

ing chapter when Peikoff finally presents us with the philosophical solution for America: Ayn Rand's "objectivism." Peikoff's remarks become aphoristic, as though they were the irrefutable wisdoms of some Eastern mystic. Logical contradictions thus need not be addressed. Although the central role in human affairs of ethics and values is properly acknowledged, Peikoff provides no program for discovering the origins of those ethics and values and for showing how they dynamically mediate the tension between the individual and the group. Selfishness and reason as necessary active processes are applauded and the discrepancy between immediate concrete perception and later abstract conception is recognized, but Peikoff never concerns himself with how one

could possibly represent once and for all that absolute truth and reality to which he constantly refers.

**A**ll this does not mean that the book will not trigger a host of useful connections. The concepts Peikoff dashingly juggles must be dealt with by any conservative setting out to specify a moral conception of reality and existence. Still, it is important that we continue to recognize that our peculiar American landscape, however imperfect, can continue to resist tyranny as long as the various "knowledges" its reason releases do not cause the majority of us to lose faith in the original enterprise. As long as we remember the necessary balance between assertiveness and humility, we can live comfortably with reason. □

## Of Poetry, Pseudo-Psychiatry, and Prophecy

Peter Medawar: *Pluto's Republic*; Oxford University Press; New York.

Arthur Janov: *Imprints: The Lifelong Effects of the Birth Experience*; Coward-McCann; New York.

by Bryce Christensen

**A**t least since William Blake, most poets have been decidedly hostile to science. And with good reason: scientific paradigms expressed in flatly denotative formulae have greatly constricted the breadth of accepted reality, consequently deadening appreciation for the creative imagination. Indeed, when Charles Darwin confessed in his *Autobiography* that his own analytical habits had made him utterly incapable of enjoying Handel or Shakespeare, he anticipated a parallel observation made by I. A. Richards concerning the typical 20th-century reader.

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Poetry, warned Richards, is in serious trouble because moderns cannot respond emotionally to any "pseudostatements" repugnant to an empirical and mathematical Weltanschauung.

This antipoetic reduction of the culturally certified universe was hardly necessary. Sir Isaac Newton, the repeated target of Romantic scorn, was anything but a thoroughgoing empiricist. A fervent believer in Scripture, Newton abhorred the conception of the world as an autonomous machine. He supposed that angels superintended the movements of planets and metaphorically described gravity as the music of a divine Piper. Though Newton was himself not especially fond of poetry, his world view could have richly nourished a poetic sensibility. Unfortunately, post-Newtonian scientists have since used Occam's razor as a scalpel for severing the optic nerves of all eyes which see seraphs anywhere. Moreover, they have amputated all ears which hear the celestial strains: long before the cosmos was so termed, its inves-

tigators had thus become voluntarily *absurd* (from Latin *absurdus*, "deaf").

Although lacking much that Newton embraced, the modern scientific world view, with its attendant inability to bifurcate emotional and intellectual responses, is nevertheless the attenuated heritage of Judeo-Christianity. Unlike the deities of the East, the biblical God of the West is a jealous God. In the Old Testament, Joshua demanded that the people make an absolute choice between Yahweh and the pagan gods of Egypt, while in the New Testament, Jesus denied admittance to His strait and narrow way to any not willing to forsake, if necessary, even father, mother, and spouse for the Truth's sake. In the light of such exacting doctrines, the West developed an exclusive and self-consistent understanding of reality. In contrast, under the influence of religions which recognize as equal many different paths to nirvana, the Eastern nations developed eclectic philosophies, ignoring—often failing to apprehend—logical inconsistencies. The East therefore provided a most bountiful harvest of gods (India alone has tens of thousands), but wise men looking for Christ or science had to travel west.

**B**lake was not a wise man. Arguably a talented madman, he led the vanguard of poets who declared allegiance to "the Devil's party" and waged war against both Christian belief and scientific method. Like Milton's Devil, such poets sought to create their own "private systems of salvation" (Keats's phrase) rather than humbling themselves before religious doctrine or physical fact. They wanted their mysterious rainbows undisturbed by optical analysis and refused to subordinate the capricious spirits of Imagination to the angelic heralds of revelation. Unlike Milton, the Romantics failed to recognize that subjective affirmation is soon obscured in the gloomy chaos of nihilism or contorted into the serpentine coils of Blakean myth. In Blake's "four-fold vision," the scientist and the scriptorian are identified together as Urizen and cast into hellish underworld dens, while his

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"redeemed" inherit Beulah land, where all passionately held imaginative visions—even contrary ones—are equally true.

As one of the very few contemporary scientists who read Blake, Peter Medawar admires the beauty of Blake's verse, but detests the illogic and subjectivity of his epistemology. (For Urizen, beauty is not truth.) Himself a Nobel laureate in medicine, Dr. Medawar lucidly answers the antiscientific "literary propaganda of the Romantics" in the essays collected in *Pluto's Republic* by clarifying the nature of the scientific endeavor. Pure induction, advocated by Bacon (another of Blake's enemies), is a myth, he explains. Ideas simply do not inhere in facts themselves, no matter how numerous, nor is it ever possible to view bare facts, totally unmasked by the observer's preconceptions. Hence, Dr. Medawar points out, imagination is as essential to scientific inquiry as it is to poetry. A researcher always formulates his initial hypothesis in a manner which is "imaginative or logically unscripted." He then does everything he can to test the correspondence of that hypothesis to measurable reality, trying especially to contrive experiments which might disprove the hypothesis. If a single ugly fact contradicts the beautiful hypothesis, it must be discarded or modified. If a hypothesis does demonstrate predictive value and is not contradicted by any known evidence, it may then be accorded provisional faith as a "theory" or even "law," but absolute proof of its validity remains humanly impossible.

In Dr. Medawar's view, it is this tentativeness and this constant testing of imaginative construct against empirical evidence which distinguishes scientific discourse from poetic and which makes it fatuous to compound the two. Indeed, having rescued the scientist from the depths of Blake's cosmology, Dr. Medawar consigns to *his* "intellectual underworld," the *Pluto's Republic* of the title, those students of human affairs who try to pass off Beulah-land fantasizing as science. He especially indicts psychotherapists, not because their theories are

highly imaginative, but because their "doctrines are so cunningly insulated from the salutary rigours of disbelief. Instead of subjecting their speculative paradigms to systematic testing, these pseudoscientists offer "a lava-flow of *ad-hoc* explanations pour[ing] over and around all difficulties." By claiming "a privileged access" to the psyche, they pretend to help the deranged "understand" their condition, while deprecating the importance of "the notion of *cure*."

It is hard to imagine a book which more fully illustrates the psychotherapeutic inanities Dr. Medawar discusses than Arthur Janov's *Imprints*. Dr. Janov (Ph.D., not M.D.) styles himself as a scientist, and occasionally even quotes from a medical journal or two, but his wildly speculative book is ludicrously unscientific. It proposes the simplistic notion that psychological abnormalities—even susceptibility to cancer, epilepsy, and suicide—derive from the trauma of being born, the "Primal Pain" imprinted deep in our subconscious and recoverable *only* through a special psychic "rebirthing" process developed by Dr. Janov and company. We may largely ignore the influence of bad families, child abuse, or incest, since the infallible Doctor has "seen every possible combination and permutation of mental illness" and has discovered that "birth and pre-birth trauma are prepotent over almost any later kind of trauma." Naturally, though Dr. Janov provides lengthy rebirthing transcripts from his patients and interprets them for the reader, he makes no effort to test the factual accuracy of these transcripts by systematically comparing them to actual medical records of the specific pregnancies and deliveries involved. And, of course, the treatment he advocates (done exclusively by therapists trained by his Primal Institute) is expensive and "involves months and years of therapy, and even then may not be totally effective." For the sake of unborn generations, Dr. Janov argues that the primitive "stoop-squat-deliver method" of childbirth would eliminate the Primal

Pain and the resultant neuroses and cancer. ("It's that simple.") He offers no statistical evidence to support such a view, but then he was probably too busy collecting fees to collect data.

In answer to the many in the "psychological and psychiatric sciences" who he admits are skeptical about his theory, Dr. Janov avers that his concept "did not develop as a theory to be superimposed over reality, but rather evolved out of observation, and measurement of that reality." Here, in other words, we have the pretensions of the purely inductive method which Dr. Medawar demonstrates to be impossible. Here, too, we have the confusion of scientific and creative literature, for Dr. Janov elsewhere states that his theory harmonizes with images "found in poetry"—at least in the wretched doggerel written by his patients.

One of the dangers of such foolish mythologizing masquerading as science, Dr. Medawar warns, is that physical problems amenable to medical treatment may be neglected. There is another danger, though, that is ignored by both Dr. Janov and Dr. Medawar. Many "mental" problems are spiritual problems whose resolution can only be effected through repentance, love, and faith. Dr. Janov dismisses "religious conversion" as a spurious substitute for his therapy (Christianity has its own "rebirthing" process), while Dr. Medawar, having rescued the scientific half of Urizen, joins Blake in damning the religious half. This is most unfortunate, for the same Judeo-Christian heritage which made science possible in the first place could now give it the context of meaning and morality it often lacks.

Dr. Medawar does see the need for such a context: "Moral judgements," he writes, "should intrude into the execution and application of science at every level." What is to form the basis and ground for these moral judgments? Dr. Medawar is not at all clear on this issue. At one point he suggests that "a certain natural sense of the fitness of things, a feeling that is shared by most kind and

reasonable people," will be our guide. Precisely what "natural" sense does he have in mind? That which guides the very natural aborigines of Borneo or their counterparts in California communes? One suspects that instead he has in mind the very *unnatural* sense inculcated by Judeo-Christian culture, but, if so, he is philosophically cheating. He is cheating, too, when he informs the reader that recognizing the "autonomous" world of all mental artifacts "does away with subjectivism" and yet on the facing page he discredits the meaning of one of those very artifacts (a fatalistic stanza from Fitzgerald) because it does not accord with "my own view."

How man ever acquired a moral sense at all is a question Dr. Medawar sophistically evades. Certainly, he does not recognize in man a unique ontological or spiritual status. Dr. Medawar sees only chemical determinism at work in man's origin and denies him any "privileged axis" in nature. With an equivocal analogy Dr. Medawar suggests that ethics differs from physics merely in the way that topology differs from Euclidean geometry, and to those who are dubious about the use of *animal studies* as a guide for human behavior he rejoins that we must remember that without such studies "there would be no penicillin, no insulin, no transplantation." Small wonder that he sees metaphysics as merely the "compost that can nourish the growth of scientific ideas."

The truth, which Dr. Medawar knows, is that science simply cannot yield moral or cognitive meaning, since "inferences having to do with the first and last things cannot be deduced from propositions containing only empirical furniture." Unfortunately, he repeatedly forgets this and pronounces as scientific fact his own irreligious opinions. Thus, for instance, he declares that a statistical survey calling into question the efficacy of prayer represents the only valid approach to the issue. Similarly, he finds that the existence of certain diseases should make "even the most devout question the existence of a benevolent deity" instead of

reinforcing their consciousness of man's Fall. Especially proud that science has "liberated" man from the "superstition" of a Second Coming, he rejoices at the secular prospect of "a future in this world." (No evidence exists, of course, to disprove this Christian doctrine, and should the Son of man suddenly appear one day in clouds of glory as He promised, Dr. Medawar would doubtless advance a new and quite viable hypothesis: "Well, I'll be damned!")

**B**ut what has the vista of millennia without a Final Judgment actually inspired? What besides widespread ennui, drug abuse, random sex, and teenage suicide? Even Dr. Medawar concedes "the decay of values . . . in this modern world." Moreover, a universe operating only according to the principles thus far discovered by science is necessarily temporal and therefore does not allow anything—not mankind as a race, not the very galaxies—to avoid eventual ex-

inction. Time without eternity, as T. S. Eliot perceived, ultimately offers but two things: "Dung and death." The Second Coming, a darkly threatening myth to Dr. Medawar, was (and still is for many) a belief which endows life with drama and meaning. And surely it is the craving for meaning which above all else afflicts modern man. As Dr. Medawar correctly observes, the popularity of Teilhard de Chardin's hysterical mysticism is "a symbol of hunger, a hunger for answers to questions of the kind that science does not profess to be able to answer." Despite all that scientists have done to enhance modern technology, medicine, and agriculture, they have not forestalled the fulfillment of the bleak prophecy of an ancient shepherd named Amos:

Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. □

## LIBERAL CULTURE

### *Night School in New Jersey*

An adult education program in New Jersey recently published a catalog of its course offerings. Included are such things as "The Gambler," which should not be confused with anything by Dostoevski. Its description opens: "On visits to Atlantic City, do you find yourself playing only the slot machines because you don't know the basic rules of the other games?" One of the more interesting offerings is the exclamatory "Living Single!" Its description advises harried housewives and sluggish salesmen that:

Living alone CAN BE more acceptable and satisfying! But—you can also explore some current options for engaging in a successful relationship. There will be dialogue, discussions, and experiential techniques for recycling your lifestyle. Enrollment is limited to the first 25 males and 25 females! The class will meet at the Holiday Inn.



A note to the course description says that the graduates of the course will be invited to a "Let's Get Acquainted" session that will also be held at the before-mentioned motel.

It doesn't take a graduate from "The Gambler" to know that the odds are better than even that the *a posteriori* session will be redundant for a number of the 50 lifestyle recyclers, many of whom will have enrolled in the course that follows in the catalog: "The Law of Divorce & Marriage." □



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# Speak No Evil

Michael Straight: *After Long Silence*; W. W. Norton; New York.

by John E. Haynes

In *After Long Silence* Michael Straight reveals that he was a member of a communist cell and cooperated with a Soviet espionage network while working for the U.S. government. These revelations caused a brief stir in the media when Straight's memoir appeared because Straight's socially prominent family founded and owned *The New Republic*, and Straight edited the journal from 1948 until his family sold the magazine in 1956.

Straight explains that he joined a communist student cell at Cambridge University in the mid-1930's and was recruited to serve as a Soviet spy in America. He returned to the U.S. in 1937 and used his family connections to gain a position in the State Department. Subsequently, he moved to an office in the Interior Department where political speeches for the White House were prepared, and later returned to the State Department. Throughout this period Straight met secretly with a Russian who was his contact with Soviet intelligence. Straight asserts that he broke off the relationship in late 1941.

Straight says that when he became editor of *The New Republic* he was an opponent of communism and Soviet expansion, though he did not go to the authorities until 1963. (Even at that late date, his information led to uncovering at least two Soviet spies.) In the ideological civil war among American liberals that followed World War II, Straight, after some hesitation, sided with the anti-communist wing against the Popular Front faction gathered behind Henry Wallace. In his memoir, Straight is emphatic that under his leadership *The New Republic* was both liberal and anticom-

munist. However, an examination of *The New Republic's* coverage of the Whittaker Chambers-Alger Hiss affair during the period of Straight's editorship illustrates the limits of Straight's version of anti-communist liberalism.

In 1948 Chambers testified before House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) that he had managed a ring of Soviet spies which included Alger Hiss, a former high official in the State Department and, at that time, the head of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace. Hiss's denial of Chambers's testimony developed into a cause célèbre and led to Hiss's conviction for perjury.

Straight's experience with communism and Soviet espionage obviously gave him a special perspective on the case. Straight knew the falsity of the widely believed

"[T]his memoir offers no serious evidence . . . Straight has complained that he is not and never was a spy. I'm inclined to believe him . . . the main result of his book is to strengthen the myths of the Cold War without adding new evidence."

—Victor Navasky  
*The Progressive*

notions that a man of Hiss's blue-blooded background could never be a spy and that the claim of Soviet espionage networks in Washington was only the product of paranoid anticommunist hysteria. In addition to his knowledge of the context for the case, Straight also relates in *After Long Silence* that after Chambers's testimony he phoned Hiss to get his reaction. Recalling that conversation, Straight states, "I sensed then that Chambers was telling the truth, and that remote as America had been from the anguish of Europe, there had indeed been Soviet agents in high positions in our government."

In his memoir, Straight contrasts his attitude in *The New Republic* with that of *The Nation*, the chief rival for the position of spokesman for liberalism.

The editors of *The Nation* were perfectly clear as to where they stood on the charges made by Elizabeth Bentley

[who also testified regarding a communist spy ring in Washington] and Whittaker Chambers. 'Any neurotic exhibitionist who can claim to have been a Communist,' said *The Nation*, 'is now assured of absolution, soul-satisfying publicity and, probably, more material rewards.' My signed editorial in *The New Republic* was less palatable to most liberals. 'In general,' I wrote, 'we believe the outline of Elizabeth Bentley's story is largely accurate.'

Straight, however, quotes himself out of context. In the original the passage is immediately followed by the following comments:

The Bentley testament, if true, indicates that the Russians may have got by espionage what the British and our other allies got by sitting at a table in meet-

ings of the Combined Chiefs of Staff and other inter-allied boards. The testimony of Chambers, if true, demonstrated that certain government officials in the early thirties exercised their constitutional rights to be simultaneously members of the government and members of the Communist Party. . . . All this has seemed to us self-evident for some time.

As Straight quotes his words in *After Long Silence*, the passage suggests that in *The New Republic* he affirmed Bentley's and Chambers's testimony. But in their proper context, the words lead to a deprecation of the significance of their testimony.

In the editorial, Straight also writes that when Hiss appeared before HUAC in response to Chambers, he "cleared himself in the eyes of most of the committee." Of those named by Chambers, Straight said: "many of these men we be-