driven back on our own imaginative lives. As we move toward authority, Pynchon sees the risk or our becoming passive, lifeless, ultimately inanimate rock-like objects. As we swing back toward the imagined life, we risk becoming paranoids who see way too much order in our lives.

In Pynchon's novels, this tendency of humans to flip back and forth between extremes is mirrored in the history of culture. His characters, his books, his worlds are so extreme that some readers have felt that Pynchon offered them little if any hope of living meaningful lives. It is hard to see, especially in novels like *Gravity's Rainbow*, the massive weight of whose images of the destructive forces unleashed in wartime seems to crush out all hope, that he offers us many alternatives. But those alternatives he does offer have their own significant weight. One of Pynchon's most positive characters, a black jazz musician in *V*, named McClintock Sphere, sees that World War II represented the triumph of the paranoids, imagination and love driven to the extreme at which they became motives for war. And he sees that the Fifties represented the triumph of the "cool — no love, no hate, no worries, no excitement," a cool that soon became unfeeling and hard. But Sphere sees his way out of the flip-flop, out of the desperate search for simple solutions: it will be "slow, frustrat-

ing, and hard work. Love with your mouth shut, help without breaking your ass or publicizing it: keep cool but care" (342-43). This ethic informs the four novels.

Pynchon's nightmare is that for us in the late twentieth century the way out of this flip-flop between the extremes of fascism and revolutionary paranoia is to turn our lives over to the new and powerful technologies we have created and to believe that they can raise us to the heights denied to us in our lowly groove; the nightmare is that they will fall on us in the arc of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The technologies that figure in the nightmare most are computers, ballistic missiles and, in *Vineland*, *The Tube*. In Pynchon's latest work, God himself has become a captive of these technologies. Frenesi, the hippie revolutionary who falls in love with the CIA agent who destroyed her campus revolution, is granted a revelation as she stands in a checkout line at Safeway: "We are digits in God's computer . . . and the only thing we're good for, to be dead or to be living, is the only thing He sees. What we cry, what we contend for, in our world of toil and blood, it all lies beneath the notice of the hacker, we call God" (*Vineland*, 90).

Such a distant, mechanistic God has appeared in each of the novels in the form of a late-twentieth century argument from Design. Pynchon's consistent and deep interest in paranoia stems from his conviction that prophets and paranoids have a lot in common in any age, maybe particularly in ours. If God is a hacker, how can we read his software? Pynchon characters rarely read scripture, but they are always reading some pattern either in nature or in culture, popular culture particularly, looking for the Design. A character in *V* sets up an antenna to listen to interstellar space, and he hears just random sound; but then the message comes in from the cosmos: that DIGEWOELDTIMSTALENSVITASDELUFUALIST. The character breaks the code. "I remove every third letter and obtain GODMEANTNUURK. Rearranged, this spells Kurt Mondtugen [the character's name]." After taking out every third letter, you're left with DIEWELTISTALLESWASDERFALLIST or "The world is all that is the case" in German. Can you recognize this sentence as Thesis 1.7 of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*? When I looked at the message the first time I saw "IMSTALENS" in the middle of it. What do you see? Truly God did mean "NUURK," but what does NUURK mean? I assume each of us would feel the quivering edges of paranoia if we reorganized the letters in our name and came up with "God Meant . . ." When I did this with Dennis Martin, the first words I came up with were "DAMN IT SINNER." How would you react if, as happens in *Vineland*, "a young woman with regular

features wearing a draped white gown appeared out of the airport crowds, leaned her forearms on . . . [your] shoulder, whispered "Watch the paranoia please!" and disappeared again!" (160)

How frightening it can be to discover that the world really does make sense, but that it's an ominous sense, might best be seen in the case of Tyrone Slothrop from *Gravity's Rainbow* who, living in London in the late days of WWII, keeps a wall chart in which he sticks pins that represent both last night's U2 rocket explosions and his own more personal explosions as he visits the women he knows in the city. Ominous indeed when the rocket strikes seem to be tracking his amorous life. But that would only be possible if the whole German rocket program, perhaps even the whole global war, were somehow caused by him, and the falling rockets sensed by his erections. This possibility does in fact turn out to be the case; the revelation to Slothrop of his childhood conditioning by Harvard scientists employed by the I. G. Farben cartel allows him to discover an international corporate plot in which even WWII is but a trivial incident.

Faced with such unthinkable possibilities of history's meaning for us, we have increasingly turned to technology, especially The Tube, to relieve our anxiety by allowing ourselves to be lulled into passivity. In *Vineland* characters check into "Tubaldex" centers, and 19-inch TVs are named as correspondents in divorce suits. A whole subculture in *Vineland* is made up of "Thanatoids," the walking dead, many of them former

revolutionaries, who sold out their dreams for a Sony Trinitron, leaving "the whole alternative America, el deado meato" (373). Pynchon can also have great fun with this point that the Tube has taken over. He imagines a basketball movie on TV called *Lakers v. Celtics* in which Sean Penn plays Larry Bird, Michael Douglas is Pat Riley, and Jack Nicholson is himself. He describes a new half-hour sitcom called "Say, Jim," in which all the actors are black except for the officer, "a freckled white redhead named Lieutenant O'Hara. Whenever Spock came on the bridge, everyone made Vulcan hand salutes and went around high-threeing" (370). Or consider a made-for-TV movie starring John Ritter called *The Bystant Gambaf Story*.

Characters in the novels are often readers, studying the meaning of history, of technology, even of a bowl of soup. Readers of Pynchon can very often seem like *Vineland*'s comic policeman Hector "slumped in zomokopsis or in the contemplation of his [alphabet] soup . . . was he reading strange soup meanings!" (31) or we can identify with Zoyd Wheeler who often feels that living is "like being on 'Wheel of Fortune' only there are no genial vibes from any Pat Sajak to find comfort in, no tanned and beautiful Vanna White at the corner of his vision to cheer the wheel, to wish him well, to flip over one by one letters of a message he knew he didn't want to read anyway" (12-13). And what if someone calling himself Thomas Pynchon did show up on *Arsenio*



Hall's show one Tuesday night to tell us what his novels mean? I would want to believe it was Pynchon. And what if he said they meant "NUURK"? We'd still be free to believe or doubt anything this authority said.

Still, who can resist a writer who could think of Pia Zadora in *The Clara Bow Story*? Who would imagine a TV buckster named The Marquis de Sod whose company jingle, sung to a postdisco arrangement of the *Marseillaise*, was:

"A lawn savant, who'll lop a tree-ee-uh  
Nobody beats Mar-  
quis de Sod."

Or who gives us a man who has sex fantasies about his ex-wife, more like ex fantasies really. Or who can mention, in passing, a place called "The Zero Inn" where a group called "Holocaust Poets" play their chartbusting hit "Like a Meat Loaf." Readers can be rendered dizzy by this mixing of contexts, references to hard-core technology and soft-core pornography, references to pop culture images and high culture icons, history and fiction fused together, poems with algebraic equations as concluding lines. Whole passages read like jazz improvisations on a theme, and no one should be surprised to find that if Pynchon has a personal hero, it's Charlie Parker, the virtuoso sax player of the Fifties. And like good jazz improvisations, Pynchon's novels are inspired play, not formally organized in predictable or conventional ways, but spontaneous and individual. We can't, his novels say, let the Situation, the mishmash drown us in a tidal wave of trash, nor should we use our dominating will to force the Situation to assume some arbitrary design. We should love the world as it is, we should work hard to make it home to us, and we should play and have fun. We are caught at the bottom of a deep groove, and that is our sad fate, but we're "in the groove" too, and we can swing; otherwise our life will be an old black and white melodrama made up of stark extremes, a B movie. And as Pynchon says in *Vineland*, that's our choice, "Be groovey, or B movie."

Observe Pynchon playing riffs, in just two passages from *Vineland*, variations on the theme of that most mundane yet central modern experience — driving on the freeway.

About the time they got onto the Richmond-San Rafael bridge, rain began to fall, and they hit San Rafael at prematurely dark and — vaporous rush hour, all eight or ten lanes full of exhaust plumes drooping like tails of some listless herd. DL was driving, her bright hair confined in a loosely knit olive snood, plowing on ahead through the wet shift's-end dusk, sitting upright in severe metered fury, holding centered and in focus the image of the enemy.

And listen to this one-sentence evocation of driving on the Ventura freeway during the 1984 Olympics, a scene that begins in description, then opens out phrase by phrase into a celebration of the nearly overwhelming richness of impressions the world pours in on us, and finally becomes an enactment of the raw joy Pynchon experiences in employing language's creative force:

So the bad Nanjamobie swept along on the great Ventura, among Olympic visitors from everywhere who teemed all over the freeway system in midday densities 'till far into the night, shined up, screaming black motorcades that could have carried any of several office-seekers, cruisers heading for more gently roaring boulevards, huge double and triple trailer rigs that loved to find Volkswagens laboring up grades and go sashaying around them gracefully and at gnar's ass tolerances, plus flirts, deserters, wimps and pimps, speeding like bullets, growling like chimps, above the heads of TV watchers, lovers under the overpasses, movies at malls letting out, bright gas-station oases in pure fluorescent spill, canopied beneath the palm trees, soon wrapped, down the corridors of the surface streets, in nocturnal smog, the adobe air, the smell of distant fireworks, the spilled, the broken world.

Pynchon's work is driven by the energy of the dynamic you see in those few sentences. DL's "severe metered fury" is passionate and potentially destructive, but it centers and focuses her; the trailer rigs threaten the Volkswagens, but they do it gracefully and precisely; the object is spilled and broken, but the subject is alert and whole. *Vineland*, it seems, is about a broken family, and as the novel sashays around to its conclusion, readers are led to hope that the family can be made whole again. But that's not exactly what happens. The final scene in *Vineland* takes place at a family reunion in the hills; the scene is of Zoyd's dog Desmond "roughened by the miles, face full of bluejay feathers, smiling out of his eyes, wagging his tail, thinking he must be home." Readers who have heard in Pynchon's novels, particularly in *Gravity's Rainbow*, a prophecy of apocalypse, of the end of Western civilization as we know it, can only smile and sit in new wonder when we see *Vineland* end with the return of Desmond, the lost family dog. ■

# INTELLECT AND WISDOM: Reluctant Bedfellows

C. E. Huber

Lutherans, above all Christian communities, have grievous problems keeping in proper perspective the abrasive yet productive relation between intellect and wisdom. In our theology we have struggled, and often failed, to balance our judgment about the appropriate uses and applications of the Law in light of the Gospel. In human affairs we have struggled, and often failed, to reconcile the genuine virtue of our moral choices and social policies with the ultimate need for forgiveness. So also have we struggled to give intellect its due while reserving to Christian wisdom a justified and preeminent place in humanity's search for fulfillment.

By 'intellect' I mean only to denote that range of powers more vaguely and generally referred to by the term 'reason', often spelled with a capital R. The term 'intellect', however, may steer us away both from the bias caused by Luther's oft-quoted but unanalyzed sexual denigration of reason as a whore, and from the modern computer mythology which suggests that its nature is little more than a calculating, deductive logic machine. 'Wisdom' in my use is intended to convey the application of intellectual insight as formed and informed by the Gospel to the judgment and choice of means and ends in practical life.

There are, perhaps, many causes for this struggle between intellect and wisdom, but I wish to reflect on two causes I take to be fundamental and curable: a misunderstanding of the

intellect's autonomy, which leads to creation

of ideologies, and the moral illusions created

by hope born in despair, which produces dogmatisms. By better understanding these avoidable irritants, I believe we shall be more serene and responsible in our own personal

struggles as our faith seeks understanding, and more sensitive and efficacious in the classroom as well.

A vital Christian Church has historically always found it necessary to conceptualize its faith in its own age: to benefit its self-understanding, to distinguish itself from and defend itself to other communities, and to transmit the essential content of its message both to its successors in the church and to the "world" so desperately in need of its redemptive power. But in the evolving process of analyzing, synthesizing, and contending for the concepts chosen to formulate its message, the church has repeatedly witnessed with surprise or chagrin the inadequacies of its efforts. As one medievalist has summed up more than the first millennium of the church's history, "The history of medieval philosophy is the history of the failure and gradual abandonment of faith's search for understanding."

Much the same could be written of our modern predicament in an age dominated by scientism. Whenever intellect challenges the wisdom of faith, the frequent knee-jerk reaction seems to be to adopt an anti-intellectual fideism (unreasoned dogmatism), or all too commonly a relativistic smugness which suggests every falsehood has a place.

The reasons for this are not hard to map out. It is, after all, a challenge to the intellect to entertain the notions of God's existence and absolute dominion, God's relations with his creatures, our ultimate responsibility to be worthy and our inability to be so. And challenges are more easily avoided, not met. Intellect has never been content conceiving of God as "He Who is," "The One," "Infinite Ocean of Entity," "Pure Act of Existing," or even "Being Itself." Nor does it rest easy with Jesus as Lord, a uniquely historical and finite man who is acclaimed to "contain" the infinite uniquely; nor with the notion that our venerated free will is bound in sin.

Perhaps of all these concepts the latter has been most vexing to the church in its search for wisdom. The

Pelagian insistence, condemned by church

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councils no less than six times, that obedience

to either the law or Gospel are equally successful paths to complete human fulfillment is the oldest and most persistent assertion of the absolute autonomy of the intellect.

(For what is more obvious to intellect than that genuine accountability requires capacity as well as obligation? 'Thou shalt' implies 'thou canst'.) A signal that Lutherans, particularly, still fail to understand the roots of this error can be found in pleadings to fill the "naked public square" with more religiously grounded morality in order to enoble the moral qualities and political aims of modern secular life. Righteousness can be taught, it is assumed, and even bought if one provides enough money for TV time. A similar, though more subtle, signal is found in our own colleges where the presence of an all-Christian faculty or of religion courses in the required curriculum are taken to certify not only benefit to the intellect, but the spiritual growth of the student. (From which it would seem to follow that a four-year Bible college would have the saintliest graduates.) Such tokens exemplify the seductive powers which intellect uses to conquer wisdom, and to make the human community in her image.

One good thing might be said for this Pelagian tendency. At least it is a response of *intellect* to the moral and social demands of human life. The same cannot be said in the case of the relativistic response of so many students and Christians to the challenges presented to the mind for resolution. Perhaps it is more an error or "habit" of the heart, of misguided good will, that leads so many to rest content in their faith and yet acknowledge the value, even truth, of claims contradictory to their values and to the content of their religious commitments. Relativism may be caused by intellectual cowardice or insecurity, or bred merely (as many think) by the need for tolerance in our pluralistic society. But if the dogma of relativism (that everyone is entitled to live by one's own beliefs or values) is taken as the universal obligation to tolerance, it contradicts the very precept used to evoke it. Hardly a choice for the intellect.

Whatever forms this avoidance of faith's search for understanding may take, some causes for the struggle between intellect and wisdom which gives rise to the attempt are, in my mind at least, themselves avoidable, and remedial steps can be taken. I have suggested two such causes: a misunderstanding of the intellect's autonomy, and the tendency to create absolutes (moral illusions, if you will) when faced with uncertainties and threats in our personal and public life. By selecting these causes I do not of course mean to suggest that the struggle between intellect and wisdom is inherently evil. Although it is painful at times to reconcile one's deepest moral and religious convictions with one's knowledge and the morality of the marketplace, even when this seems impossible the struggle is often productive both for one's life and one's learning.

What is the misunderstanding of the legitimate autonomy ascribable to intellect in its relation to wisdom, that contributes to the unease of their alliance? Lutheran dogmatists of the 17th century had a good name for this misunderstanding, if not a satisfying analysis: they called it the magisterial use of reason. The name suggests that somehow intellect is regarded not as a service department

within human nature (a ministerial role), but as resident chairman of the board, the only repository of knowledge. The omnipotence that this age of scientific cheerleaders seems to see in intellect, however, grossly disregards what scientists and "intellectuals" must surely know now, though they might have been unable to know it in the Newtonian age: that not a single factual or theoretical proposition about nature has a meaning — nor can its truth be judged — outside the conceptual context of assumptions, theories, laws, and human experiences within which it is asserted. This fact has been generally recognized, particularly in the last twenty years as argument about the paradigm shifts in the evolution of scientific thought has developed, and as positivism has been superseded by more modest reconstructions of human knowledge.

The probabilistic nature of the scientific enterprise and the significance of the subjective element in it are now more fully understood than in an earlier age of naive realism. What this means for intellect in relation to Christian wisdom is that religious insight has new opportunities for serious argument when necessary, on intellect's terms alone, about the proper understanding of nature *without* the need to introduce mysterious "powers" or indulge in special pleadings for the faith. The openness of genuine science and its willingness to examine its own metaphysical roots is an openness to wisdom as well.

Despite the efficacy of scientific methods, there is (and ought to be) an appropriate modesty in the legitimate claims of science today, and this allows Christian wisdom once again to have a respectable shot at apologetic dialogue, as well as to learn what it can. As educators we have the responsibility to engage in that discussion and not convey to our students a false sense of the sufficiency of science which science itself is able to disclaim.

None of this, of course, suggests that perhaps the existence of God and other articles of faith are candidates, after all, for immediate inclusion in physics. But I see no reason *a priori* to deny the conceivability of arguments for some religious claims that are at least as perspicuous and rigorous as their scientific counterparts. Whether there are such must be established in the court of intellect over time. Just as there was a practical possibility of showing the intellectual failure, if not dishonesty, of "Creation science" (a possibility now realized, I believe), so there can be a possibility of intellectual success in justifying some religious tenets. To deny this possibility is to claim to know something more than intellect can know.

The whole debate about "secular humanism" versus Biblical faith, for example, is rooted in beliefs about rival metaphysical positions and not mere squabbles about the epistemic status of Scripture. It therefore seems quite reasonable for people to argue the rational grounds for preferring one system over another. One need not be a "fundamentalist" to debate various principles of physics such as the conservation of energy, which presupposes a closed universe, or physical theories dependent on assump-

tions of "beauty," "simplicity," "steady-state," or a certain dimensional character of time. If and when such issues become hermeneutically important for theology, as they do within Christianity at least, there is no reason to disclaim or avoid the necessary argument. This becomes an urgent priority especially, I think, in assessing the moral and theological implications of molecular biology and neuroscience for the traditional religious understanding of human nature.

My concern here is to resist the tide of philosophic and religious temperament that denies outright the possibility of rational dialogue between faith and science. Further, there is no intellectual justification for awarding absolute autonomy to intellect merely because, as the masses perceive it, science is so successful. "Intellectuals," if that is what we are calling ourselves, know better than to act, as Heraclitus said, "with the masses who follow the bards and make the crowd their teacher." There is ample pragmatic justification for respecting the powers of science while still insisting that truth is not established by polls.

All this while I have been talking as if intellect and science were coextensive and distinct from all that wisdom expresses. But of course science is the product of intellect, and intellect is exhibited in the utterances of wisdom as well. It is intellect which makes it possible for us to recognize, e.g., the problem in the assertion that we are accountable as human agents but also incapable of fulfilling our responsibilities. It is wisdom which holds these elements together as witness to God's supremacy. Apparent contradictions or paradoxes are hardly unique to religious belief; modern physics is rich in them. (It is useful to note that apparent contradictions are tolerated, and hence preferably called paradoxes, whenever there are very strong reasons for holding each incompatible assertion.)

I have cited the tendency to erect absolute values or unqualified duties when we confront moral claims seemingly at odds with our deepest religious instincts. And this, I have maintained, like the misunderstanding of the intellect's autonomy, is another needless irritant in the struggle of intellect and wisdom we can do something to avoid. Why needless? Because such a tendency is not intellectually compelling, and because no human virtue can be absolutized, nor any ethical system have God's endorsement. Righteousness is bestowed, not enacted in the dramas of history.

What that means for our moral choices and public policies is that we can never erect them, as the politico-religious right seems to do, into crusades to Christianize America and make its norms into a civil religion that is the imperial standard of a righteous nation. That futile effort inevitably reveals a Pelagian worm gnawing at the core of Lutheran wisdom. But what, argues the intellect, can be done in our Christian vocations if moralities have no ultimate force? Repent, comes the answer of wisdom. That is the whole point of the law. But surely, the argument continues, some actions and policies must be reason-

ably justified over others, and not all is permitted, unless God is dead. Of course, comes the response, but their justification is grounded in the consequentialism of prudence or the benevolence of happy genes. It is not, in any case, the act that needs the justification faith seeks; it is the actor.

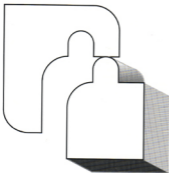
In the realm of moral and political choices, no less than in our science, we are left to construct our own arrangements as they best befit our purposes, as judged by our intellectual lights. Human law, ideally, echoes those arrangements and purposes, and these change with the contingencies of history. To proclaim any system or particular virtue absolute and indefeasible is to construct an ideology which the intellect itself cannot defend, and which wisdom regards as the essence of idolatry. The justification of a political system, in sum, is found in its rational coherence with human nature, the needs and purposes of the people it represents. It neither requires nor receives a transcendent imprimatur.

To make this point more amenable, a reference to the Constitutional Convention may help. After a month of debate in a disabling climate, the convention was getting nowhere fast in finding what Ben Franklin called "political truth." And so on June 28, 1787, he made a speech which proposed a resort to prayer.

We have been assured, Sir, that "except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that build it." I firmly believe this and I also believe that without his concurring aid we . . . shall be divided by our little partial interests . . . and what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance, despair of establishing Governments by Human Wisdom and leave it to chance, war and conquest. I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayer imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this assembly every morning. . . .

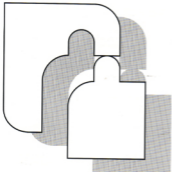
The delegates, after briefly noting that the budget did not provide for chaplains, didn't even vote on the motion; they ignored it and adjourned. The Great Compromise was adopted three weeks later through the rational deliberations and inevitable trade-offs dictated by the sensible lights of the delegates, without benefit of prayer. They felt no "despair of establishing government by Human Wisdom."

We are held accountable not to construct a redemptionist state, but a rational and humane society. Redemption is God's work, and it is already finished. If we could remember this bit of wisdom we would not so easily be beguiled by the radical tendencies in our society to return America to its mythical Christian origins. This illusion, and the fanaticism it carries in its train, is not just an intellectual and public vice; it is religious idolatry. Freedom from it would allow us to get on with the intellectual and civic tasks of ordering our purposes, and the means to



their achievement, as responsible citizens without disservice either to human nature or Christian wisdom. Once understood, the Kingdom of Heaven will not be seen or sought in the Constitution or the sagacity of the Supreme Court. And we will have removed one more root cause for the reluctance of intellect and wisdom to coexist.

I do not deny the relevance of faith to the conduct of human affairs. I simply deny that the Gospel is, or prescribes, a moral or social system. There are points of contact between the uniquely *Christian* graces of peace and charity and the rational judgment of how best to distribute civic powers, but I don't see how those contacts can be elaborated as ideologies which do justice both to the radical call of the Gospel and the realities of power. To think so, I have argued, is to create an unnecessary tension



between intellect and wisdom. Christian love turns the other cheek, but this is political insanity. Human expressions of that ideal are lucky to produce only a pale form of justice, a job the Founding Fathers did passably well with intellect alone.

Having rid ourselves of the unnecessary tensions between intellect and wisdom, there may still be residual discomfort in the search for understanding. The danger for intellectuals especially is that they lose the will to act as wisdom requires. Lutherans, particularly, are commonly charged with being so fearful of taking pride in their moral achievements that they are left with a civically intolerable case of moral paralysis — unable or unwilling to do anything that might suggest their commitment to public, human virtue. If this is plausible, it should be added to dogmatism and relativism as another form of avoiding faith's search for understanding. It seems ironic that this search, a legacy of the Augustinian quest, should be compromised by a misreading of another Augustinian vision, that of "two cities . . . formed by two loves; the earthly by the love of self, *even to the contempt of God*; the heavenly by the love of God, *even to the contempt of self*." I believe with William James, however, that it is never justifiable to withhold a resolve will just because certainty or perfection is unavailable to us.

Let me conclude with a picture of intellectual frustration described by Dostoevsky in his *Notes from Underground*.

I repeat, I repeat with emphasis: All "direct" persons and men of action are active just because they are stupid and limited. How explain that? I will tell you: in consequence of their limitation they take immediate and secondary causes for primary ones, and in that way persuade themselves . . . that they have found an infallible foundation for their activity, and their minds are at ease . . . To begin to act, you know, you must first have your mind completely at ease and no trace of doubt left in it. Why, how am I, for example, to set my mind at rest? Where are the primary causes on which I am to build? Where are my foundations? Where am I to get them from? I exercise myself in reflection, and consequently with me every primary cause at once draws after itself another still more primary, and so on to infinity. That is just the essence of every sort of consciousness and reflection . . . Oh, gentlemen, do you know, perhaps I consider myself an intelligent man, only because all my life I have been able neither to begin nor to finish anything.

This was a discovery of Dostoevsky's *wisdom*, which moved him to act — to write — in the face of intellectual uncertainties. Intellect and wisdom *can* coexist, if only we think wisely. ■

# IS ACADEMIC FREEDOM SACRED IN CHURCH UNIVERSITIES?

K. E. Christopherson

"We believe in academic freedom — but in a church school it must be somewhat limited," say some in schools like Pacific Lutheran University. I answer: *The church college should have more academic freedom* than secular schools, for the PLUs have even better grounding for that freedom!

Elaboration for academic freedom is needed especially in religion because the teaching of religion remains the point, in church-related colleges, where academic freedom is most sensitive and frequently attacked. But academic freedom most of all needs elaboration because of the paucity of any theological rationale for it. In this essay I argue that there is abundant theological rationale for academic freedom — no less in the study of religion than in other disciplines. As a result, the same unlimited academic freedom should be extended to higher educational institutions of the churches as is given to the secular universities, and to non-tenured as well as to tenured faculty.

The "pursuit of truth," by definition, entails academic freedom to follow honestly wherever scholarship's evidence leads: To ask the scholar not to follow the evidence honestly is to ask him to be untruthful in the pursuit of truth — a contradiction in terms. Therefore tenure in some form is necessary for genuine academic freedom, since freedom to find and express truth cannot be genuine if the threat of loss of livelihood is used to force the teacher to express the "truth" in forms acceptable to any authorities whatsoever, inside or outside the university. That is why I insist that full academic freedom must also be extended explicitly to those who have not yet become tenured. Presumably, highest among the desiderata for new candidates for tenure should be their demonstrated dedication to truth and its pursuit. But to hold over their heads the threat of loss of tenure, i.e., loss of livelihood, unless they find and express truth in forms acceptable to powers around and above, is to tell them they must put other values above truth — until they are granted "tenure," after which they are to do a sudden about-face and thenceforth put the pursuit of truth as the highest value. That is educational hypocrisy!

For academe there are two "self-evident axioms": The pursuit of truth is the *highest* value in academe; but none of us humans, individually or collectively, ever has truth fully. That is why there must be total academic freedom: Above the individual scholars seeking truth there

is no higher human authority capable of delineating absolutely the limits of truth beyond which the scholars must not think and express their thought. The wisest summary advice I ever heard about academic freedom was that given me nearly thirty years ago by former President Robert Mortvedt of Pacific Lutheran University when he said: "PLU and every university must *select* its teachers very carefully — but once having hired them, must give them complete academic freedom."

In Europe and most other countries, the university is usually autonomous within itself, that is, the faculty is legally supreme and self-governing. It is clear that the American system, consisting largely of lay regents, leaves more opportunity for attempts to exclude political government and religion from the principles of academic freedom: regents who are non-academics are thereby less likely to appreciate the supreme value most academics place on academic freedom, and are more likely to hope or expect that faculty will be paid propagandists for the regents' own political, religious, and other views.

Regents, and the whole public, must learn that the chief goal in education is to teach students to *think*, not to teach them *what* to "think" (which is a self-contradiction in terms). University teachers are in a unique position: Only teachers are paid to think; i.e., thinking is their end, not a means to any other end than Truth. That is why academic freedom is the unique and basic prerequisite to academe: Only free and unlimited thinking is truly thinking. The teacher may even think wrongly — but human freedom must include the freedom to be wrong, or else it is not free!



Is academic freedom itself unlimited? Yes! The teacher's right and responsibility to think is accompanied by the responsibilities of competence and diligence. But discipline for shortcomings must safeguard against even the appearance of any changes (e.g., of incompetence or neglect) being screens for administrative infringement of the teacher's academic freedom. And therefore the case must be decided by a group of the teacher's peers. This provides an answer to the common charge that an unlimited right of academic freedom shields the incompetent scholar. The answer must lie in the *peer* group: The answer to bad scholarship is not administrative reprisal, but better scholarship from peers!

The machinery for detecting incompetence has been worked out by scholars for centuries, and improved now through modern communication. It typically includes any or all of these: The teacher ventilates his thought to students, who respond and bring the teacher to improve the thought. Then the teacher shares thoughts with colleagues — and the give-and-take sharpens his thought. He next presents a paper to his department, then at a regional or national meeting in his discipline; each set of responses moves him to change and improve his thinking. Finally, he publishes it, for widest dissemination. At all

these levels, especially the later ones, "bad scholarship" will be pointed out, and "better" answers will be offered. In education there is no substitute for scholarly critique and persuasion, and a more just human procedure than this one for assuring academic freedom could hardly be devised.



Now, our pointed question: Should or can such unabridged academic freedom exist also in Christian universities? It can, and it should! The usual argument against saying this is that self-perpetuation of their own belief-identity allows, even requires Christian universities to delimit what religious doctrinal positions may be held and taught by their teachers; here academic freedom must be abridged. In practice, in most church-related schools, the doctrinally sacrosanct area has now shrunk to the Religion Department. Academic freedom is sacred in every other department but religion. Apparently all that school's teachers are to be honest scholars — except those in religion!

For theological seminaries, the case for limits may seem even stronger. After all, here is where the pastors are taught, who will be the chief teachers in the parishes. Current strife over this issue is focusing on the Southern Baptist Convention's control of its seminaries. A letter to the editor by Professor Richard Fowler (*Chrenticle of Higher Education*, 13 August 1986) typifies the presently reigning notion in the SBC and, I would guess, the view of a majority of the general public — and perhaps of most church college and seminary regents:

In a country founded on democratic principles, I wonder why so many of our educators balk at majority rule? If a denomination is paying most of the bills, should they not also have the right to set the foundation for their schools? Is academic freedom violated if a denomination mandates that their universities and seminaries adhere to a set of clearly defined directives?

Such thoughts as these may seem seductively reasonable, and so Fowler's ideas deserve some individual responses: (1) Is truth discovered and determined by majority vote? If so, then Jesus, Socrates, Galileo, and countless others were wrong! (2) If Truth and the search for it are not the purpose in church-sponsored higher education, let the church be honest about it and not call it "education" but indoctrination; yes, even more honest and admit to teachers that the church is buying their mind, their soul. (Some may recognize this as intellectual prostitution.) (3) The church may believe that what Fowler's letter called "God's absolute truth" does exist — but does any human individual, group, or church know God's absolute truth absolutely?

Yet Mr. Fowler's question does prompt our own: Can a school of higher education have genuine academic freedom and yet perpetuate its religious identity? It can! The question is not peculiar to church schools; can any school have academic freedom and yet perpetuate its identity? For the 'Yes' answer we must have, we repeat Mortvedt's wisdom: *Select teachers carefully — and then give them total academic freedom.*

Academic freedom does not require that any school — whether church or secular — select and hire teachers without regard to their views. Selection for uniform thought among faculty may be weak education, but it does not nullify the teacher's academic freedom. For it is clear that the teacher has no existent right to academic freedom in a job he does not yet have.

But what about retention of faculty, once appointed? If a teacher's views of central truths change during employment, does not this endanger the school's intended identity? Does not institutional self-preservation here require some hedging of academic freedom? No! Every scholar worthy of the name will change his views during the ongoing pursuit of truth. And every school of higher education existing for the search for truth will not choke off, but rather welcome, the teacher's intellectual odyssey as part of the progress toward Truth. Edgar Carlson, a Lutheran theologian of some eminence, says it well in *The Future of Church-Related Higher Education*:

The church which is related to a college must not only allow such freedom in the pursuit of truth to its faculty; it must insist on it. To prescribe outcomes for individuals on any issue is to call in question the validity of the educational process itself, since it denies the investigator the right to be guided by evidence or reason.

After careful faculty selection, it is almost certain that those who change their mind on views fundamental to that school will never be so numerous as to threaten change for the institution's identity. If occasionally even that more widespread change occurs, this can reasonably be regarded as evidence that the change was valid and needed. For that truth which is held by most or all at time of appointment, but is forsaken by the majority during their ongoing study, must need revision. This, in fact, is the basic way religious thought has changed forms throughout the history of the church!

Some may counter: "The selection process is too short to ascertain fully whether the new teacher is 'safe' to keep." That is true for matters of competency and personality, hence the seven years probation toward tenure. (Doctrines can be screened thoroughly in the selection process.) But the church school that would dismiss that

teacher who has shifted thought on such most central issues as the way of salvation itself, and on what is the highest authority for the Christian, would then have eliminated Martin Luther himself and perhaps the whole Protestant Reformation!

Yet, some will object, such total academic freedom may occasion the loss of faith itself, in the student or the teacher. The suggestion in this line of argument is that religious faith is the highest value and, in case of conflict, takes priority even over academic freedom. However, as Langdon Gilkey has said (*In Christianity and Crisis*):

While faith may be lost in freedom, faith cannot be regained by the repression of freedom. The risk of freedom may be a danger to established religion, but it is also the condition of true religion.

In other words, church universities and seminaries are also communities of faith, and as such their identities are preserved, not by forced rules, but by freely shared faith. Religious loyalties should be first to God, then to the faith of the whole Christian Church, and only after that to the denomination. The teacher whose views have changed may or may not decide to leave his school for the sake of conscience — but the choice must be his, without external threat to his academic freedom.

I know of no thoroughly worked-out theological rationale in support of academic freedom. That is surprising, for biblical faith and the Judeo-Christian tradition offer rich resources for such a rationale. The First Commandment is fundamental to the whole of biblical faith: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." That means, to put it in religious terms, not only that God is the Absolute, but also that only God is absolute. That only God is absolute means that no human thought or idea, whether of an individual or group, is absolute — not even religious thought: Not even any human thought about God is absolute.

The sins by "religion" against this first commandment have been rife. But we should recognize them for what they are — *idolatries*. To absolutize any human practice or belief, even religious ones, is to make another god besides God. Denial of academic freedom, in the name of "religion," ought — in the name of God — to be recognized as the idolatry that it is. This is radical: If only God is absolute, and everything else (including human thought about God) is "up for grabs," that leaves as the very greatest conceivable academic freedom!



Our theological rationale can be put into more distinctly Christian and Trinitarian terms. The First Article of the ecumenical creeds declares all creation (including all its forms) to be holy, as the intended product of God. In what is often called the "orders of

creation," each order has its own integrity; no order is to lord it over another. Politics, economics, social needs, and yes, religion too, all have their created worth and place — as does intellectual education — and none of them is to override or cancel out any of the others.

Luther put this in terms of the Two Kingdoms, God's kingdoms of the "right hand," the Gospel of grace, and of the "left hand," the kingdom of Law, based on Reason — which he deemed God's highest worldly gift. The Church, idolatrously assuming it already had the absolute truth absolutely, denied Luther's academic freedom and simply ordered him to recant. He refused, saying that "it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience" (i.e., in his case, to act against convictions arrived at by honest scholarship). The full words of his next sentence are often overlooked: "Unless convinced by scripture or sound reason [emphasis added] . . . I cannot and will not recant" — though he was always ready to change if otherwise convinced by scholarly persuasion.

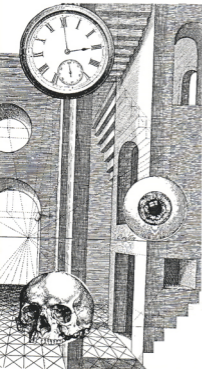
In Trinitarian terms, the Second Person, the incarnate Jesus, is the expression and incarnation of the Grace of God. This sheer grace of God speaks also to academic freedom. It says that like Creation, Redemption is only by this unmerited grace of God — that is, that we are saved by God's grace, not by our knowledge (whether right or wrong). To academics that says that nothing we can do with our hands — or our head — can save us. And this frees us, even in theology, to do our scholarship — and even to make our human errors in it — without anxiety before God.

The third of the three articles of the creeds likewise speaks to academic freedom. I jump first to that more "human" part of it, the church as the "communion of saints." That "communion" exists and lives by "the forgiveness of sins": Accepted and forgiven freely by God, we are accepting and forgiving freely of each other. Just as none of us need or can buy acceptance from God by coming up with the "right thinking" as only God knows it, so none of us need to buy acceptance from others by coming up with the "right thinking" as they see it. We accept each other by the same grace by which God accepts us. And that should free us to differ with each other, even in theology, without anxiety over what the other considers "error."

But the Third Article is primarily about the Holy Spirit, that is, the Spirit of Christ, risen and ruling in his world. That should free us from another anxiety: Intellectual errors — even in theology — made by ourselves or others are not going to topple the Christian Church and the faith! To limit academic freedom because of what is usually the ultimate argument, namely that the "error" threatens the very faith itself, reveals a discomfiting lack of confidence in the intrinsically persuasive worth of the "truth" that needs such "protection." Worse, it really reveals a too small faith in the power of the Spirit of God,

the risen, living, and reigning Christ and his power to vindicate Truth! Is it not near self-idolatry to suppose that God's truth will fall unless it is "protected" by us? Perhaps Christians, in regard to academic freedom, should seek the confident faith Luther expressed when he gave all credit for the Reformation, not to himself, but to God's Word and its power: Below Luther's feet, on his statue that stands in front of Wittenberg's City Hall, are engraved his words, "If it is God's work, it will stand; if it is human work, it will fall."

In the end, our whole matter must boil down again to the wise dictum: *Select faculty very carefully — but then give them complete academic freedom!* ■



## Recent Humanities Publications

Jon J. Nordby

### *"Bootstrapping While Barefoot (Crime Models vs. Theoretical Models in the Hunt for Serial Killers)"*

Synthese: Special Issue on Applied Science  
edited by Jon J. Nordby and Vivian T. Weil  
Volume 81:3 (1989), 373-389.

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There is a difference between applying philosophy to practical problems and thinking philosophically about that application. This roughly parallels the difference between distinguishing good arguments from bad, and providing an account of what it means to be a good argument in the first place. For the past several years, as I have applied my philosophical and scientific skills working with the Pierce County Medical Examiner's office investigating suspicious deaths, I have used the opportunity to think philosophically about this application. My paper in this volume of the philosophical journal *Synthese* is an early result of that thinking about my own area, forensic science.

There is a lack of consistency in the use of the terms "approximation," "idealization," and "model" in the sciences. Indeed, the variations are of interest. For example, the mathematical modeling process is evident in many examples from biology, physics, and geology. These models abstract certain elements at the expense of others and simplify the process of explaining and predicting phenomena. Their successes or failures are measured by their predictive and explanatory power. But in criminal investigations, a model helps to frame questions about the observed world in an idealized way. While the differences between these models and scientific models are radical, I argue that calling them models is justified both by functional and structural similarities. I use the problems in serial homicide investigations to illustrate the marked difference between theoretical models in science and the models applied in criminal cases.

Unlike geologists explaining earthquakes using the tectonic plate model, criminalists supply no effective theory for selecting an appropriate crime model to be applied to a certain event. Although such models may have scientific theories as components, they lack theoretical functions. Attempts by behavioral scientists and criminologists to infuse them with the status of theories is doomed to failure; they have no such explanatory status. Unlike the scientist, the flatfoot gumshoe is also barefoot: he is bereft of a general determinative theoretical framework.

According to philosopher Clark Glymour, bootstrapping occurs in a scientific theory when novel evidence is taken to confirm some hypothesis only by using an additional hypothesis to predict that evidence. This technique could be of great value in difficult homicides. So, how do detectives bootstrap, that is, use hypotheses

like levers to elevate each other's probabilities, without the theoretical "boost"?

My paper supplies an answer. Because detectives are not omniscient, they choose a number of models simultaneously and use them each to develop novel evidence in rival crime stories. These decisions determine the inferences used to distinguish relevant from irrelevant facts, and to formulate — and perhaps bootstrap — hypotheses. Such decisions are usually made, for serial homicide investigations, at the crime scenes themselves, under less-than-optimal circumstances.

Studying how other sciences are applied also informs us about the nature of scientific concepts. To achieve generality and to cover the phenomena, scientific theories since Galileo have become increasingly abstract. This abstractness increases our need to understand more fully the relation of these theories to real objects, experiments with actual systems, and the solution of practical problems. To seek understanding of these relations, philosophers of science have paid a great deal of attention to the structures of explanation and confirmation; but applications of science have their own structure and need their own philosophy. This volume exhibits some of that structure, and supplies some philosophical treatments.

We tried to present a variety of instances and approaches, for example in even determining what counts as "applied science". The common thread running through all uses of that term here is the focus on practical results in the phenomenal world. Almost every paper highlights some mechanism connecting theoretical elaboration and observational results.

Several authors note the falsity of idealizations and their ilk, and consider the implications for debates among philosophers of science about the truth of scientific theories. Many of the authors argue that corrections of the models or approximations derive from actual observation, from the ground up so to speak, rather than from theory. This appears to put the phenomena beyond the reach of theory in a significant way.

There may not be a single role for laws and theories that are said to be scientific. The concepts of law, theory, idealization, and explanation thought to be basic in science may instead be families of related but distinct concepts. Sometimes members of the same family are referred to by the same name in different contexts, and sometimes not. A study of application suggests that both the nature and function of these notions seem to change in different settings, and that the setting is defined by the purpose at hand. When the purpose is practical, laws and theories developed in another context for another end must be modified in order to apply, or in some cases be abandoned altogether. This volume suggests future lines such investigation might take. ■

Gregory Johnson

### *"Jewish Assimilation and Codes of Manners in Saul Bellow's 'The Old System'"*

Studies in Jewish American Literature 9:1 (1990), 48-60.

Bellow has often said, justifiably, that he should not be considered a specifically Jewish writer. In general, he is more interested in the human condition than in the Jewish condition, not that he sees any fundamental differences between the two. However, in "The Old System" (1967), a very important short story, Bellow is concerned with specifically Jewish characters. The story fondly recalls a family of immigrants whose ethnicity is crucial to the plot: the waning of the highly civilized "old system" of Jewish manners in early twentieth-century America, and the subsequent replacement of that system by two very different, inadequate codes: the code of Protestant restraint and the code of "opera" that has emerged out of the tradition of East European Jewish civility. "The Old System" is Bellow's most unified and concentrated treatment of the national behavioral problem dramatized by Jewish assimilation, as illustrated by the protagonist, Isaac Braun, who is caught between the new code of restraint and the even newer code of behavioral "opera".

Isaac is an Eastern European Jew, whom Bellow — overturning the stereotype of the loud and vulgar *Ostjuden* — considers properly expressive. Sadly for Isaac, history tempts him to observe, in a shady real estate deal, an opposite code of manners, the code of self-restraint favored and enforced by America's Capitalist, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (CASP) culture. By following the CASP code, Isaac makes his millions but alienates his sister, Tina. Intensified by a peculiarly American boastfulness, her prideful, vain, hyperbolic style is, perhaps, even less commendable than Isaac's, since it engenders a sort of egregious opera that mocks the most vital emotions, as Isaac learns when Tina charges him \$20,000 to visit her deathbed. Isaac not only embraces the New World code of understatement in his business deals, he also capitulates to the code of operatic overstatement in paying off his sister.

Insightful a piece of social history though it is, "The Old System" is important for another reason as well: the light it sheds on Bellow's subsequent novel. Published three years after the story, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* reiterates the opposition between CASP and Jewish manners, and Isaac's situation can help us understand Artur Sammler, the reserved, contemptuous old protagonist whom many readers mistakenly take to be Bellow's spokesman. Far from being the repressive misanthrope that Artur appears to be, Bellow in this novel still occupies a political middle

ground, a space of civility and compromise called "conservative liberalism". Bellow claims this accustomed space by subjecting even Sammler to moral criticism, albeit a much gentler criticism than some other characters deserve and receive. Despite the considerable authority with which Artur speaks, and in view of his admittedly Anglicized style, Bellow means to suggest that Sammler himself would do well to follow the "old system." ■

A sketch of Katherine Mansfield,  
Humanities Research Center,  
University of Texas at Austin, 1975.



Jayne Marek

# "Class-Consciousness and Self-Consciousness in Katherine Mansfield's 'The Garden Party'"

Postscript (Philological Association of the Carolinas)  
7 (1990), 35-43.

One of Katherine Mansfield's most famous stories is "The Garden Party," a study of what appears to be the social and artistic awakening of a young, upper-class girl, whose family's annual party occurs on the day a local workman has died. After the party, the girl takes leftovers to the dead workman's family, views the body, and experiences a heightened empathy which seems to lift her out of her class-bound role. As Gilbert and Gubar put it in *The War of the Words* (95), Laura experiences a "moment of being" in which she is "mysteriously empowered" by this vision.

I find, however, that Laura's moment of empathic blins is profoundly ambiguous, and that, upon reflection, the reader is uncertain about whether anything has really changed. Mansfield's themes in the story seem to me to involve more than an adolescent's personal epiphany, or a clever critique of upper-class complacency. I believe that "The Garden Party" subtly expresses Mansfield's guilt over the way she used her "artistic privilege" to create a stable base in her difficult exilic life.

Mansfield's own movement from a life of wealth in Wellington to the persistent poverty of London strongly affected her artistic development and sense of identity. The change in circumstances intensified her chronic illness and led her to depend heavily upon her old school friend, Ida Baker. Through the years, Mansfield repeatedly took Baker's money, demanded that she send things or drop everything for a trip, and then sent her away. Baker explained away Mansfield's demands as instrumental to the realization of her genius — but this rationalization cannot mask a relationship which put Baker in the servant's role through Mansfield's manipulation of her love. Mansfield's letters reveal a profound split within herself over her treatment of, and attitude toward, Baker. Mansfield created, in her life as well as her fiction, an emotional battle between the desire for privilege and power, and the hope of artistic rapport and insight.

The deeply ironic tone of Mansfield's writing gains poignancy and power when one considers her inability to make a "transcendent vision of harmony" work in her own life. "The Garden Party" may be read as an expression of Mansfield's disillusionment with the power of art to teach us about ourselves, even as the story itself is a fine piece of literary craftsmanship. ■

## CContributors:

**Ken Christopherson** is Professor of Religion; his field is Church history and he is currently writing a history of Norway's Reformation. Ken will retire after fall semester.

**Curt Huber** is Professor of Philosophy; his specialties are philosophy of religion and epistemology. He has authored *The Promise and Perils of Business Ethics*. Curt will retire after fall semester.

**Greg Johnson's** field is contemporary American literature; he is Adjunct Professor of English.

**Jayne Marek** is Assistant Professor of English. She is a published poet whose scholarly speciality is twentieth-century literature.

**Dennis Martin's** field is American literature; he has special interests in contemporary literature and in literature and science. Dennis is Associate Professor of English.

**Jon Nordby's** specialties are logic and philosophy of forensic science. Jon is Associate Professor of Philosophy.

**Janet Rasmussen** is Professor of Norwegian and Dean of the Division of Humanities.

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Editorial Board: Charles Bergman, Keith Cooper, Janet Rasmussen (*ex officio*), Rochelle Snee

Publication Design and Illustration: Paul Porter

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