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A TALE OF WONDER

OLIVE SCHREINER was born in Basutoland in 1855. Her novel, *The Story of an African Farm*, written during her teens, she brought to England in 1881, submitting it to George Meredith, who was then a reader for an English publisher. The book came out in 1883 and claimed the admiration of all its readers, bringing a measure of fame to the author. Then, in 1891, her *Dreams* was published, consisting of eleven "poems in prose," as her later American publisher called the work. He was Thomas Mosher. He chose eight selections of *Dreams* to print in 1919, in a tiny but exquisitely designed volume.

There is a quality in everything that Olive Schreiner wrote that is almost completely lacking in present-day writing. You could call it transcendence, or '`transcendent values." In all her little tales there is a sacrificial element which grows out of reaching beyond ordinary hopes and longing. This is best illustrated in "The Hunter," which first appeared in *The Story of an African Farm*, but a reaching beyond is characteristic of all the other stories.

In "A Dream of Wild Bees," a mother, heavy with child, dreams that a swarm of wild bees sweeps into her room; they take on the aspect of human creatures and one after another murmurs to her, "Let me lay my hand upon thy side where the child sleeps. If I touch him he shall be as I."

One promises Health to the child, another offers Wealth, still another Fame. The portraiture of a desirable future for the child goes on and on. As told in Olive Schreiner's incandescent prose:

> And the mother lay breathing steadily, but in the brain-picture they pressed closer to her.
>
> "Let me touch the child," said one, "for I am Love. If I touch him he shall not walk through life alone. In the .greatest dark, when he puts out his hand he shall find another hand by it. When the world is against him, another shall say, '*You and 1.' "* And the child trembled.
>
> But another pressed close and said, "Let me touch; for I am Talent. I can do all things—that have been done before. I touch the soldier, the statesman, the thinker, and the politician who succeed; and the writer who is never before his time, and never behind it. If I touch the child he shall not weep for failure."

But the story goes on.

> About the mother's head the bees were flying, touching her with their long tapering limbs; and, in her brain picture, out of the shadow of the room came one with sallow face, deep-lined, the cheeks drawn into hollows, and a mouth smiling quiveringly. He stretched out his hand. And the mother drew back, and cried, "Who are you?" He answered nothing; and she looked up between his eyelids. And she said, "What can you give the child—health?" And he said, "The man I touch, there wakes up in his blood a burning fever, that shall lick his blood as fire. The fever that I will give him shall be cured when his life is cured."

This sad and apparently famished bee offers no health, no wealth, and gives no promise of fame.

> "For the man I touch there is a path traced out in the sand by a finger which no man sees. That he must follow. Sometimes it leads almost to the top, and then turns down suddenly into the valley. He must follow it, though none else sees the tracing.

While he may hunger for love, he will not obtain it. No success will attend his efforts, although he may have lovely visions of mountain-tops of burning gold.

> The mother said, "He shall reach it?"
>
> And he smiled curiously. She said, "It is real?"
>
> And he said, "What is real?"
>
> And she looked up between his half-closed eyelids, and said, "Touch."
>
> And he leaned forward and laid his hand upon the sleeper, and whispered to it, smiling; and this only she heard—*"This shall be thy reward—that the ideal shall be real to thee."*

The child trembled and the dream or vision passed. But the unborn babe had a dream.

> In those eyes that had never seen the day, in that halfshaped brain was a sensation of light! Light—that it

had never seen. Light—that perhaps it never should see. Light—that existed somewhere.

And already it had its reward: the Ideal was real to it.

All women, whether or not with child, should know this story. Those who carry babes have in their hearts a secret aspiration, a transcendental longing, a hidden hope. It is there, within and above the organic process, the spiritual element in mothering that needs to be awakened, given access, nourished by a reflection that may come without being asked. For—

> The world is too much with us; late and soon
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon . . .

The tale of the Hunter is perhaps the most beautiful and is certainly the best known of Olive Schreiner's stories or dreams, and the most inspiring. The hunter was a man who, while waiting in the rushes beside a lake for a flight of birds, saw a great shadow before him. Looking up, he saw nothing; what had cast the shadow was gone. He waited all day but it did not come again. He went home, moody and silent. That night he told his friend:

"I have seen today," he said, "that which I never saw before—a vast white bird, with silver wings outstretched, sailing in the everlasting blue. And now it is as though a great fire burnt within my breast. It was but a sheen, a shimmer, a reflection in the water; but now I desire nothing more on earth than to hold her."

His friend only laughed and said he would soon forget the image of the bird, but the hunter did not forget. Day after day he sought in the forest, by the lakes, and among the rushes. He shot no more wild-fowl. "He is mad," his friends said, and they left him alone.

One night, as he wandered in the shade, very heart-sore and weeping, an old man stood before him, grander and taller than the sons of men.

"Who are you?" asked the hunter.

"I am Wisdom," answered the old man; "but some men call me Knowledge. All my life I have grown in these valleys; but no man sees me till he has sorrowed much. The eyes must be washed with tears that are to behold me, and, according as a man has suffered, I speak."

And the hunter cried—

"Oh, you who have lived here so long, tell me, what is that great wild bird I have seen sailing in the blue? They would have me believe she is a dream, the shadow of my own head."

The old man smiled.

"Her name is Truth. He who has once seen her never rests again. Till death he desires her."

And the hunter cried—

"Oh, tell me where I may find her."

But the man said,

"You have not suffered enough," and went.

Now the hunter took from his breast the shuttle of Imagination and wound his wishes upon it, weaving a net. He seeded the net with some grains of credulity and soon caught a snow-white dove-like bird which sang "A human-God!" Then came a black bird which sang only "Immortality!" The hunter gathered them into his arms, saying "They are surely of the family of Truth," and then he captured some others, also of great charm, until the seed was gone. He built a great iron cage to hold the birds captive, a cage that people name "a new creed," and the birds sang for all the people. Truth, the hunter thought, is surely among them and will reveal herself, but time passed and she did not appear. So, as the days went by, the hunter sat alone weeping. Then it chanced that Wisdom came again.

"Many men," he said, "have spread that net for Truth but they have never found her. On the grains of credulity she will not feed; in the net of wishes her feet cannot be held; in the air of these valleys she will not breathe. The birds you have caught are of the brood of Lies. Lovely and beautiful, but still lies; Truth knows them not."

And the hunter cried out in bitterness—

"And must I then sit still to be devoured of this great burning?"

Now the old man called Wisdom gave him the counsel he needed. The searcher for Truth cannot stay in those familiar valleys of superstition, but must leave them forever, taking with him not one shred that has belonged to them. He must go to abide in the Land of Negation and Denial, and there wait for the light, and when it comes he must follow it into the land of dry sunshine where the mountains of stern reality will rise before him.

". . . he must climb them; *beyond* them lies Truth."

"And he will hold her fast! He will hold her in his hands!" and the hunter cried.

Wisdom shook his head.

"He will never see, never hold her. The time is not yet."

"Then there is no hope?" cried the hunter.

"There is this," said Wisdom. "Some men have climbed on those mountains; circle above circle of bare rock they have scaled; and, wandering there, in those high regions, some have chanced to pick up on the ground, one white silver feather dropped from the wing of Truth. And it shall come to pass," said the old man, raising himself prophetically and pointing with his finger to the sky, "it shall come to pass, that, when enough of those silver feathers shall have been gathered by the hands of men, and shall have been woven into a cord, and the cord into a net, that in that net Truth may be captured. Nothing but Truth can hold Truth."

Learning this, the hunter rose and said, "I will go," but the old man detained him, saying, "Mark you well—who leaves these valleys *never* returns to them."

"Upon the road which you would travel, there is no reward offered. Who goes, goes freely—but for the great love that is in him. The work is his reward."

"I go," said the hunter; "but upon the mountains, tell me, which path shall I take?"

"I am the child of The-Accumulated-Knowledge-of-Ages," said the man; "I can walk only where many men have trodden. On these mountains few feet have passed; each man strikes out a path for himself. He goes at his own peril: my voice he hears no more. I may follow after him but I cannot go before him."

Then Knowledge vanished.

Then the hunter broke his iron cage and freed all the captive birds, even the one that cried "Immortality," which grew heavier and heavier and weighed him down. He threw away the threads of his wishes, although keeping the shuttle, which came from an unknown land; and meanwhile the people of the valleys reproached him bitterly for freeing the birds. They drove him away, throwing stones and mud. He went, and in the land of Negation he waited for the light. But first came Tempters of various sorts. Yet although miserable, he remained unmoved.

Then before him rose the almighty mountains of Dry-facts and Realities. The clear sunshine played on them, and the tops were lost in the clouds. At the foot many paths ran up. An exultant cry burst from the hunter. He chose the straightest and began to climb; and the rocks and ridges resounded with his song. They had exaggerated; after all, it was not so high, nor was the road so steep! A few days, a few weeks, a few months at most, and then the top! Not one feather only would he pick up; he would gather all that other men had found—weave the net—capture Truth—hold her fast—touch her with his hands—clasp her!

But now the path grew steeper. He saw here and there the white bones of other men who had gone before. Encountering a great wall, he made a stair of stone to surmount it. At last he reached the top, only to see much higher mountains towering beyond. So, climbing and building, he went on.

He sang no more; he said no more, "I will do this or that"—he only worked. And at night, when the twilight settled down, there looked out at him from the holes and crevices in the rocks strange wild faces.

"Stop your work, you lonely man, and speak to us," they cried. . . . As brave and strong a man as you climbed to these rocks. He saw there was no use in striving, he would never hold Truth, never see her, never find her. So he lay down here, for he was very tired. He went to sleep forever." . . . And the hunter laughed between his teeth.

"Have I torn from my heart all that was dearest, have I wandered alone in the land of night; have I resisted temptation; have I dwelt where the voice of my kind is never heard, and labored alone, to lie down and be food for you ye harpies?"

He laughed fiercely; and the Echoes of Despair slunk away, for the laugh of a brave, strong heart is as a deathblow to them.

But the Furies of Despair could not be kept away. They returned and told him truths difficult to acknowledge.

"Do you know your hair is white?" they said, "that your hands begin to tremble like a child's? Do you see that the point of your shuttle is gone?—it is cracked already. If you should ever climb this stair," they said, "it will be your last. You will never climb another."

And he answered, *"I know it!"* and worked on.

Yet he was indeed old, shrunken, weak. His strength was gone.

The old hunter folded his tired hands and lay down by the precipice where he had worked away his life. It

was the sleeping time at last. Below him over the valleys rolled the thick white mist. Once it broke, and through the gap the dying eyes looked down upon the trees and fields of their childhood. From afar seemed borne to him the cry of his own wild birds, and he heard the noise of the people singing as they danced. And he thought he heard among them the voices of his old comrades; and he saw far off the sunlight shine on his early home. And great tears gathered in the hunter's eyes. . . .

"I have sought," he said, "for long years I have labored; but I have not found her. I have not rested, I have not repined, and I have not seen her; now my strength is gone. Where I lie down worn out, other men will stand, young and fresh. By the steps that I have cut they will climb; by the stairs that I have built they will mount. They will never know the name of the man who made them. At the clumsy work they will laugh; when the stones roll they will curse me. But they will mount, and on *my* work; they will climb, and by *my* stair! They will find her, and through me! And no man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself."

The tale of the hunter, needless to say, is well-nigh done. Yet a difficulty remains. How is it that a teen-age girl could write this story? Was the place of her early life in Basutoland responsible? Was her father, a German missionary, an element of inspiration, or her mother, of whom we know little or nothing?

We might say that it was the genius in her that wrote the story of the hunter, and the book in which it is contained, but genius is little more than a word—no doubt a good word—that we put in place of our ignorance. We now complete the story as she related it:

The tears rolled from beneath the shrivelled eyelids. If Truth had appeared above him in the clouds now he could not have seen her, the mist of death was in his eyes.

"My soul hears their glad step coming" he said "and they shall mount! they shall mount!" He raised his shrivelled hand to his eyes.

Then slowly from the white sky above, through the still air, came something falling, falling, falling. Softly it fluttered down, and dropped on to the breast of the dying man. He felt it with his hands. It was a feather. He died holding it.

REVIEW
A SAINTLY DISSENTER

ANOTHER collection of the essays of Simone Weil is now available, this one titled *Simone Weil: An Anthology*, edited and introduced by Siân Miles, a lecturer in a British university. The publisher is Weidenfeld and Nicolson, the price $8.95. An excellent introduction of nearly fifty pages gives the life of Simone Weil—her last name is pronounced "Vay," we are informed by other writers. Some indication of her importance is provided by Albert Camus, who said "he could not imagine a rebirth of Europe which did not take into account the analysis and proposals for social reform she drew up" in *The Need for Roots*. She was born in 1909 in Paris of well-to-do Jewish parents, revealed her extraordinary intellectual capacities and moral insight early in life, and died at the age of thirty-four in an English sanatorium. She wrote some nineteen books (some of them collections of notes and essays) in her short life, of which five (or perhaps more) have been rendered into English.

For an example of her thinking we go to the essay, "Human Personality," written in 1942-43, a little before she died. In it she wrote:

> It is impossible to define what is meant by respect for human personality. . . . To set up as a standard of public morality a notion which can neither be defined nor conceived is to open the door to every kind of tyranny.
>
> The notion of rights, which was launched into the world in 1789, has proved unable, because of its intrinsic inadequacy, to fulfill the role assigned to it. . . .
>
> So far from its being his person, what is sacred in a human being is the impersonal in him. Everything which is impersonal in man is sacred, and nothing else.
>
> In our days, when writers and scientists have so oddly usurped the place of priests, the public acknowledges with a totally unjustified docility, that the artistic and scientific faculties are sacred. This is generally held to be self-evident though it is very far from being so. If any reason is felt to be called for, people allege that the free play of these faculties is one of the highest manifestations of the human personality. . . .
>
> When science, art, literature, and philosophy are simply the manifestation of personality they are on a level where glorious and dazzling achievements are possible, which can make a man's name live for thousands of years. But above this level, far above, separated by an abyss, is the level where the highest things are achieved. These things are essentially anonymous. . . .
>
> What is sacred in science is truth, what is sacred in art is beauty. Truth and beauty are impersonal. All this is too obvious.
>
> If a child is doing a sum and does it wrong, the mistake bears the stamp of his personality. If he does the sum exactly right, his personality does not enter into it at all.
>
> Perfection is impersonal. Our personality is the part which belongs to error and sin. The whole effort of the mystic has always been to become such that there is no part left in his soul to say "I." . . .
>
> Every man who has once touched the level of the impersonal is charged with a responsibility towards all human beings; to safeguard, not their persons, but whatever frail potentialities are hidden within them for passing over to the impersonal.

Very much like Mazzini, Simone Weil finds declarations of rights a destructive force.

> Suppose the devil were bargaining for the soul of some poor wretch and someone, moved by pity, should step in and say to the devil: "It is a shame for you to bid so low; the commodity is worth at least twice as much."
>
> Such is the sinister farce which has been played by the working-class movement, its trade unions, its political parties, its leftist intellectuals.
>
> This bargaining spirit was already implicit in the notion of rights which the men of 1789 so unwisely made the keynote of their deliberate challenge to the world. By so doing, they ensured its inefficacy in advance.
>
> The notion of rights is linked with the notion of sharing out, of exchange, of measured quantity. It has a commercial flavor, essentially evocative of legal claims and arguments. Rights are always asserted in a tone of contention and when this tone is adopted, it must rely upon force in the background, or else it will be laughed at.

She goes to the Greek play, *Antigone*, not only to affirm her position but also to reveal its "rationalist" weaknesses.

> It is extraordinary that Antigone's unwritten law should have been confused with the idea of natural right. In Creon's eyes there was absolutely nothing that was natural in Antigone's behavior. He thought she was mad.
>
> And we should be the last people to disagree with him; we who at this moment are thinking, talking, and behaving exactly as he did. One has only to consult the text.

> Antigone says to Creon: "It was not Zeus who published that edict; it was not Justice, companion of the gods in the other world, who set such laws among men." Creon tries to convince her of having outraged one of her brothers by honoring the other, so that the same honor had been paid to the impious and the loyal, to the one who died in the attempt to destroy his own country and the one who died defending it.
>
> She answers: "Nevertheless the other world demands equal laws." To which he sensibly objects: "There can be no sharing between a brave man and a traitor," and she has only the absurd reply: "Who knows whether this holds in the other world?"
>
> Creon's comment is perfectly reasonable: "A foe is never a friend, not even in death." And the little simpleton can only reply: "I was born to share, not hate, but love."
>
> To which Creon, ever more reasonable: "Pass, then, to the other world, and if thou must love, love those who dwell there."
>
> And, truly, this was the right place for her. For the unwritten law which this little girl obeyed had nothing whatsoever in common with rights, or with the natural; it was the same love, extreme and absurd, which led Christ to the cross.

It is already evident that Simone Weil broke with numerous conventional assumptions, the most notable being the idea that human beings have rights, or "natural lights." She contests this vigorously, as have a few others—a very few—since. In the first part of *The Need for Roots* (first published in English here by Putnam's Sons, with an appreciative preface by T. S. Eliot), reprinted in the book we are considering, she says:

> The notion of obligations comes before that of rights which is subordinate and relative to the former. A right is not effectual by itself, but only in relation to the obligation to which it corresponds, the effective exercise of a right springing not from the individual who possesses it, but from other men who consider themselves as being under a certain obligation towards him. Recognition of an obligation makes it effectual. An obligation which goes unrecognized by anybody loses none of the full force of its existence. A right which goes unrecognized by anybody is not worth very much.
>
> It makes nonsense to say that men have, on the one hand rights, and on the other hand, obligations. Such words only express differences in point of view. The actual relationship between the two is as between object and subject. A man considered in isolation, only has duties, amongst which are certain duties towards himself. Other men, seen from his point of view, only have rights. He, in his turn, has rights when seen from the point of view of other men, who recognize that they have obligation towards him. A man left alone in the universe would have no rights whatever, but he would have obligations. . . .
>
> Rights are always found to be related to certain conditions. Obligations alone remain independent of conditions. They belong to a realm situated above all conditions, because it is situated above this world.
>
> The men of 1789 did not recognize the existence of such a realm. All they recognized was the one on the human plane. That is why they started off with the idea of rights. . . . Obligations are only binding on human beings. . . .
>
> This obligation is not based upon any *de facto* situation nor upon jurisprudence, customs, social structure, relative state of forces, historical heritage, or presumed historical orientation; for *no de facto* situation is able to create an obligation. . . .
>
> This obligation is an eternal one. It is coextensive with the eternal destiny of human beings. Only human beings have an eternal destiny. Human collectivities have not got one. Nor are there, in regard to the latter, any direct obligations of an eternal nature. Duty towards the human being as such—that alone is eternal.

This led Simone Weil to another now heretical affirmation:

> Hierarchism is a vital need of the human soul. It is composed of a certain veneration, a certain devotion towards superiors, considered not as individuals, nor in relation to the powers they exercise, but as symbols. What they symbolize is that realm situated high above all men and whose expression in this world is made up of the obligations owed by each man to his fellow-men.

The true human, for Simone Weil, is the impersonal soul and spirit hidden from us by the personality. She recognized the laws governing this spiritual being and set them down as she intuited them, without compromise. Fortunately, there have been those among her readers who felt the genius in her insight and increasingly place her works before the world.

COMMENTARY
WHERE RESPONSIBILITY LIES

A BOOK the contents of which will come as a surprise to most readers is *Natural Disasters—Acts of God or Acts of Man,* fruit of the research of the Swedish Red Cross and Earthscan, a news and information service on environmental issues. The authors are Anders Wijkman, Secretary General of the Swedish Red Cross, and Lloyd Timberlake, editorial director of Earthscan. The book is issued by New Society Publishers, P.O. Box 582, Santa Cruz, Calif. 95061, and the price is $7.95, in paperback. In an introductory section, the authors say:

> The common view of "natural disasters" is due for a radical change. Though triggered by natural events such as floods and earthquakes, disasters are increasingly man-made. Some disasters (flood, drought, famine) are caused more by environmental and resource management than by too much or too little rainfall. The impact of other disasters, which are triggered by acts of nature (earthquake, volcano, hurricane) are magnified by unwise human actions. Disasters are social and political events which can be and often are prevented. In the Third World where the poor are forced to overuse their land and live on dangerous ground, disasters are taking a rising toll. by emphasizing mitigation instead of development, current disaster relief is often inadequate to the task it sets itself. . . .
>
> Disasters have increased sharply in number and death toll over the past two decades. Yet there is no evidence that natural "disaster triggers" are becoming either more frequent or more dangerous. Poor people in poor countries are most vulnerable to disasters. There are over 3,000 deaths per disaster in low-income countries. The three major contributors to disasters in the Third World are poverty and inequality, environmental degradation, and rapid population growth.

To illustrate, the writers point out that while lack of rain is one cause of drought, other factors enter in. Deforested and overused tropical soils are unable to retain water and are easily eroded. In short, human pressure on the land is the chief cause of disaster. Often in Third World countries economic policies discriminate against the poor, discouraging migration, replacing subsistence crops providing food for the people with a single cash crop. Meanwhile foreign aid often fails to reach those who are suffering most.

> Biases in disaster relief dictate that sudden, dramatic, "newsworthy" catastrophes tend to receive more aid than disasters which grind people down slowly. Food aid saves lives but can also undermine long-term local self-sufficiency. When injudiciously supplied it can disrupt local markets and make food too expensive for the poor. Free food may act as an incentive to corruption and in the long term may actually increase starvation. Some critics of relief operations claim that their main goal is to return victims to the status quo. Yet it is the status quo which makes them disaster-prone and vulnerable.

This book offers evidence in detail of the accuracy of this analysis, dealing with droughts, floods, cyclones, earthquakes, tidal waves and volcanoes. Then, in a section on efforts to bring help to areas where people are suffering, it is pointed out that "Some disaster relief is being planned and managed on the basis of incorrect assumptions and mixed political and economic motives," and it is noted that "The relief agencies are coming to realize that emergency relief by itself is no longer an adequate response." Relief work today, it is said, is like bandaging a wound that is constantly growing.

What grows on the reader of this book is the general ignorance of all in matters of actual human welfare. And that the way we go at things now will never bring about correction of this ignorance. Such books are important for this reason, even though they do not make clear what the remedy may be.

It becomes evident that the way we live our lives virtually closes the door on human understanding of the growing problems of the world. It is here, on this general ignorance, that we must focus if there is to be any hope of a genuine change. Is there, one must ask, any attitude of mind, anywhere in the world—in any of the "worlds"—as a result of which the knowledge that we seek comes naturally?

So far as we know, this attitude is natural only to the bioregionalists, the people who begin with seeking out and understanding our relationships with the planet which is our host. All the problems this book speaks of are avoided by the bioregionalists through their initial recognition of the ways in which to cooperate with the natural laws governing the resources of the earth. This, then, is where we must begin, in order to bring about changes in our own lives, and then, as a result, learn how to bring help to others.

For a beginning one might read Kirkpatrick Sale's book, *Dwellers in the Land* (Sierra Club, 1985), and then subscribe to *Raise the Stakes*, a journal brought out three times a year by Peter Berg—Planet Drum Foundation, Box 31251, San Francisco, Calif. 94131. Berg also issues pamphlets which help to understand the meaning of bioregionalism and offer practical steps to be taken by those who want to become a part of this movement.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
STUDENTS IN CALIFORNIA

THE processes by which races are blended may now be upon us, leading to minor cultural conflicts and mixed responses from the public. The whites of America, quite naturally, have long thought that the United States was *their* country, but today that assumption is being challenged by black, brown, and oriental groups who have read our equalitarian documents and have taken them seriously. This is nowhere more evident than in the institutions of higher learning. On the Berkeley campus of the University of California, for example, 25.5% of the students are now Asian. As Linda Mathews remarks in the *Los Angeles Times Magazine* for July 19.

> In Sproul Hall a visitor can eavesdrop on conversations in three Chinese dialects as well as Vietnamese, Korean and Tagalog, the official language of the Philippines. The fastfood shops on Telegraph Avenue, outside the university's main gate, sell not only hamburgers but sushi and *bulgogi* and *soba* noodles. If anything, Asian-Americans seem over-represented.

Linda Mathews' article, however, seems written to suggest otherwise. She tells the story of a Chinese-descended boy of eighteen, Yat-Pang Au, who lives in San Jose, established a straight-A average in his high school, took home prizes of every sort—including cross-country running and track, and by reason of a business he started and operated in his home was a runner-up as Santa Clara County's Young Businessman of the Year.

Yet despite these attainments Yat-Pang Au's 1987 application to enter the University of California at Berkeley was rejected. His father, Sik-kee Au, a Berkeley alumnus who runs a security-alarm business in the Silicon Valley, when told the news, thought his son was joking. But it was no joke, nor was it a "mistake" by the University. Au and other Asian-Americans are now asking if "institutions of higher learning have imposed quotas on Asian-American students," in order to preserve Caucasian majorities.

The background of the admissions policy of the University is of interest. Linda Mathews writes:

> Word of the sharply upgraded admission standards at Berkeley and UCLA, the most sought after and most competitive of the US campuses, is only just beginning to reach the public. "The kids know this, the teachers know, and the guidance counselors know," said Rae Lee Siporin, director of undergraduate admissions at UCLA. "But the mommies and daddies don't. . . . Parents are shocked when I tell them, 'Yes indeed, your kid can get rejected even with a 4.0.' Asian-American kids with 4.0S get turned down, and so do Anglo kids with 4.0s."
>
> Admission to UCLA, where Asians will account for 27% of the freshmen expected to register this fall, has become more competitive than that at many elite private colleges. The average Asian student admitted to the College of Letters and Sciences comes with a 3.97 grade point average and the average white student is just a step behind with a 3.91 average. SAT scores for both groups top 1,200.
>
> Another pressure in the admissions process comes from 1974 state Legislature resolutions ordering the UC campuses to make the racial compositions of their student bodies match the racial compositions of each year's high school graduating class. Despite a decade's efforts, blacks and Latinos remain under-represented in the UC system, so both Berkeley and UCLA have set aside a growing number of places in their freshmen classes for these minority groups; that means that, under affirmative action programs, both campuses accept minority students who do not meet ordinary eligibility standards.

Mandy and Sik-kee Au were both immigrants from Hong Kong who became naturalized citizens. When they sought an explanation for Berkeley's rejection of their son's application, Vice Chancelor W. M. Laetsch told them that Yat-Pang "is a good but not an exceptional student."

> His mistake, said Laetsch, was that he applied to Berkeley's College of Engineering, which "turns down hundreds of students just like him." Yat-Pang made it even more difficult for himself by pursuing a spot in a specialized double major—electrical

engineering, and computer and material sciences—that admitted only 21 of 184 applicants.

Yet the boy felt that his qualifications were such that he should have been admitted.

In high school, Yat-Pang ran Math and Science Clubs, dominated science fairs and joined the Academic Decathlon team, the activities usually associated with valedictorians. But he also ventured beyond these brainy pursuits—running track, teaching economics to fifth-graders in a special program, showing such profits for his junior achievement company that he was a finalist for Santa Clara County's Young Businessman of the Year award. Although he intends to study engineering at DeAnza Community College this fall, Yat-Pang yearns to be a businessman or, more precisely, an entrepreneur.

While the University of California has the largest number of Asian applicants—the most Asian students enrolled—other universities in the East have had similar problems.

In 1983, Brown University's Asian-American Student Association charged that Brown used quotas to limit the numbers of Asians on campus. The association noted that between 1975 and 1983, the number of Asian-American applicants had soared 848% while the number of students admitted rose only 276%. Beginning in 1980, the admission rate for Asian-Americans had dipped below that for whites and had never recovered.

Brown, Linda Mathews says, took remedial measures, "but it still remains slightly harder, statistically, for an Asian-American to gain admission to Brown.

The same holds true at Harvard, where about 12% of Asian-American applicants are admitted, contrasted with an overall admission rate of about 15.2%. Harvard blames this differential on two factors: There are few Asians either among athletes or the children of alumni, two groups of applicants awarded preferences in the admissions process. . . .

Stanford, too, has been forced to confront accusations that it discriminates against Asian applicants. Last year, a faculty senate committee investigated why the admission rate for Asian-Americans was only 65% to 70% that for whites. The committee concluded that the differential "did not arise from an implicit quota." But it acknowledged that "unconscious bias" could have crept into the admissions process.

The Stanford faculty responded by reaffirming that the university would never discriminate on the basis of race and decreed that the dean of admissions would have to justify any discrepancies in admissions rates among ethnic groups. Since then, the admission rate for Asian-Americans has climbed—it stands at about 91% of the rate for whites—and this fall, Stanford will have its largest contingent ever of Asian-American freshmen, accounting for about 17% of the class—up from 8% in 1985.

The University of California, however, is regarded as "different."

"Everybody assumes that the private, elite universities engage in social engineering," said UCLA assistant professor Don T. Nakanishi, himself a graduate of Yale. "Those universities say, up front, that academic merit is only one factor in the admissions process. They openly seek diversity.

"But a public university is different," Nakanishi insisted. "The University of California has been a traditional avenue of opportunity. . . . Its admission criteria are established by the Legislature and the Regents; they're supposed to be largely objective. They're supposed to be set out in black and white so every high school student in the state knows what he's shooting for."

Well, judging from the evidence assembled by Linda Mathews, the University of California is doing fairly well, especially considering the prejudice that has marred the state's past history. It seems plain, today, that the American race, if it can be called a race, is changing in its constituents, and in California more rapidly than in other states of the union. Conceivably, in a hundred years or more, Americans will be less frequently blond, darker and perhaps brighter, than they are now.

FRONTIERS

What Is Good for Human Beings?

IN a forum held this past year, arranged by the editor of *Harper's,* Lewis Lapham, the participants—all connected with the medical profession as either practitioners or administrators, or as critics—considered the ethical implications of several medical technologies that have been proposed for application to human beings. One is the implanting of fetal brain tissues to restore mental lucidity to persons afflicted by Alzheimer's disease. The fetal material would be obtained from otherwise unwanted aborted embryos. Another of the proposals was to give women wanting to have healthy babies a stimulant which would cause them to produce an excess of eggs (thirty instead of the usual six) which would be withdrawn from the uterus and examined for the possible presence of germs of disease. The diseased eggs would be destroyed and the healthy ones returned to the woman's body. All the eggs have been fertilized with the father's sperm. Still another proposal was that of controlling the sex of an offspring by using "artificial insemination" after the sperm of the father has been examined and either the male-producing or female-producing sperm has been destroyed by a spermicide. "The success rate is 95 per cent when seeking boys, slightly less for girls."

All these proposals make many, perhaps most, people uncomfortable to think about. Even the participants in the forum seemed a bit uncomfortable, but bravely argued about the possibilities, evident or implied.

On the question of the use of fetal brain tissue for victims of Alzheimer's disease, Nancy Neveloff Dubler, director of Legal and Ethical Issues in Health Care at the Montefiore Medical Center in New York, said that the women aborting the fetuses ought not to profit from the procedure. Lee Salk, a professor of psychology in psychiatry and pediatrics at Cornell University Medical Center, agreed, saying it would be repugnant for a woman to become pregnant "in order to sell the aborted fetus." If this use of fetal brains becomes an adopted procedure, Nancy Dubler said, women who come to an abortion clinic would sign a paper enabling the fetus to be so used. She went on:

> It would be a two-step process. First, society reaches a judgment, either through its legislative process or through a combination of political and administrative processes, that this is a good for society and should be encouraged. Step two, the individual involved—the gestational mother—can refuse or consent to have those fetal parts used.

This observation brought a comment from Jeremy Rifkin, president of the Foundation on Economic Trends (in Washington, D.C.) and author of *Entropy* and *Algeny:*

> There's a broader question that needs to be looked at. For the last hundred years in Western medical science, there has been a shift toward utilitarianism, toward short-term benefits to individuals. However, utilitarianism has thrived at the expense of a gradual desacralization of the life process. In this kind of procedure, two different values conflict: the short-term utilitarian value to the individual versus the long-run systematic desacralization of human life itself.
>
> Science and technology in Western civilization have increasingly reduced living things to dead material for manipulation. We need to ask ourselves: Is life more than the chemicals that make it up? Is life more than tissues and cells and nucleic acid sequences? . . .
>
> In public policy in Washington, ethical concerns always play a secondary role to commercial considerations. By the time the ethics of a new technology are debated, it's generally too late to change course. The technology is already ensconced in the marketplace. The religious community, the social philosophers, and the ethicists—much to my chagrin—have been edged out of public deliberation in any meaningful way on these technologies.

Rifkin's point—Is life more than the chemicals which make it up?—would be strengthened by developing its implications. This might be done by changing the question to: Are we more than our bodies? Except for Rifkin, the participants, while ethically sensitive people, say nothing about

this. What if we say, with Plato, and with the Hindus and Buddhists, and with indeed the twenty-three per cent of the American population who, according to George Gallup, believe in reincarnation, that we are not just body but body and *soul?* This surely would produce a different attitude not only toward life but also toward death.

Lee Salk offers a comment that would hardly gain popularity today, but is worth thinking about.

> Thirty years ago we did not engage in heroics in the delivery room. Newborns were allowed to die if there were any complications. Today those same babies survive and seem to be at risk for problems later. Maybe we're introducing certain weaknesses into the species. That's the disadvantage and it suggests a much larger question. . . . We have become the force that can control our evolution. The problem is *how* we are going to shape it. We will indeed be doing that and manipulating things that were once considered totally unacceptable. Implanting fetal brains in adults' brains is only the beginning.

On the matter of determining the sex of a child, Salk also saw a serious problem:

> If we begin to manipulate the existing balance between genders in any society, we will have a major disruptive effect on society.
>
> If a man and a woman want to bring a child into this world only if it is a certain gender, they shouldn't have a child in the first place. When it comes to French poodles, they can choose. But the nurturing of a child should not depend on its gender.

But would you, asked Lapham, "try to legislate this technology out of existence?" Salk responded:

> If we did, we would indeed make some people rich by creating a black market. My approach would be for public education to convince people it's unwise to do this. It may be better to develop a conscience than to develop legislation. People may act on their conscience.

Toward the end of the discussion Jeremy Rifkin offered this comment:

> Scientists used the term "genetic engineering" up until the late 1970s. When the controversy over genetics emerged the word was changed from "engineering" to "therapy." Suddenly we're talking about gene therapy. What's the difference between engineering and therapy? . . . You have to have a change in world views to deal responsibly with this technology. You can't use this world view to critique this technology because this world view is the architect of this technology.

Nancy Dubler ended the discussion by saying that public debate would give guidance to legislators and enable us to reach "a consensus on what our overriding values should be." But surely we already see, from the difficulties of these well-informed debaters to agree, that the more we leave to conscience, and the less we turn over to law-makers, the better.