

nonviolent civil disobedience; white segregationists react with violence; federal government steps in." The alliance between blacks and the media, however, was built on shifting sand. When the civil rights movement splintered in the late 1960s, it no longer lent itself to simple "sound bite" reports, and the press lost interest.

Two decades later, the news media are fitting blacks "into a terrible new storyline: black pathology. Blacks are routinely portrayed in the news as drug lords and crack victims. They make up the underclass, the homeless, the subway muggers." In fact, blacks are no more likely than are whites to use drugs; and more whites than blacks are arrested on drug charges. And yet news stories about drug abuse, crime, and poverty overwhelmingly center around blacks.

Drummond contends that this distorted portrayal of blacks is made worse by a lack of non-crime-related news reporting on blacks. "Reports invariably will give minority legislators ample coverage when the subject is a so-called minority issue,"

notes one black state legislator, "but when minority legislators become involved in the mainstream of economic, political, government, and social matters," they are "either ignored or very lightly reported."

The small number of black reporters is one reason for the media's poor coverage of blacks, Drummond says. In 1989, for example, black reporters and news anchors garnered just five percent of network news air time. Less than eight percent of American newspaper reporters are black; more than half of the nation's 1,600 papers have no black reporters at all. Still fewer blacks make it into newspaper or television news management, where the decisions about what stories will be covered are made.

Drummond suggests, however, that hiring black reporters and editors may not change the way news about blacks is reported. One reason is that many black professionals are reluctant to become pigeonholed as "black affairs" specialists. More important, the news media will always favor the story that is "easy to find and photograph."

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Revolutionary Thought

"Positivism, Pragmatism, and Everyday Life" by Steven Ross, in *Society* (Nov.-Dec. 1990), Rutgers Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. 08903.

In 1936, a slim volume written by a 26-year-old philosopher rattled the world of Anglo-American philosophy. In *Language, Truth, and Logic*, A. J. Ayer argued that the big questions that philosophers had been wrestling with for 2,500 years—questions such as "What is truth?" and "What is man's purpose?"—are unanswerable. Not because they are so profound, but because they are nonsense.

Ayer's "logical positivism," writes Ross, who teaches philosophy at Hunter College, energized Anglo-American philosophy. Often criticized as sterile in its preoccupation with analyses of language, especially in contrast to the pyrotechnics of Continental philosophers such as Heidegger

and Sartre, the field has in fact been in a state of creative ferment for the past 50 years. Or so Ross maintains.

Positivism emphasized the use and meaning of specific language rather than abstract notions. Ayer argued that only two kinds of statements are meaningful: Analytic statements are true by definition ("A triangle is a three-sided figure"); synthetic statements are true because they happen to match the way things are ("No man weighs more than 2,000 pounds"). Any statement that doesn't fall into either of these categories is considered meaningless for the purposes of philosophy. Abstract discussions of justice and morality are therefore impossible. Virtually overnight,

writes Ross, metaphysics, aesthetics, and ethics lost respectability, at least among Anglo-American philosophers.

In the immediate postwar years, however, two powerful criticisms of positivism emerged from philosophers equally convinced of the centrality of language. The pragmatist W. V. Quine (b. 1908) of Harvard argued that there is no clear distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. Rather, he said, truths form an interconnected "web of belief," with our dearest beliefs entrenched in the center. Truth, in Quine's view, frequently is indeterminate.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) took a different tack. Whereas Ayer's positivism presented itself as "offering a conception of meaning and truth that was somehow untainted by the messiness of life," and Quine sought to construct a fluid philosophy of belief, Wittgenstein said that each person's truth is revealed in the way he perceives his life's experiences. Ultimately, the philosopher cannot hope to discern universal truths.

Not all Anglo-American philosophy of the past half century has been concerned with language, Ross continues. In his elegant *Theory of Justice* (1971), Harvard philosopher John Rawls set out explicitly to construct a set of "just principles of society." A principle is just, he argues, if it would be chosen while under a hypothetical "veil of ignorance." Unaware of his own race, for example, a person will always choose equal rights for minorities. Rawls' book, Ross believes, is as powerful and influential a brief for equality as has ever been written. More recently, "philosophers of the mind," such as John Searle, have argued over the differences between humans and machines—no small distinction in a world of advancing computer technology.

Anglo-American philosophy is not the purely esoteric pursuit that its most vocal critics have painted it as, Ross concludes. Philosophers today are more deeply immersed than ever before in the gritty realities of everyday life—politics, the law, even artificial intelligence.

Supreme Sacrifice

"Disabled for the Kingdom: Celibacy, Scripture & Tradition" by Paul E. Dinter, in *Commonweal* (Oct. 12, 1990), 15 Dutch St., New York, N.Y. 10038.

Like many young Catholic priests, Paul Dinter took the vow of celibacy believing that it would inspire his work. Twenty years later, he says that he maintains the commitment to celibacy, "but with a different, a chastened attitude."

"I value it," he writes, "if at all, only in spite of itself. In other words, the good that I do as a priest is not a *direct* result of celibacy, but *despite* my celibate condition." The Church celebrates celibacy as a triumph of personal generosity and psychosexual maturity. Dinter says that it should be considered instead as he believes Jesus himself presented it: as a disability.

In the book of Matthew, Dinter points out, Jesus speaks of three kinds of "eunuchs": those "who have been so from birth," those who have "been made so by men," and those who have made themselves so for the sake of the kingdom of

Heaven. "Let the one who can receive this, receive it." Celibacy was, Dinter insists, a voluntary undertaking that "responds to the same gift which allows someone to turn the other cheek, to walk the extra mile, to pray for your persecutors—in a word, to be able to act out of the same inner completeness or perfection as God does. Simple justice cannot require any of these extraordinary acts."

During the 12th century, Dinter argues, the Church transformed what was a voluntary invitation into a requirement for the priesthood. (The Eastern Orthodox Church, by contrast, only requires monks and bishops to be celibate, and Protestants reject celibacy altogether.)

Dinter views the persistence of celibacy as part of the Catholic Church's resistance to change, including the possibility that such "perversions" as homosexuality are