

C.E.M. Joad, Richard Weaver and the Decline of Western Civilization

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THE HISTORY OF IDEAS is filled with unusual coincidences. One such coincidence was the publication in the same year—1948—by two authors, one English and one American, of books reaching very similar conclusions about the decline of Western civilization, and based, moreover, on a similar analysis of the causes of that decline. The writers were C.E.M. Joad (1891-1953), a professor of philosophy at the University of London, and Richard M. Weaver (1910-1963), a teacher of English and rhetoric at the University of Chicago. So far as I am aware, the two men were not acquainted. Weaver's work, *Ideas Have Consequences*,¹ had a wider influence than Joad's book, which was entitled *Decadence: A Philosophical Inquiry*,² but Joad's was an equally powerful and in some ways philosophically deeper analysis of the spiritual and cultural crisis that these writers perceived in their respective societies.

By the late 1940's, there was already considerable evidence of moral and cultural decline in Europe and America. In addition to two devastating world wars, the holocaust and the spread of communist ideology, Western societies had experienced a serious deterioration in moral values, the deadening effect of a

machine-driven way of life, the politics of the mass man and the Leviathan state, the collapse of recognizable standards of beauty in art and architecture, a weakening of educational standards, the marginalization of religion and the dominance of a materialistic culture based on jejune entertainment and instant gratification. It was clear that these conditions had not arisen all at once in the middle of the twentieth century. The question that Joad and Weaver addressed in the aftermath of World War II was whether there was something in the history of ideas that could help to explain this apparent breakdown in the values that had been central to western culture.

I

Cyril E.M. Joad was a graduate of Balliol College, Oxford, and taught for many years at Birkbeck College, University of London, where he was head of the philosophy department. His published works, including comprehensive treatises on metaphysics and ethics, were written in a marvellously clear and comprehensible style. Yet they never gained the attention they deserved, probably because his premises directly contradicted those of the positivist and analytic schools that have dominated English philosophy for most of the twentieth century.

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The central thesis of *Decadence: A Philosophical Inquiry* is that spiritual rootlessness, moral disintegration, and intellectual incoherence result from the absence of adequate metaphysical principles. Joad's career was devoted to defending the existence of a real order of being, including a realm of objective values—"objective" in the sense of having an existence not dependent on one's feelings and subjective attitudes. The values of truth and beauty, for example, transcend the experience by which we apprehend them. This conclusion, Joad argues, is consistent with "the *philosophia perennis* which, starting from Plato and Aristotle, running through the neo-Platonists and subsequently reinforced and enriched by Christianity, has been the dominant common philosophy of European culture."³

Joad accepted the position of philosophical realism, which holds that our acts of consciousness are always in contact with something outside of ourselves, and that this "something other" is unaffected by mind's awareness of it. Further, he accepted the real existence of universal ideas. We use general propositions to describe the resemblances among objects. These propositions embody universal truths. "A universal is something which is able to characterise a number of different particulars."⁴ Whiteness, humanity, justice, and triangularity are universals. A universal, not being an object experienced by sense perception, cannot be known entirely by sense experience. Modern philosophy has tended to reject the reality of universals and to assert that all abstract ideas are, in fact, ideas of particular things ultimately derived from the senses. There is no "whiteness"; there are only white things. This was the position of the medieval nominalists and their modern empirical successors. But if all knowledge is reducible to personal experience or sensation, there can be no moral or aesthetic value other than what seems valuable to each person

based on what he feels at any given moment.

For centuries, Joad asserts, the *philosophia perennis* has been under attack. Empiricism attempted to base knowledge on a combination of sensation and tautological constructs. The Enlightenment elevated "progress" into a cosmic law and regarded man's unaided reason as the only source of value. Spokesmen for evolutionary biology identified value with whatever happens to evolve. Freudian psychology regarded man's aspirations toward moral value as sublimations of instinctive urges. The net result of all of these tendencies is "[t]he subjectivist analysis of moral, religious, aesthetic and scientific judgements according to which the mind, when judging and thinking makes contact not with external 'objects' but only with the projections of its own activity...."⁵ In this self-centered and self-indulgent refusal to recognize the world as it really is (and particularly the world of universal ideas and values), Joad finds the essential core of the notion of decadence.

Joad argues that there are permanent spiritual values, of which truth, beauty, and goodness are the most important. These values, though non-material, are present in the changing world of sensory things; and man, through his spiritual faculty, can attain at least some awareness of them. "We experience this awareness pre-eminently in the enjoyment of art and natural beauty, in the recognition and pursuit of truth in history and science and mathematics and philosophy and in imaginative literature, in the effort to do our duty for its own sake and in the service of God and our neighbour."⁶ Although manifested in our sensory world, the permanent values are other than and independent of that world. In epistemology, the search for truth implies a recognition that there is a real object of knowledge. Similarly, in moral philosophy, the very notion of obligation (what "ought"

to be done) implies the existence of objective moral values; otherwise, there would be nothing to make conduct obligatory. Empiricism, positivism, pragmatism, and similar doctrines lead to relativism, which denies both the objectivity of the moral law and the existence of objective limits on personal conduct. The modern empirical tradition, which holds that all knowledge results from sense experience and that there is no other order of reality, has a devastating practical effect, since the values inherent in the moral order provide people with principles to live by.

In *A Critique of Logical Positivism*, published in 1950, Joad systematically attacked the premises of positivism and defended his version of the traditional philosophy of universal values. Even simple physical objects, he argues, cannot be reduced solely to constructions from sense contents; a table is partly a mental construct, and is recognized for what it is through a rational process of analogy and resemblance, aided by the complex findings and mathematical theorems of science. When we come to moral values, the consequences of positivism and other subjectivist theories become more serious. If, as positivists contend, a statement that X is good or bad is only a verbal ejaculation of emotion, morality is both irrational and wholly subjective. But the premise is erroneous. "This is good" is not the same as "I like this." "This is good" is both cognitive and normative; it gives us objective information about something other than ourselves. This is the critical point for Joad: in moral discourse, we are taken beyond sensory and subjective feeling into an objective realm of value. "The universe contains an objective moral order which subsists independently of our awareness of it...."⁷ When I do my duty, I subject myself to this moral order.

It is no accident, according to Joad, that subjectivism, hedonism, and skepti-

cism are found together, since each has its origin in the view that experience is valuable for its own sake. The accompanying social characteristics are love of luxury, weariness, superstition, and an unhealthy preoccupation with the self. The subjectivist approach weakens the ability to think clearly and to communicate effectively. Judgments of approval, in the absence of standards of value, become little more than reactions to present stimuli. Either we will value nothing at all, or we will value experience in itself. This is precisely the condition of decadence. It manifests itself in exclusive concentration on material things, insensitivity to beauty, ignorance of history, a utilitarian attitude to education and indifference to religion. All of these defects are present in modern Western civilization.

Joad, who began his career as a skeptic, became a convert to orthodox Anglican Christianity late in life and wrote a book defending Christian belief.⁸ In a sense, this conversion was merely a further development of Joad's Platonic realism. Our direct experience of mind teaches us that there is a supernatural order; we know, for example, that mind can in many cases control matter. Mind is brought into being in consequence of the incorporation of the soul in a physical body. In Joad's Platonic theory, mind is the active principle that mediates between the universal forms and particulars. No particular configuration of matter on any particular occasion can exhaust the universal values of order, coherence, resemblance, and regularity. These universal values, therefore, cannot be wholly supplied by ourselves—they are outside of us and transcendent. The transcendent must accordingly become immanent as a necessary ground of our experience. The Incarnation is the most dramatic example of this principle in action. In ethical philosophy, moreover, it seems obvious that the facts of moral consciousness (the

opposition between “is” and “ought”) cannot be explained by material causation. The only satisfactory basis for moral experience is therefore a religious one. Joad could see, of course, that the intellectual climate of the twentieth century was hostile to religion in general and to the Church of England in particular. This hostility was consistent with the antipathy to universal values that Joad had traced in his philosophical writings, and which he blamed for many of the defects of contemporary culture.

Although Joad’s thought tended toward Platonism in metaphysics, in political theory he did not accept Plato’s subordination of the individual to the state. Decadence, for Joad, is manifested politically in the love of power for its own sake—in particular, the aggrandizement and worship of the state. In contemporary political theory, planning and efficiency are seen as ends in themselves. There is a real danger that society will evolve toward Huxley’s “Brave New World,” in which material comfort will be offered to everyone in exchange for the abolition of freedom and initiative. “The more functions the State takes over from the individual, the fewer the individual becomes capable of exercising for himself.”⁹ Joad predicts that the rise of the bureaucratic state will reflect a division of society between intellectuals (a more accurate term would be James Burnham’s “managerial elite”) and drones, who are willing to leave government to the managers in return for security and pleasure. Voters will therefore welcome increased dependence on government for health, education, welfare, and the other burdens of life, so long as they have access to the bread and circuses of everyday enjoyment. This was a wholly accurate prediction of the future development of the welfare state. The Leviathan state was part and parcel of the cultural decline that Joad saw emerging from the materialistic conformity of contemporary soci-

ety: “a gilded sty for everybody.”¹⁰

In his last book, *Folly Farm*, written by Joad in 1953, when he knew that he had only a short time to live, he summarized many of his concerns about philosophical and educational decline. His reflections on the decline of Western culture were somber. On the last page of his last work, Joad concluded that our age is “an age without art, without beauty and without genius.... What is more, it is exceedingly unlikely that, short of a major catastrophe ushering in a new Dark Age, creativity will return to the arts.”¹¹ Joad saw the youth of his time as spiritually rootless and intellectually adrift because there were no solid principles to guide them. The moral principles of Christianity had survived for a time in the nineteenth century, but they too, when deprived of their metaphysical foundation, had fallen into desuetude. “In periods of strain and crisis, the habitual way of life, lacking any foundation in principle, crumbles and finally collapses.”¹²

II

In the same year that Joad’s *Decadence* appeared, Richard Weaver published his best-known work, *Ideas Have Consequences*, in which he developed a theory of decline strikingly similar to Joad’s. Weaver was born in North Carolina in 1910 and studied at the University of Kentucky, followed by graduate work at Vanderbilt, where he was strongly influenced by his teacher John Crowe Ransom and other “Southern Agrarians.” Weaver taught for most of his career at the University of Chicago, and wrote a number of books and essays exploring the theme of philosophical, social, and educational decline. He was an associate editor of *Modern Age* and a contributor to *National Review* and other conservative publications. After Weaver’s death, Henry Regnery wrote that *Ideas Have Consequences* was one of the three books which provided the intellectual basis for the modern

American conservative movement (the other two being Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* and Kirk's *The Conservative Mind*).

In *Ideas Have Consequences*, Weaver, like Joad, starts with the premise that true knowledge is the knowledge of universals. The fourteenth-century nominalists, Weaver argues, in attacking the objective reality of universal ideas, initiated a dangerous intellectual trend. The nominalists asserted that so-called "universals" (whiteness, justice, etc.) do not have independent existence but are merely names for a collection of individual things. If nominalism is correct, there are no objective values such as the good, the true, or the just. All of these things are merely names for kinds of conduct of which we happen to approve. The nominalist position eventually led to a philosophically empty form of radical empiricism or positivism, which replaced the reality apprehended by reason with impressions received by the senses. This philosophical error ultimately ends in subjectivism, relativism, and the denial of truth itself. This is the same conclusion that Joad had reached.

True knowledge, for Weaver (as for Joad), is knowledge of forms, essences, and principles rather than of the sensory and the transient. Knowledge, in other words, is a product of reason; and belief in universals and principles is inseparable from the life of reason. The empirical tradition, in its concentration on the particulars of subjective experience, has ended by affirming that immediate experience is an end in itself. Again, this was precisely the conclusion reached independently by Joad. Weaver calls this attitude the "cult of presentism."¹³ The desire for immediacy is a false and dangerous idol because the present has only an infinitesimal existence, and has no meaning apart from the past and future, to which the present must be connected by the reality of history, memory, and rational expectation. The cult of presentism is,

in fact, a characteristic of the barbarian, who regards forms, essences, and universals as irrelevant to his desire for immediate gratification. The barbarian rejects the cultivation of the intellect and seeks only power or physical comfort.

The quest for immediacy puts society on the path of cultural and moral decline, in which we can no longer recognize evil and depravity. Weaver cites as examples of the "ravages of immediacy" the failure to oppose obscenity, and the abandonment of honor and of respect for privacy. The craving for personal publicity is so extreme that it makes a virtue of public manifestations of private grief. Standards of propriety are abandoned because they might inhibit self-expression. (Today's television talk shows, on which the squalid details of private life are displayed for the prurient interest of viewers, provide additional evidence for the validity of Weaver's analysis.) The world, Weaver wrote, "has been engulfed by a vast demoralization.... Its most permanent feature is perhaps materialism, but this has been greatly abetted by that compound of humbug, pretense, and vulgarity which can be labeled 'Hollywood values.'"¹⁴

Democracy may be a workable model for political relationships, but cannot be a principle of order in social and cultural life because in those spheres men are decidedly not equal. In education, for example, there will inevitably be selection in accordance with ability and dedication. The attempt by educational progressives to deny distinction and excellence will lead to mediocrity, as evidenced by the deterioration of public education, which Weaver could perceive as early as the 1940s. For Weaver, the egalitarian dogmas of "progressive" education manifest the contemporary rebellion against fundamental and long-held beliefs about man and the world, and, indeed, against the very structure of reality.¹⁵ Since Weaver's time, his warnings

about educational decline have been proven correct: lower standards, "social promotion," the "self-esteem" movement, labor union monopoly, absence of discipline, the stupefying effect of television and parental apathy have taken America's public schools even farther down the road toward mediocrity than Weaver could have foreseen.

A central theme of Weaver's work is that the values embodied in the Southern tradition are the values of Western civilization, and that the hostile moral and cultural forces threatening the nation today are the same forces which, since the War between the States, have sought to destroy the heritage of the South. In Weaver's analysis, the Southern tradition was rooted in four interlocking historical characteristics. First was a feudal theory of society which accepted social hierarchy, privilege accompanied by social responsibility, and an obligation of stewardship for the land. The Southern tradition valued local sovereignty, property rights, manners, conversation, hospitality, and loyalty, all of which had essentially feudal roots. Second was a code of chivalry. Southerners were never under any illusions about human nature, and understood that the self-discipline of a chivalric code was necessary to alleviate the innate brutishness of man. Third, the ideal of the gentleman. The gentleman followed the rules of noblesse oblige—that is, he had privileges but he also had heavy responsibilities, particularly for family, workers and others entrusted to his care. Fourth and not least important was religious faith. Religiousness did not mean that the believer had to belong to any particular sect, but it did mean that he must have a sense of a higher Power and of the divine order of being. At the heart of all of these values (which, for Weaver, were those of Western civilization as well as the southern United States) was the virtue of self-discipline, which taught men that

they had certain responsibilities that had to be fulfilled; that good character came through rigorous training; and that the most basic commandments are those of God. When the discipline of the permanent values is forgotten, the citizens become spoiled, arrogant, and impious. This is the condition of decadence.

As a student and defender of the Old South, Weaver knew that the traditional Southerner was an individualist who was jealous of his liberty and sensitive to issues involving personal honor, but who also had a strong sense of community, rooted in local and regional loyalties. Weaver uses the term "social bond individualism" to describe this attitude. "It battles unremittingly for individual rights, while recognizing that these have to be secured within the social context."¹⁶ While property rights are vital, for example, the ownership of property carries with it certain social responsibilities. Nature is the gift of the Creator, to be venerated and not abused. Land is to be conserved and nurtured, not despoiled and paved over in the name of "progress."

The fundamental value that pervades Weaver's writings is "piety," an attitude he believed was central to the culture of the South. Piety (*pietas*) was a Roman concept that included respect for nature, the family, ancestral customs and gods. Weaver's formulation placed particular emphasis on nature, neighbors, and the past. Nature is the substance of the world—the natural order of things, which is part of the divine order. As the creation of God, nature ought to be venerated rather than "fought, conquered and changed according to any human whims."¹⁷

Regard for neighbors is simply a manifestation of Christianity and chivalry. Men have real obligations toward one another, not just rights and demands. This means that the differences between people must also be recognized. All civilized societies require distinctions and differentiation.

The attempt to force everyone into an identical mold will lead to disorder, alienation, and envy. For example, Weaver regarded the notion of equality of the sexes, in the contemporary sense of functional interchangeability, as misguided and degrading to women. It is perhaps just as well that Weaver was spared the dismal spectacle of pregnant women on combat ships, and the United States Supreme Court ordering the Virginia Military Institute to admit females.

A further aspect of piety is respect for the past. Tradition binds us to our ancestors and inspires us to pass on our inheritance to our descendants. When respect for the past disappears, there is no longer anything to bequeath to the future. The society becomes immersed in the present. The erosion of piety is thus simply another aspect of the cult of presentism. Perhaps the most obvious aspect of cultural decline is the failure to teach history. Without historical memory, neither culture nor moral order is possible. Our very identity is at stake: "Moral nature cannot be ordered except with reference to one's identity, which has its formation through history...."¹⁸ Ignorance of history is barbarism in the strict sense of the word. It can destroy a civilization as thoroughly as the Goths and Vandals destroyed the Roman Empire.

As a result of his intense dislike of large-scale modern industrialism and his horror at the demonic technology of modern war, Weaver developed a distrust not only of industrialism but also of science itself. Weaver called science "the most powerful force of corruption in our age."¹⁹ This was an attitude that he shared with the Southern Agrarians, but it was not well thought out. It is important to separate the excesses of industrialism from the theory and practice of science. Science is an exciting adventure of the human mind. It takes the principles of mathematics, which, as Plato argued, are essentially spiritual, and applies them to

material reality in an effort to understand the world we inhabit. Science teaches us discipline, objectivity, precision. In its highest and best formulations, it also teaches humility, reverence; and awe before the sublime complexities of the universe. What Weaver and the Agrarians legitimately complained about was "scientism"—the misuse of science by evil or misguided men to abuse nature, to impair freedom and to manipulate man and society through social engineering. These abuses are always rationalized as the necessary conditions of "progress."

Weaver's political theory looked to the past for inspiration—in particular, to the principles that animated the American founding. The Founders knew that the nature of man was "capable of perverting the best of institutions to wicked purposes."²⁰ They therefore designed a system of checks and balances to restrain power. The most important of these restraints was the federal system, which left the States as sovereign entities and delegated to the central government only specific and limited powers. The result of the War between the States was a federal government that was the arbiter of its own authority—a constitutional absurdity and a recipe for tyranny. Disregard for history and constitutional authority has also had its impact on the practice of politics. The disappearance of objective criteria of justice and civic virtue gives rise to Jacobinism, resentment, and rebellion against every kind of distinction and superiority. Mass democracies distrust genuine ability and intellectual excellence. While equality before the law is a necessary condition of a just society, Weaver deplores the tendency to press for equality of condition regardless of merit—a tendency which has gone even further since Weaver's death.

Weaver, like Joad, urges the restoration of metaphysical right—the world of "ought." What is the foundation for such a restoration? The victory of nominalism

has left little to build on, but our society has retained virtually intact at least one institution: "the right of private property, which is, in fact, the last metaphysical right remaining to us."²¹ The right of private property is metaphysical in the sense that it does not depend on social utility but rests on the identity of the owner with the owned. Property has an enduring structure that affirms transcendence; it embodies the philosophical concept of substance. It expresses the direct conjunction between man and nature: the imprint of man's spirit on material reality. At a practical level, it offers a sanctuary for the individual against the tyranny of the state. The ownership of property forces us, moreover, to go beyond the cult of presentism and take a long-term view of things, which is part of our obligation of piety.

Weaver's solution was the widespread ownership of independent farms, local businesses, and other small properties. This "distributist" model may seem utopian in an era of multibillion dollar mergers and global conglomerates. Yet it is a hopeful sign that, half a century after Weaver wrote, property rights are still protected in the United States to a greater extent than elsewhere. Threats to property are apparent, however, in the form of excessive taxation and regulation. And there are few signs of the metaphysical restoration proposed by Joad and Weaver, whether based on property rights or anything else. Western societies have moved even further toward materialism, subjectivism, and dependence on intrusive government. The constant bombardment of our senses with obscenity, noise, and vulgarity reaches a new nadir with each passing decade. Nor is there any serious and effective movement in Western universities to restore the primacy of the universal values they were created to protect. Indeed, the dominance of deconstructionism, "gender studies," "multiculturalism," and other

intellectual perversities threatens to destroy whatever is left of the *philosophia perennis* that Joad and Weaver fought to preserve.

To the end, however, Richard Weaver remained an optimist,²² perhaps because, as M.E. Bradford suggested, a gentleman should always be an optimist. In this respect, as Bradford observed, Weaver followed the Agrarians. In their "Statement of Principles," the Agrarians noted that if a society is suffering under excessive industrialization or any other "evil dispensation," it must find a way to throw it off. "To think that this cannot be done is pusillanimous. And if the whole community, section, race, or age thinks it cannot be done, then it has simply lost its political genius and doomed itself to impotence."²³ Weaver and the Agrarians did not believe that we were doomed to impotence.

III

In contrast to the traditional principles of objectivity, truth and self-discipline espoused by Joad and Weaver, the prevailing values today are egalitarianism, compassion, and hedonism. These are "soft" values that require neither discipline nor intellectual rigor. They rest upon sentiment and sensation, not reason. They reflect a society in which true excellence and distinction are regarded with suspicion, everyone seeks to shift blame to someone else, and government is expected to make people happy. We are the spoiled children of modernity who believe that luxuries are an entitlement and look for scapegoats to conceal our own defects. These attitudes are symptomatic of a society in decline, and they are likely to lead sooner or later to a diminution of freedom. As Weaver said, "An ancient axiom of politics teaches that a spoiled people invite despotic control."²⁴

A standard response to these concerns is to point out that the United States is the world's only superpower,

with a dynamic economy that creates millions of new jobs and pumps out an ever-increasing supply of novel products to meet the needs, or to satiate the appetites, of consumers around the globe. It is true that our military power can be projected across vast distances with devastating effects upon real or imagined enemies. But this was also the case with Rome, Spain, and numerous other "great powers." The external trappings of power did not save those empires from collapse. A superabundance of wealth produces an atmosphere of boundless indulgence that enervates the soul and undermines the discipline and unity which hold a nation together. It is not prudent, therefore, to hope that our civilization will be preserved by worshipping the Dow Jones Industrial Average.

The preservation of a free republic will require an alert and intelligent populace. As Jefferson said, a people cannot be both ignorant and free. A renewal of civic competence will require a wholesale renovation of the public school system that

the citizenry, pampered and dumbed-down by decades of educational malfeasance, is unlikely to tolerate easily. Similarly, on the political front, in our ignorance and short-sightedness, we have made ourselves increasingly dependent on government to supply our wants. Increased dependence, in turn, leads to corruption, and ultimately to despotism.

Under these circumstances, it is difficult to be hopeful about the chances for a renewal of intellectual and moral order. Yet there are signals in the work of both Joad and Weaver to which we may respond. Joad found comfort in teaching the perennial wisdom of the past and in religious faith. Weaver looked to the continuing respect for property rights and urged a return to the principles of the American founding. Ideas still have consequences. If wrong ideas have driven us in the direction of materialism and demoralization, the restoration of universal values can bring us back toward the rationality and grace that Joad and Weaver sought.

1. Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago, 1948). 2. C.E.M. Joad, *Decadence: A Philosophical Inquiry* (London, 1948). 3. *Decadence*, 423. 4. C.E.M. Joad, *Guide to Philosophy* (New York, 1937), 259. 5. *Decadence*, 424. 6. *Decadence*, 422. 7. C.E.M. Joad, *A Critique of Logical Positivism* (Chicago, 1950), 134-135. 8. C.E.M. Joad, *The Recovery of Belief: A Restatement of Christian Philosophy* (London, 1952). 9. *Decadence*, 404. 10. C.E.M. Joad, *Folly Farm* (London, 1954), 53-54, 66. The image of the sty is reminiscent of Toynbee's comment that "the guests at Circe's banquet had soon found themselves penned in Circe's sty." There are interesting points of resemblance between Toynbee's theory of moral decline and Joad's. See Toynbee, *A Study of History*, IX (Oxford 1939), 610-612. 11. *Folly Farm*, 153. 12. *Decadence*, 43. 13. Richard Weaver, *Visions of Order: The Cultural Crisis of Our Time* (Wilmington, Del., 1995

[1964]), 48. 14. *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, ed. George M. Curtis III and James J. Thompson, Jr. (Indianapolis, 1987), 27. 15. *Visions of Order*, 115-120. 16. *Southern Essays*, 82. Weaver's position is consistent with traditional natural law theory. "The individual person and the community are ontologically so related to each other that they can have no existence independently of each other." Heinrich Rommen, *The Natural Law* (Indianapolis, 1998 [1947]), 209-210. 17. *Southern Essays*, 221. 18. *Visions of Order*, 44. 19. Richard Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay* (Chicago, 1989 [1968]), 15. 20. *Southern Essays*, 231. 21. *Ideas Have Consequences*, 131. 22. See M.E. Bradford, "The Agrarianism of Richard Weaver: Beginnings and Completions," in Joseph Scotchie, ed., *The Vision of Richard Weaver* (New Brunswick, 1995), 141. 23. *I'll Take My Stand* (LSU Press reprint, 1983), xlviii. 24. *Ideas Have Consequences*, 91.

Remembering Robert Drake (1930-2001)

James A. Perkins

WHEN I WAS ALREADY well into an earlier draft of this essay, a reconsideration of the work of Robert Drake, I got a call from Dr. D. Allan Carroll, Head of the Department of English at the University of Tennessee, telling me that Dr. Drake had died on Saturday, June 30, 2001. At that point, I decided to combine reminiscences about Drake along with the critical discussion of his work as both a revaluation and a celebration of his achievement.

The reminiscences are in the form of verbal snapshots, word pictures, sketches of particular personal moments connected with my understanding of Drake. These italicized vignettes are interspersed in what is an only slightly more formal essay. Such snapshots are particularly appropriate within a discussion of Drake's works since he himself included photos by his uncle, W.L. Drake (whom he fictionalized as "Uncle John"), as well as by his former students Jeanne Holloway-Ridley and Michael O'Brien, in both *The Home Place* and the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Amazing Grace* (1990). The last two volumes of Drake's works also derive their titles from his uncle's love of photography. *The Picture Frame and Other Stories* does not contain the eponymous

story of Drake's "father's oldest brother, Uncle John, who was a Methodist preacher [and] was an avid photographer." That story is part of section one, "the Drake Past," in *The Home Place*.¹ Uncle John's request that everyone gather together in a pose before his camera "for the record" suggested the fitting title of the summary volume *For the Record: A Robert Drake Reader*.²

Writing a revaluation of the works of Robert Drake to appear in the pages of *Modern Age* is a little like preaching to the choir. The readers of this magazine should be well aware of his work. He served as an associate editor of *Modern Age*, and over the years the magazine has published 20 of his stories and memoirs as well as numerous essays and reviews. *Modern Age* readers are probably aware that Drake never planned to be a writer. As he told *Contemporary Authors*: "[I] never expected to write fiction.... Nobody could have been more surprised than I."³

Drake graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a B.A. from Vanderbilt in 1952 and took an M.A. at Vanderbilt in 1953 before going to Yale University. There he earned an M.A. in 1954 and a Ph.D. in 1955. At Vanderbilt Drake wrote a thesis on the short stories of Saki. At Yale he wrote a dissertation under Fredrick Pottle, which he said was a "gimmicky reading of the various poems of Keats, and of course it's never seen the

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