

There is another danger, emphasized by Hugh Seton-Watson's concluding essay. The Soviets are overextended as an empire; there is unrest in Eastern Europe, Islamic revivalism to their south, the Chinese confrontation, and a stagnant economy. Further, the Soviets know that it is within the power of the U.S. to regain strategic superiority if the effort is made. Seton-Watson fears that the Kremlin will make the same decision that the German general staff reached during the crisis of 1914—that it is better to strike now than to wait, because to wait means to become weaker in comparison to one's adversaries:

Defeatists will say, we (the U.S.) lose

either way. If we don't rearm and don't arm China, the Soviets will surely win all over the world. . . . If we do rearm and arm China, the Soviets will threaten force or use force while they still have superiority. The realist will say, we can survive and win . . . if we use our resources, our brains and our courage to good effect.

The assumption that the Soviets will resort to force rather than reform or make concessions is supported by recent Soviet actions in Poland, Afghanistan, and Indochina. This is not the time, then, to cut back our political or military preparedness. The current situations are set to bring Great-power tensions to their peak. And as in the past, only strength and resolve will pass the test. □

going that scientists such as Galileo found it virtually impossible to attack the errors of Aristotelian science without appearing to attack Christianity itself. But far more culpable were the advocates of science who dogmatically sought to make themselves the sole purveyors and custodians of truth and to establish their empirical and mathematical methods as the *only* legitimate avenues to knowledge. The eagerness with which modern society seeks the opinion of scientists on various nonscientific issues—including religious questions—bespeaks the success of their endeavor. So while the Bible goes unread, magazine racks bulge with “scientific” pronouncements on God, man, and immortality.

Yet, as Leszek Kolakowski amply demonstrates in *Religion*, the acceptance of the lab coat as a substitute for clerical vestments is profoundly problematic and philosophically inconsistent. The popular understanding is that science rests upon a bedrock of knowledge and certainty (the word *science* comes from the Latin *scire*, “to know”) while religion rests merely on faith. Careful examination of both attitudes reveals almost the reverse. Because, as Kolakowski observes, the scientific method provides “no tools which enable us to perform a miraculous leap from empirical data, however numerous, to infinity,” its epistemological results are necessarily finite also: even its zealous apostle Bertrand Russell admitted that science could never give certainty, only probability. It is therefore only by an act of faith, faith in the uniform and autonomous operation of the physical universe, that atheistic scientists can posit the universal applicability of those descriptive and predictive mental constructs called physical “laws.” That such faith is repeatedly justified in specific instances and thus is easy to maintain does not alter its fundamental character: it is still faith, ineffable belief, not absolute knowledge. Categorical denial of providential miracles, then, is rooted not in any scientific “proof,” but rather, as Kolakowski notes, in a stubborn faith

Of Saints, Scientists & Supermen

Leszek Kolakowski: *Religion: If there is no God . . . On God, the Devil, Sin and other Worries of the so-called Philosophy of Religion*; Oxford University Press; New York.

Ken Wilber: *A Sociable God: A Brief Introduction to a Transcendental Sociology*; McGraw-Hill/New Press; New York.

by Bryce Christensen

Science is commonly regarded by modern commentators as a body of truths superior and antithetical to religion; few conceptions are more deeply ironic. Many astute scholars have concluded that science is the outgrowth of impulses fostered and defined by a Judeo-Christian theology in which the material universe is celebrated as a beneficent entity distinct both from the mortal men who inhabit it and from the transcendent God who created and governs it. While the pantheists of the East were bemoan-

ing the multitude of creation and trying through meditation to achieve a mystical union with the All, Occidental religionists were rejoicing in the diversity of their Lord's creation as they actively examined its wonders. Hence, as G. K. Chesterton observed, the “almost insane happiness in the eyes of the mediaeval saint” who is “separate from things and is staring at them in astonishment” contrasts sharply with “the sealed eyes” of the Buddhist contemplative who believes “there is really only one thing, and that being impersonal can hardly be astonished at itself.” It is therefore only logical that science and technology were chiefly of Western, not Oriental, origin and that most of the principals in the scientific revolution—including Copernicus, Kepler, and Newton—were fervent (if not always orthodox) believers.

Since the time of Newton, though, Western religion has had more difficulty with its heady offspring than David had with Absalom. Part of the blame for this estrangement belongs to religionists, especially those well-meaning Scholastics whose synthesis of scriptural doctrine and Greek thought was so thorough-

Mr. Christensen is an editorial intern at Chronicles.

in "intellectual patterns ... which simply cannot assimilate such an event as a 'miracle.'"

Most religionists, of course, profess merely the title appropriate also to scientists, that of "believer." However, prophets and saints—including especially those responsible for the scriptural teachings which incubated Western science—often claim certainty and actual *knowledge*, a "more sure word of prophecy," as the Apostle Peter called it. And because such prophets aver direct contact with the infinite mind of God, their claims have at least an epistemological consistency. Of course, claimants to divine revelation have often complained about the impossibility of adequately expressing their experience in finite language, have sometimes disagreed with one another—even within the Judeo-Christian tradition—and have provided no means for an unequivocal public verification of their message. Consequently, attempts to impose universal acceptance of such prophetic burdens have often resulted in inquisitorial persecution and protracted war. Until God sees fit to rend the veil and render apocalyptic judgment Himself, it therefore seems best to leave the evaluation of allegedly inspired testimonies largely to private conscience and prayer.

Unfortunately, however, many champions of science, with no consistent claim to anything but provisional faith, have arrogantly assumed the task of adjudicating publicly and absolutely all assertions of transcendent certainty. The terribly hubristic character of this adjudication is all too evident in social scientist Ken Wilber's *A Sociable God*. Despite the subtitle of his book, Wilber is miraculously certain that there really is no transcendent realm above nature, only terrestrial "transpersonal possibilities," and that therefore belief in and worship of God as an omniscient Father in Heaven is but "childish illusion, magic, myth" grounded in "wishful, defensive, compensatory belief, created in order to assuage insecurity/anxiety." Accordingly,

he rejoices in the destruction of traditional religion by rationalistic science, which he sees as "perfectly religious" in that it is "necessary, desirable, appropriate, phase-specific, and evolutionary." The last adjective is a key term for Wilber, who believes, à la Hegel and Teilhard de Chardin (at whose altars he genuflects), that mankind is evolving into a glorious new race. More specifically, Wilber has no doubt but that men will progressively discover that "God" is simply "the crowning level" of our own potential "structural adaptation," with pantheist Hindu and Buddhist sages leading the way to godhood through their "yogic enlightenment." But if he is a professed disciple of the gurus of the Orient, he is also clearly in the turbulent wake of the Westerner Nietzsche both in his demand for a superman and in his expressed willingness to cast aside "society's norms" and allow the more highly evolved individual to "norm the norms" himself in an act of radical transvaluation.

Naturally, like a demi-Nietzsche, Wilber is irreconcilably at odds with Judeo-Christian revelation and hence either throws it onto a procrustean bed of reinterpretation (Paul's theophany on the road to Damascus was just a misinterpreted "peak experience") or peremptorily discards it as primitive "myth." The Genesis account of the Fall, recognized by Kolakowski as "one of the most powerful symbols" ever employed by men "to grasp, and to make sense of, their lot and their misery," seems especially obnoxious to the god-scientist Wilber:

Postmythic men and women did not get thrown out of Eden; they grew up and walked out, and, now assuming rational and personal responsibility for a measure of their own lives, stand preparatory for the next great transformation: the God within, not the Father without.

The kind of being Wilber wants man to become is precisely "the man-god" predicted and applauded by the Devil in his conversation with Ivan in Dostoevski's

Brothers Karamazov:

'As soon as men have all denied God ... the old conception of the universe will fall of itself ... and what's more the old morality and everything will begin anew. ... Man will be lifted up with a spirit of divine Titanic pride and the man-god will appear. Extending his conquest of nature by his will and his science, man will feel such lofty joy ... that it will make up for all his old dreams of the joys of heaven.'

However, if Wilber's vaunting rhetoric only suggestively reminds the reader of Ivan and his encounter with the Devil, Kolakowski makes an actual quote from Dostoevski's character the basis for a brilliant and lucid argument which, by contrast, makes Wilber's carefully diagrammed plan for man's evolutionary ascent to "heaven," with its explanatory verbiage of pseudoscientific jargon, seem like nothing more than the blueprint for a modern Tower of Babel. Using as his point of departure Ivan's declaration that "If there is no God, everything is permissible," Kola-

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kowski demonstrates with subtle and rigorous reasoning that if there is no God, there is no truth and everything is epistemologically permissible. What this means is that empirical science is not merely a faith ("it is vain to hunt for a godless certainty"), but an empty faith at that, utterly without philosophical content. "Science," Kolakowski proves, "does not deal with reality at all, its meaning being utilitarian, rather than cognitive." Thus "rationality" does not disprove the existence of a transcendent God, as Wilber glibly assumes, since it cannot "produce any compelling grounds for a definition of *Ratio* without employing criteria whose validity depends on the previous acceptance of this very concept." After Kolakowski easily exposes the view that traditional religion emerged from "a hypothetical archaic era" and a "pre-logical mentality" as a "false theory" resting not on empirical evidence but on "purely speculative contrivances," Wilber is left in the same unenviable position as the mendacious snake in Genesis: without a leg to stand on.

Kolakowski's discussion of science and religion, of course, is that of a philosopher rather than a proselytizer, so his interest lies simply "in elucidating the *status quaestionis* and in explaining why these questions matter," not in converting the reader. Indeed, he cogently demonstrates that the principle of *credo ut intelligam* makes both epistemological nihilism and theistic doctrine logically circular and therefore "empirically invincible." (Wilber claims his "spiritual knowledge" is "publicly verifiable" in an "empirical-analytic" sense, but when he specifies the "public" for whom this verification is possible as a "Zen master and the community of participant meditators" only a real superman can resist the temptation of a most uncharitable laugh.) Kolakowski does force the reader, however, to see that the circularity of religion circumscribes meaning, that the circularity of atheism bounds only the void of existential absurdity, and that

the choice between the two is absolute and imperative: "either God or a cognitive nihilism, there is nothing in between."

Thus, though Kolakowski has no logical or scientific proof for or against the Resurrection, he can show that the doctrine of immortality is not merely a childish response to the fear of death, as Wilber facetiously posits, but is metaphysically related to the very possibility of meaning both in time and in eternity. Similarly, though his arguments cannot be used to prove that Wilber is wrong about God's absence, Kolakowski does show that all supercilious assertion of human dignity in a godless world is truly an act of wish-fulfillment for two reasons. First, such an assertion denies the "ontological permanence" of "human infirmity." Because of his understanding of the abiding and near-universal sense of man's insufficiency, Kolakowski properly identifies the act of submissive worship as the essential element of religion and hence defines "the ontological nihilism of Buddhist sages" as merely a truncated "metaphysical and moral wisdom," not the acme of religious development as Wilber would have it. The second in-

adequacy of Wilber's atheistic vision of human dignity is even more damning: all notions of dignity or worth depend finally for their content upon the very transcendence that the dismissal of God necessarily precludes. Writes Kolakowski:

The absence of God, when consistently upheld and thoroughly examined, spells the ruin of man in the sense that it demolishes or robs of meaning everything we have been used to think of as the essence of being human: the quest for truth, the distinction of good and evil, the claim to dignity, the claim to creating something that withstands the indifferent destructiveness of time.

For this reason, the announcement in the preface to *A Sociable God* that Wilber's book will help researchers "to move the psychology and sociology of religion to a new watershed" is appropriately glossed with the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." □

LIBERAL CULTURE

Sinus Delight & Computerville

Although we've been known to glance at the screen of our home computer on occasion and we do have a word processor on the premises to massage our manuscripts, we, unlike *Time* magazine, must honestly admit that the workings of microchips are a mystery to us. Now we know why. Says a recent press clipping: "Executives in California's highly competitive Silicon Valley snort a ton of cocaine a year, state narcotics agents said."

Small wonder that the famed cruelty of computer mistakes, which so often plague Social Security recipients and credit card holders, looks so inexplicable to normal, sober people. □



Reclaiming Neglected Remnants

***The Horizon of Literature*; Edited by Paul Hernadi; University of Nebraska Press; Lincoln, NE.**

Gerald L. Bruns: *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History*; Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.

Robert Scholes: *Semiotics and Interpretation*; Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.

by Gary S. Vasilash

The title of a lecture presented by Edgar Wind in 1960 as part of the Reith series and a passage therein speak clearly to a state in contemporary literary criticism. The title: "The Fear of Knowledge." The passage: "Masterpieces are not so secure in their immortality as Croce imagined. If a contingency can bring them to life, a contingency can also reduce them to shadows: for what must be learned can be forgotten."* Mr. Wind asserts, correctly, that many modern viewers of art works—and this can be extended to readers of literature—are ignorant of what is represented, and so they misperceive what they are viewing. He thinks that a viewer should be knowledgeable about the work because "Inadvertently we trivialize the works of art of the past when we take them at their face value." Mr. Wind recognizes that what he recommends—that viewers recapture "a great deal of contingent knowledge"—is "burdensome," but he insists that it is necessary not only for the proper appreciation of art, but also for the creation of true art, not the marginal trivialities that can be seen in major art museums and found on the shelves of respectable bookstores.

*Edgar Wind: *Art and Anarchy*; Alfred A. Knopf; New York, 1964.

Mr. Vasilash is associate editor of *Chronicles*.

The need for contingent knowledge is dramatically illuminated in a novel published in 1959 by Walter M. Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. A word of caution is necessary at this point. The novel tells of events relating to the monks of the fictional Albertian Order of Leibowitz in the southwestern part of this country. The book has three main sections, "Fiat Homo," "Fiat Lux," and "Fiat Voluntas Tua," which tell of three distinct time periods. The first is set six centuries beyond the present; the last some 18 centuries hence. Because of the chronology, the book is commonly termed "science fiction" and is thus dismissed from serious literary discourse. The monks are very ordinary people; undoubtedly they could work as characters in a novel set from six to 18 centuries ago. In terms of literary conventions, the book is quite orthodox; I suspect that it is very Catholic in the religious sense because Catholic Digest published an edition of the book in 1960 and because the author ends his acknowledgement with appreciation and gratitude to "Ss. Francis and Clare, and to Mary."

A case for the legitimacy of science fiction as a literary genre is cogently made by Robert Scholes in an essay, "Stillborn Literature," that appears in *The Horizon of Literature*. Scholes, as will be made clear anon, is not a man with whom I always agree; I do concur with him in this case. Scholes's topic is the state of contemporary literature. He points out that should readers ask for complexity from writers, then they ought to be prepared to expend "an extraordinary interpretive effort" in order to understand the text. Especially since *Finnegans Wake*—to which Joyce thought people should unstintingly devote themselves—certain novelists have been creating novels which are increasingly cryptic, which might explain the rise of semiotic studies in the past few years: cryptanalysts are best suited to

crack codes. Scholes says that he suspects "that the amount of satisfaction human beings are capable of deriving from language is . . . limited. There is a saturation point, beyond which no formal complexity can produce additional satisfaction." Should writers push further—"beyond the point where the coefficient of effort expended by the reader becomes greater than the coefficient of pleasure"—then it could result in "literary death." Those whom Scholes terms "competent readers" would undoubtedly be disinclined to study ciphers, as literature, I think, is supposed to provide some pleasure. Although the general state of literature is not one that can be characterized as being a collection of anagrams and other word games, there is an additional danger. Scholes maintains that "Orthodox fiction is losing its audience. It has become at once too easy to do it competently and too difficult to do it well." The following words are key: "It [orthodox fiction] is respected but not admired, praised but not cherished." What seems to exist, for the most part, are experimental works that aspire to incomprehensibility and the general run of things, products of authors who are more concerned with the bottom line and popular success than with making a contribution to that corpus of works which is known as genuine art. But if there are still some authors who are striving to create true literature, there are not many. Some of them write science fiction. There are too few for these to be dismissed out of hand. Of course, there is as much refuse—pseudosophisticated or highly salable—in that genre as in any other, perhaps more, but still, some science fiction, as Scholes points out, can be characterized as having "considerable beauty and intellectual richness."

So back to *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

Walter M. Miller, Jr. posits a nuclear war occurring in this half of the 20th