
articles for the Hearst newspapers ("Going to the Cinema," "Should Philosophers Smoke Cigars?," "Who May Wear Lipstick?"). The marriage broke up in the early 1930s. He then married Peter Spence, a woman 30 years younger than he. She left him in 1949. Finally, in 1952 he married Edith Finch and experienced 17 years of quiet bliss: an interesting but not edifying record. Moorehead only occasionally raises an eyebrow at the discrepancy between Russell's mastery of logic and his weak grasp of the realities of other people's lives.

The post-1945 Russell is the one Americans remember. This Russell fought for the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, wrote to John Foster Dulles and Nikita Khrushchev to demand nuclear disarmament, lectured John Kennedy on Cuba, and led a last, bitter campaign against the Vietnam War. Moorehead is pained by the way Russell was taken over by Ralph Schoenman during this final crusade. Schoenman was a left-wing graduate student at the London School of Economics who came to see Russell in 1960; he stayed to tea, then to manage Russell's affairs for the next eight years. He destroyed innumerable old friendships, wasted large amounts of money, hampered every good cause with which he was involved, and made Russell look ridiculous. Moorehead shares the universal relief that almost the last thing Russell did was break with Schoenman and write a memorandum explaining why. Can we decently say that a rip-roaring atheist like Russell redeemed himself? We can certainly rejoice that he died as clear-headed as he had lived.

BLASPHEMY: Verbal Offense Against the Sacred, From Moses to Salman Rushdie. By Leonard W. Levy. Knopf. 688 pp. \$35

The question of blasphemy—what it is, what harm it does, whether it can even be a crime in a secular or pluralistic society—calls forth strong yet foggy views from across the political spectrum. Unlike obscenity, it doesn't belong to that category of things you know when you see; the many authorities, religious and otherwise, who have tried to construe it as such have only added to the confusion. As Levy shows in his history

of blasphemy trials, political persecutions, and other related oddities, the charge—no matter who brings it—tends to blur with astonishing speed into related offenses and semioffenses such as heresy, impiety, sacrilege, apostasy, idolatry, and, as the early Catholic Church described the Arian heresy, "pestilential error."

Levy's story wends its way from the original, strict Judaic definition of blasphemy as "reviling God by name" (which, the Name being unknown and unpronounceable, presented insuperable difficulties of prosecution) through the uncontrollable political bloating of the concept in early Christianity up through the age of religious wars and the later struggles to distinguish between blasphemy and obscenity in English common law. The excitement mounts with the great 19th-century blasphemy trials that advanced freedom of the press in England, including those that made a martyr of the printer Richard Carlile, jailed for distributing Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. These trials in turn led to such legal landmarks as the Trinity Act of 1813, which decriminalized questioning the doctrine of the Trinity.

Levy's own views about the boundaries of blasphemy are obvious from the book's dust jacket, which shows the notorious "Piss Christ" photograph by Andrés Serrano in giant closeup. Levy thus implicitly rejects the view, an important one in the recent art wars, that the context in which such an image is shown or the use to which it is put has no effect on whether it is offensive. Exactly how the author, a professor emeritus of history at Claremont Graduate School, arrives at his conclusion that the charge of blasphemy is meaningless in a secular society remains murky. But there's so much material here that the argument can be treated as secondary, especially since it's clear that, on this subject at least, people are more interested in ammunition than in new ideas.

Contemporary Affairs

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS FREE SPEECH AND IT'S A GOOD THING, TOO. By Stanley Fish. Oxford Univ. Press. 332 pp. \$25

While the current impulse in the so-called

"canon wars" may be toward conciliation, there's little likelihood that Fish will have a seat at the peace table if multiculturalists and traditionalists bury their differences and shake hands on the White House lawn. Fish, a professor of literature and law at Duke University, is an idiosyncratic and infuriating army of one. Welcoming the charge that he is a "contemporary sophist," he does battle with all sides while coyly refusing to stake out an agenda of his own. His battle cry is "Hearkening to me will lead to nothing. Hearkening to me, from my point of view, is supposed to lead to nothing."

Fish's latest collection is a smorgasbord of law, literature, and campus politics. Last year the author traveled the country with the right-wing polemicist Dinesh D'Souza, and several of the essays printed here are culled from their acrimonious exchanges. In them, Fish argues that much of the debate about political correctness has taken place under false pretenses. Conservative critics of campus radicalism have disguised their own partisan ends by appealing to "neutral" standards of high-mindedness, tolerance, and "common ground." They have exaggerated the spread of the multicultural curriculum and misstated their reasons for opposing it. And they have disingenuously opposed the "politicization of the humanities" while themselves occupying positions of considerable power and prestige.

Fish casts similar aspersions upon the academic Left. While he agrees with New Historicists and other practitioners of advanced literary criticism who declare that everything is "historical" or "political," he denounces their efforts to judge the worthiness of critical enterprises by the degree to which they are historical or political. To those critics who assume that the study of a poem's political implications is more properly "historical" than the study of its aesthetic principles, Fish replies that aesthetics is itself a historical tradition, and one that weighed heavily on poets in the past. These scholars' political aspirations, in short, are both self-contradictory and naive: "Those who conflate and confuse literary and political work end up doing neither well."

Although Fish's targets are scattered, his work clings to a central notion: that human beings cannot get any kind of critical distance from their activities. Instead, they are simply con-

signed to continue along in them as best they can. "Focus cannot be expanded," he argues, "it can only be adjusted." Therefore, Fish loathes any abstract concept—"fairness," "merit," "neutrality"—that promises to free us from our perspectives and guide us toward transcendent truth or open-minded flexibility. It is always, in his view, a false promise.

As a conscientious gadfly, Fish deflates other people's ideals with impressive panache. But he has hardly disposed of those ideals for good. Fish barely pauses to consider, for instance, the possible hazards of speech codes and other restrictions on free speech. It's easy to suspect that his cautious support of such policies is based less on a conviction that they are sound than on his irritation with their opponents.

Although Fish advises all thinkers to forsake "theory" and dwell in the "local," it is plain that he is most comfortable operating on a theoretical level. He is more aroused by the fact that all our perspectives are partial than he is by the content of any particular perspective. Like his fellow pragmatist Richard Rorty, who gestures toward the end of philosophy and the beginning of an age of free-floating conversation without ever quite getting around to joining that conversation himself, Fish apparently would prefer to travel busily across several disciplines than find a local habitation of his own. This champion of the situated self proudly keeps himself afloat.

Science & Technology

SILENT TRAVELERS: Germs, Genes and the Immigrant Menace. By Alan Kraut.
HarperCollins. 352 pp. \$25

Americans of the late 19th century were ambivalent about immigration. Because the nation's booming industrial economy created a need for laborers, popular opinion grudgingly tolerated the admittance of foreigners. At the

