

# Deep Thoughts

Indeed the world is too much with us, late and soon. There are things other than elections and recessions, maybe things even more important, certainly things

that have been around longer than we have or will be.

Some years back, I was on a scuba trip to the Caribbean with Capital Divers, my then dive club out of Washington. I forget just where we were. We made these trips annually for several years and they blur together. The club usually chartered one of those 125-foot specialized dive boats. We spent most of our time underwater. Dive, burgers, beer, sleep, dive. Bright sun, blue water, explosion of bubbles as you stepped off the dive deck and finned at ten feet to the anchor line.

One day we swam along a deep wall at 120 feet, maybe 15 of us, the sea dropping to blue-black night and the wall colorless in the crepuscular dimness of depth. It was deeper than a basic instructor would recommend, but Cap Divers was a bit of a cowboy outfit and everyone was experienced. Curling misshapen growths projected from the rock like tangled ropes and distorted cups from some nightmarish basement. The only sounds were the slow sssssss-wubbawubba of breath and exhaust and the locationless clicking of arthropods.

A curious relaxation comes over you at such times: a sense of not mattering at all to the sea, of the world as a bigger and older place than Washington or even New York, of detachment from the fizzing little wars of columnists and polls and polls. A salubrious triviality. If I could bottle the feeling, drug markets would wither overnight.

Those droning nature shows on television say that the ocean is hostile to

man. I think it is not, though it is a bad place to make mistakes. The ocean is a huge, huge world that doesn't care about us, isn't interested, has other things to do. You see documentaries that try to make sharks sound dreadful. In fact they do not seem to regard a weird humpbacked creature with one big eye and emitting bubbles as appetizing. Few creatures underwater are aggressive toward people. Odd things swim, or flap, or drift by, usually paying no attention. They have their agendas, and we have ours.

**PEOPLE CALL THEM OCEANIC BATS, OR FLYING BATHMATS, BUT THESE DESCRIPTIONS DON'T CATCH THE SMOOTH, RIPPLING, FLEXING FLAP OF SOFT CHILLY FLESH.**

You can wonder what God or Darwin had in mind. Whatever goes on at corporate, it is well above our pay grade. I forget with whom I was buddied up, but she stopped and hung with her mask over a big barrel sponge. A small diver could crawl into some of these things. She motioned me over. In the glow of dive lights, I saw a bright red arrow crab sheltering. At that depth a dive light makes everything it touches burst into color as if you were throwing paint at it.

The beastie was built like an aspirin tablet with great long jointed legs, a daddy longlegs of the ocean. It stalked slowly about, puzzled by our lights I suppose. I wondered what it thought it was doing or we were doing.

The sea is a dead world, though living. In a forest you can imagine communing

with the deer or squirrels or having a pet bird sit on your shoulder. The land is our world. The sea isn't. Fish swim slowly by, eyes cold and devoid of thought, of anything we would recognize. For untold millions of years they have done this. I do not think that even a renegotiation of NAFTA could change it.

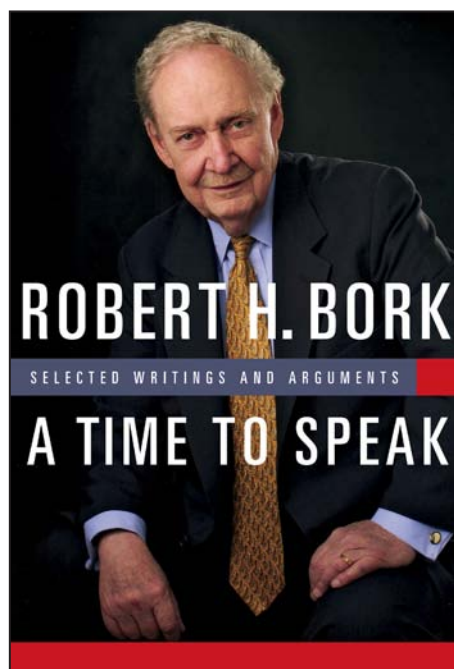
Below a hundred feet you don't have much time before your computer squeaks warnings about going into decompression tables. We were starting to drift upward when they came by, three of them: big rays, flying in formation. Their wingspan may have been four feet. It is hard to tell with the magnifying effect of water. People call them oceanic bats, or flying bathmats, but these descriptions don't catch the

smooth, rippling, flexing flap of soft chilly flesh.

I cannot explain how anything so ugly can be so lovely, but they manage it. I have heard them called devil fish by people of the surface, but they are as ominous as potatoes. They passed us, graceful, fast, as if going somewhere with a purpose in mind. And disappeared. I felt like a mouse in a computer room: something was going on, but it wasn't my business.

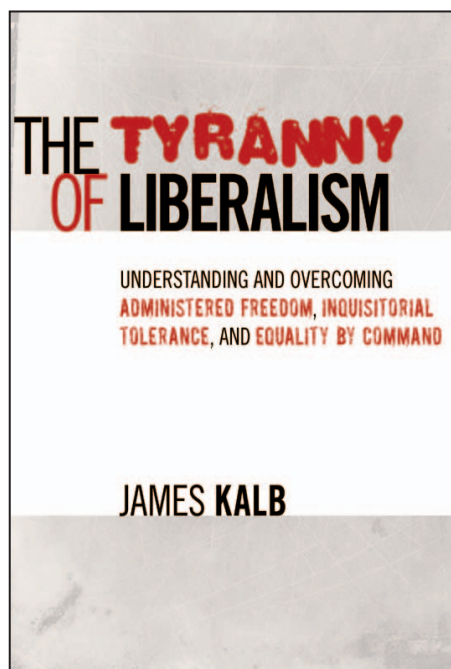
We had all seen rays before, but this was prettier, a privilege, and we knew it. We stared—programmers, GS-14's, journalists, graduate students, all the detritus of Washington—and resumed the ascent. Our computers were becoming importunate, and one does not ignore computers. ■

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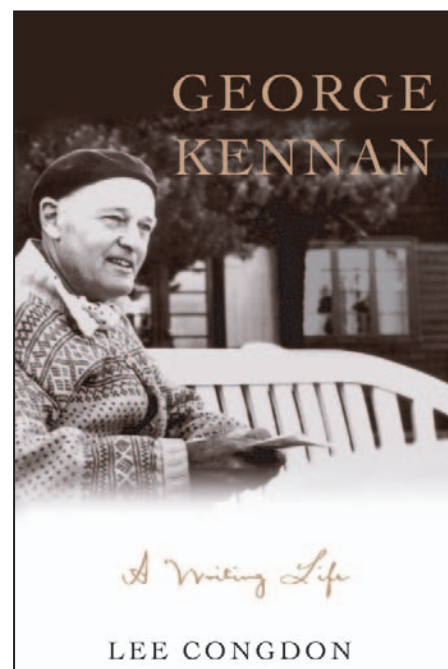
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