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**RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY**


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Spinoza's challenge might have been viewed more sympathetically.

In breaking with both Judaism and Christianity, Spinoza chose the path taken by many Jews of later generations. "Perhaps we can see in him," writes Yovel, "the first 'secular Jew' at a time when this category did not exist." There is no longer one norm of Jewish existence, he adds, no single compulsory model: Judaism today is determined by the way Jews live it.

### *Transcending Secularism*

"Religion and the American Future" by Peter L. Berger, in *New Oxford Review* (Nov. 1977), 6013 Lawton Ave., Oakland, Calif. 94618.

The current "orgiastic self-denigration" of American life by the cultural oracles of the upper-middle class has a parallel in the American religious community's "crisis of credibility," suggests Berger, a sociologist at Rutgers University. This crisis, he says, which has hit "mainline" Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, is marked by a weakening of traditional symbols and an accelerating secularization.

According to Berger, organized religion's present troubles have their roots in the Enlightenment, when religious leaders paid misguided obeisance to the "cultured despisers of religion." In its modern form, the Christian churches, seemingly embarrassed by their tenacious belief in transcendent values, have stressed the secular aspects of their creeds: social uplift, the search for "true community," and so on.

One result is that while many Americans have not lost their faith, their belief in spiritual values is typed as "backward" or "reactionary" by the religious avant-garde. Ironically, the more these religious trend-setters—priests, ministers, and theologians—bend over backwards to accommodate secular opinion-makers, the more they are held in contempt. Berger cites "ominous threats" in Congress to the tax-exempt status of religious organizations that take strong stands on political issues.

An awesome collection of human hopes rides on the survival of American democracy, Berger concludes. But the re-spiritualization of American religion is an even greater imperative, "for it points beyond America and indeed beyond history."

### *Thoughtless Evil*

"Thinking" by Hannah Arendt, in *The New Yorker* (Nov. 21, 28, and Dec. 5, 1977), 25 W. 43rd St., New York, N.Y. 10036.

The 1961 war crimes trial in Jerusalem of former Nazi officer Adolf Eichmann left one witness with an uneasy sense of the "banality of evil." Reflecting on the implications of that phrase, the late political philosopher Hannah Arendt concludes that Eichmann's crimes indeed lacked "base motives." Neither pride, nor envy, nor any of the other sins to which responsibility for evil has been traditionally assigned

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were at the root of Eichmann's behavior.

In this three-part article, left in manuscript form at the time of her death in 1976, Arendt writes that Eichmann's "deeds were monstrous, but [he] . . . was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither monstrous nor demonic." Not any kind of willfulness but a profound *thoughtlessness*—an utter unreflectiveness—made the proper operation of his conscience impossible.

Arendt suspects that wickedness, however defined, is "*not* a necessary condition for evildoing." Instead, she argues, our "faculty for telling right from wrong" is connected with our "faculty of thought." Arendt follows Plato in viewing the thought process as a "soundless dialogue" that each person carries on with himself—a private activity demanding withdrawal from the world. The distinguishing mark of this inner conversation, she maintains, is consistency. A criminal like Eichmann who is unfamiliar with this silent intercourse (in which we examine what we say and what we do) does not mind contradicting himself—"nor will he mind committing any crime, since he can count on its being forgotten the next moment."

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**SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY**

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*The Changing  
Face of Flu*

"The Epidemiology of Influenza" by Martin M. Kaplan and Robert G. Webster, in *Scientific American* (Dec. 1977), 415 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Influenza was reported by Hippocrates in Greece as early as 412 B.C. In 1918–19, it reached pandemic proportions in Europe, Asia, and America, killing 20 to 40 million people. Until recently, however, little was known about the disease.

The influenza virus was isolated in pigs during the 1920s, in humans a decade later. Subsequently, the influenza A virus, the only type that causes pandemics in man, was found in several species of lower animals. But the origin of these periodic pandemic strains (as opposed to relatively localized viruses) remains a mystery. Kaplan and Webster, research scientists with the Pugwash Conference and the World Health Organization, respectively, suggest two possible sources: (1) genetic recombination of human strains with lethal animal viruses and (2) transmission of virulent animal strains directly to man.

The RNA—ribonucleic acid containing genetic information—of the influenza virus is included in the virion (see illustration) as eight separate, single segments, thus easing rearrangement with influenza strains from horses, pigs, and ducks. Such recombination, the authors write, is of "key importance" in accounting for the "drift" and "shift" of influenza viruses. Drift refers to a naturally occurring mutation of the virus. Shift means a dramatic mutation caused by genetic recombina-