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The Moment for Decision
By Albert G. Reilly ’66

The moment for decision. I’m in trouble with my desk. I told the desk that I was in love with my chair, but this is trouble. First of all, I heard from the door—I went steady with the door for six years—and it was not at all very good. Secondly, my pillow thought it should speak out, but to no avail. My chair and I got along great (no problems), but by all rights I should like my desk more. It’s bigger, contains more, has more facets to it; however, I just don’t enjoy sitting on my desk as much as I like sitting on my chair. The big obstacle to fulfillment will be—well, I can carve little chairs out of some wood.

It’s embarrassing to pass the door, desk, and pillow every day without being free to say hello because the chair is extremely jealous. I can’t so much as look at them without feeling as if somebody is breathing down my neck.

I met the chair through a friend of mine, the rug. The rug and I were lying around one day, when I happened to see the chair, which was just sitting there, playing hard to get. I was on the way over when I heard the ash tray giggle a little; turning slowly, I noticed it signaling to me. Furious, I rejected the ash tray’s interference and stormed over to the chair. In the midst of our conversation, she (the chair) mentioned that her cousin, the lamp shade, was always teasing her about her ungainly shape. This was a hint to do something if I were not to win her mahogany heart; I lunged quickly toward the lamp shade and trapped it under my weight. I was wild with rage; cursing, biting, spitting. I tore the shade to pieces and returned confidently to the chair’s side. “That was my mother you ripped up—my cousin is on the other desk,” she said lovingly. This time I made no mistake; the cousin was dead. A con-
queror now, I felt a spirit take hold of me—it was the rug, the cousin's boy-friend. To war I went; battle was the means; death was the rug's fate. I shredded him, jumped up and down on him and flung him about the room. Silence now as I sit breathless; suddenly, the pillow jumps me, his comrades, the mattress and the springs, giving strength to his cause. They try to do me in, but I kick the spring, rush the mattress and knock the pillow to the floor; then I throw the springs on top of the pillow and the mattress on top of him. This was the final blow—they lay there lifeless, nothing stirring. I knew I couldn't give them a second chance; fire would do away with the enemy. I struck a match, a Diamond National South Carolina pine, and set their bodies ablaze. The flames were killing the foe; I raced from the room with my love, the chair, to safety downstairs. Outside, I sat on my love, but fate played me a cruel trick—this wasn't my love, it was her twin sister . . . good-bye forever, sweet, sweet chair.

Charlie McWeedles, Esq.
By David McIntyre '65

Have you heard of Charlie McWeedles,
Who once swallowed a cushion of needles
And ever since then,
Old Charlie has been
Among the very sharpest of men.

The Train
By David McIntyre '65

The train pulls into the station;
There's hardly a soul here I know.
So I boost up my ego
By telling myself
I'm traveling incognito.
The Still Requiem
By Gregory Prior '65

Siren. Cutting through the air with a sharp howl. Shaking snow off the heavy-laden branches of the fir trees. Fading, slowly dying, as the ambulance moved quickly off into the distance, carrying Moira’s limp body in it.

I watched it as it sped down the road, its red cross, bold against a background of white paint, diminishing into a blur and finally disappearing. There was a small crowd standing around me with blank faces and questioning eyes. A cold wind whipped through the trees and hit our faces. Blindly, I elbowed my way through the crowd, walking across the drifts of snow into the ski-lodge. I walked into the lodge and across the hall to the warm, smoothly panelled room where I had first seen her. Two middle-aged couples seated in easy chairs around the fireplace glanced at me and turned away as I stood in the doorway trying to imagine the room as it was when Moira was in it.

“I’m telling you,” one of the men said in a husky whisper to the woman next to him, “It’s typical of the sort of foolishness that goes on with young people nowadays.”

“Pete,” the woman said, “It was just some sort of accident. Don’t exaggerate it.”

“I say it’s no exaggeration. That’s the way they act. Blind and crazy.” He began to shout. “Listen, you saw that girl around here. Did she look completely sane to you. I mean, she was always walking around here in a trance like a zombie or something.”

“You shouldn’t judge people,” the woman answered harshly. “You didn’t even know her. At

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least I've spoken to her. She used to smile at me and say hello when we'd meet in the dining room or someplace. She impressed me as a very nice, soft-spoken girl."

"Sure," he snapped. "They give you that impression. The sweet little colleen. But inside they're seething."

I coughed twice in warning and walked across the room to a window which looked out on the mountain. The man stopped speaking. He stared at me for a moment, then bent down close to the woman and began whispering to her. I turned to look at the snow on the mountain. Despite the buzz of the man's voice, I could see against the screen of the snow, almost like a vision, the room as it was the day before when I first met Moira.

The room was different then, quiet. I noticed her first because of the fire. It filled the empty room with a soft light, dancing in the folding shadows of the smooth pine walls. Alone, she seemed to dance in time with the snapping music from the fireplace. With her eyes closed, humming a soft liquid melody, she floated across the room. Her lithe body bent and twisted as she moved.

Her black ski pants clutched her stem-like ankles and covered the smooth lines of her body to her full thighs and narrow waist. Hanging freely, a large blue sweater followed her actions hesitatingly, lost slightly by the quickness of her movements. It billowed around her as she leaped and whirled. Her long arms cut through the air in wide arcs, flying like two gay streamers. Her thin fingers, tipped with blood red nails, performed a slow sensuous dance of their own.

Bending her neck, she held her head back, letting her hair fall behind her like a rich drapery. The skin of her face was browned by wind burn and flecked with minute petals of white where it was peeling. Beneath her skin, her blood rushed,
painting her face apple-colored. Pointing her cleft chin toward the ceiling, she smiled at the shadows with smooth dark lips. Her long thin nose rose high over her lips and her nostrils dilated with a slow pulsating rhythm. On each side of her nose, her soft eyelids covering her eyes formed small rounded mounds.

She rocked her head slowly as she danced. Moving across the room, framed against the glowing heat of the fireplace, she looked like a demi-goddess or a priestess. I felt as if I were interrupting a prayer. She was lost in her dance, caught up in a strange, unknowable communion. Her dance grew wild and she began to twist around like a leaf in a whirlpool, circling at a constantly increasing speed. Then her eyes blinked open and she saw me. She stopped, froze in mid-motion like a statue. She lowered her arms to her sides, relaxing her body like a puppet freed from its strings.

“I was dancing,” she explained. “I’m sorry.” Her voice was high and clear.

“Don’t be sorry,” I said. “It was beautiful.”

She stepped toward me on uncertain legs, smiling. Her face glistened with a smooth glazing of sweat. As she moved closer, I could smell the perfume of her body, a sweet heavy odor like newly fallen pine needles.

“It must’ve been,” she said, “I felt very beautiful when I was doing it.”

“Then I’m sorry I stopped you,” I said.

“That’s all right. It was a silly thing to do anyway.” She started toward the door, glancing back at the fire wistfully.

“No,” I said. “Wait. It wasn’t. What’s your name? I wish you’d do it again.”

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“My name’s Moira. What’s yours?” Her eyes laughed.

“Jerry.”

“Good,” she said. “Maybe we can dance together later.” Together, joined in the secret knowledge of her dance, we walked out of the room.

We moved across the hall of the ski-lodge and out onto the porch. She looked out to the mountain that rose just a few feet away. “Let’s go skiing,” she said.

Silently, we lifted our skis from the rack nearby and started toward the mountain, walking over the snow with cat-steps. Moira’s hair was a raven flag, blowing in the crisp, biting wind. Above us the sky, lit by the pale candle of the sun, shone with a faint blue like the delicate shell of a robin’s egg. Before us was the mountain, rounded and softened by the huge white drifts of snow.

It seemed like a dream then, walking unknowing through a whitewashed world, our skis pressing on our shoulders with unfelt pain. There was a crowd, red-faced and excited, moving in flocks like birds, but she did not notice them. She did not hear their brittle chatter or their sharp sour yells. She saw nothing but the soft snow on the mountain and heard only the low haunting song of the wind.

Perhaps she became too anxious while we stood in line waiting for the chair lift, a line like a strange snake with a back speckled by the colors of ski parkas. “It’s cold,” she said, but she knew it wasn’t since the heat of the glowing sun covered us like a warm liquid.

Our turn came at last and we climbed into the narrow nest of the chairlift. It swung away gracefully, climbing slowly, rocking back and

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forth with the regular rhythm of a pendulum. We were alone, balanced delicately above the valley. Only the clean air, smelling like silver, touched us as we glided like birds toward the top of the mountain. Below us the ski trails, twisted like rivers through the fir trees. The mountain shone with a brilliant white and the fir trees fringed it with green. Farther up the mountain, snow covered the trees and bent the trunks with its weight. The trees bowed in adoration toward the top, a multitude of white-robed nuns, praying.

The mountaintop was covered with a soft mist when we reached it. We were lost together, hidden from the world. Together we walked to the top of the trail and adjusted our skis, listening to the strong snap of the clamps as they grasped our feet. Moira stood for a moment, perched like an eagle, then in a cloud of flying snow swept down the mountain. I followed. Moving in a rhythmic dance, paralleling each other’s actions, twisting and turning, we drove down the mountain. The blur of the white snow flew past us. We swept down, moving faster and faster, falling deeper and deeper into the white world. As we flew down the side of the mountain, cutting through the cold air, each movement was perfect, violently graceful and balanced.

But the trip was too fast and the leveling slope slowed our skis too soon. As we stopped moving, the world came into focus again, full of people. Moira looked at me sadly. “Again?” she asked, breathing hard. And we spent the rest of the day together on the mountain.

At the end of the day, we returned to the room where we had first met and sat before the fire. We said very little to each other. After we had been there for a while, one of the girls Moira was staying with came over to us.

“Hi, Moira,” she said. She was a tall nervous-looking blonde. “Did you have a good day?”

_Alembic_
“Yes I did,” she answered slowly. Moira introduced me to the girl whose name was Cassie.

“How ’bout you?” Moira asked her. “What did you do all day?”

“Nothing much,” Cassie said. “We spent an hour on that silly baby slope. Honest, I was bored to tears.”

“I was great today, tell her,” Moira said to me. “Go ahead, tell her how great I was.”

“You were good, not great,” I said.

“No, I was great,” she said. “Skiing is the one thing I really do well.”

“I think you’re overestimating yourself,” I said.

“I don’t think so,” she said. “You know what I’d really like to do? I’d like to try shooting the gully trail just to see if I could do it.”

“Now you’re really overestimating yourself. You’d crack up before you made it half way down.”

“What’s this gully trail?” Cassie asked.

“It’s a kind of narrow path dug out between some rocks,” I answered. “No one is supposed to go near it.”

“Oh yes, I know,” Cassie answered. “Moira, you remember Freddy Andrews, that blond boy we met yesterday. He was supposed to have skied it a couple of years ago. But wasn’t he nearly in the Olympics or something. Your’e not nearly that good. Lord, you’d kill yourself.”

“She’s right, Moira,” I said. “You could never maneuver through those rocks.”
"I know I could," she said, pouting. "Skiing is an art. It's only half practice. The other half is inspiration." Her face brightened at the deftness of her statement.

"Well, you and your harebrained inspiration better keep away from that trail," I said.

"It's something I feel I've got to do," she answered.

The strength with which she said that worried me. We did not say anything more about it but for the rest of the night Moira seemed withdrawn. Though I hoped she was only joking, her silence kept her words alive in my mind.

Standing in that same room the next day looking out the window, I could not understand why I had not known that she was serious. Through the window, I saw the bottom end of the gully trail about a thousand yards up the mountain. The jagged rocks there made me wish I had known what would happen. The whispers of the couple whom I overheard when I first came into the room distracted me again. The man's whining argument grew louder and I could hear him again.

"Don't you see what I mean," he groaned. "It was suicidal. And that sort of thing is done for attention. It's an exaggerated complaint."

"It doesn't have to be suicidal," the woman answered. "Some people just feel they have to conquer things. Not just sit around all day and do nothing."

The woman raised her head and looked over at me. Then, she bent down close to her husband, whispering to him again. He glanced at me, stood up and walked over towards me.

"My wife says she bets you can tell us what happened to that girl," he said. "She was a friend of yours. Why did she do it?"

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“I can’t really say,” I answered. “I hardly knew her. I just met her.”

“Well she must have given you some indication. What kind of girl would do a thing like that?”

“I don’t know. I guess it was just something she had to do.”

“I bet she did it to hurt someone. To frighten her parents maybe?”

“Don’t be a fool, Pete,” the woman demanded from across the room. “There are lots of other reasons she could’ve done it for. Anyway, when you’re young, you don’t do things for reasons. You just do them. Even you can do that.”

“You don’t do something like that without a reason,” the man answered.

“I shook my head slowly and turned away. Reason, I thought. There was no reason in the way we met and in our day on the mountain. There was no reason in what Moira did or what happened to her. I suppose I could sense that when I woke that morning. There was a purple light filling my room, the light of the dawn reflected on the crust of the snow. A dull throbbing sound resounded muffled in my ears and I gazed around the room briefly and then pulled a pillow over my head with a limp, tired arm. Even under the pillow, the sound continued, a heavy, steady pounding. After a few moments, I threw off the pillow, drew myself out of the bed and throwing on a bathrobe, stumbled toward the door. Then I heard the sharp, high insistent shouts of a voice on the other side of the door. “Jerry. Jerry. Will you please wake up.”

“Yeah, I’m up. Whas’a matter?” I mumbled as I pulled the door open.

*Alembic*
“Oh Jerry, what took you so long? Have you seen Moira?” It was Moira’s friend Cassie whom I met the night before. Her pinched, crab-apple face was blank with panic.

“Course I haven’t. I’ve been asleep,” I answered slowly.

“I woke up this morning and she wasn’t in our room and I’m sure something awful’s happened to her.” She spoke in a quick, stacatto voice. “Her ski things weren’t in her room.”

And then I remembered, my mind working fuzzily, what Moira had said about shooting the gully. “Don’t worry,” I said. “I’m sure she’s all right. You go downstairs and I’ll meet you there in a minute.” Hurriedly, I pulled on a pair of worn dungarees, put on my ski boots and slipped myself into my parka. I walked down to the first floor of the lodge where I saw Cassie standing next to the fireplace, looking scared.

“I told you not to worry,” I said. “I think she may have gone skiing. I’m going to get the ski patrol and we’ll find her and bring her back.” She nodded and whimpered slightly.

I turned away from her slowly and walked out the door of the lodge and down the wooden steps of the porch to the ski-patrol office. There had been another light snowfall during the night, covering the ground with silver crystals. My feet made a harsh crunching sound as I walked. One of the men from the ski patrol was standing outside the office with a mug of coffee in his hands. He was a tall man about twenty-five, with very pale blond hair and a thin red face. He listened carefully as I told him about Moira.

“Yes,” he said, “Often we have kids from college doing foolish things like that. But we will find her. We always do.” The man spoke with an accent, a singsong, trochaic rhythm. German, I
thought. Or Swiss. Probably Swiss. He would know his business.

The blond called inside for his partner and the two of them picked up a gleaming steel stretcher with runners on it like a sled. I followed them as they walked toward the mountain. When we reached the bottom of the hill, we could see a path of shallow, bird-like prints that went up toward the top.

“She will have taken over an hour to walk up to the gully trail,” the blond man said softly. “A very foolish thing to do in the dark.”

It took a long time to walk through the snow, but the two men, linked by the stretcher, walked with assurance. I followed after them, placing my feet in the prints they made in their careful path. No one spoke and the silence was deepened by the hissing of the cold, early morning wind which swept snow off the side of the mountain. The light brightened as we crept along so that by the time we reached the bottom end of the gully trail we had a clear view of it. It was a steep, winding path, lined on both sides by the high, jagged boulders. The snow on it was smooth, frozen into an ice-like surface.

When we had moved three hundred yards up the trail, I saw Moira lying next to one of the rocks and was about to shout to the men when I noticed them quicken their pace and head toward her. As I drew closer, I saw the path her skis had cut through the hard snow and the rock in the trail that had caused her fall. Around the spot where she lay, the hard, even crust of the snow had been cut into small sharp pieces by her skis.

She lay motionless, stretched out on her back, her face marble white against the snow except for a small cut on her temple from which a thin line of blood flowed across her forehead to the
white beneath. The blond man knelt next to her, running his hands expertly over her body feeling for injuries.

“I’m sorry,” he said coldly, looking up from her. “Her neck has been broken.” I said nothing. The man looked from the body to the rock and from the rock to the end of the trail. “That is bad,” he said. “She almost made it to the end.”

The blond man placed the stretcher next to her and with futile gentleness lifted her inert body onto it. Slowly, they slid the stretcher down the trail. I didn’t notice the time or the difficulty it took to get to the bottom of the mountain. I could not take my eyes off Moira’s body bouncing limply, lifelessly, in the stretcher. A crowd had gathered when we reached the lodge and the sound of the muffled, sympathetic whispers filled the air. They stood back, almost in awe, as the two men carried her to the ski patrol ambulance standing by the road and slipped the stretcher through the door into it. Then the men jumped into the front seat, started the motor and shot off down the road. The piercing howl of the siren blocked out all other sounds from the mind.
I am as certain as the circumstantial evidence at hand can make anything, that the evolutionary process was a real one. But most Darwinians and neo-Darwinians insist that it was all mechanistically determined and that purposefulness and meaning are absent from the process. They would explain everything by the idea of "adaptation." Instead, could we not think of it as "a reaching out" which suggests direction and an end? Instead of a mechanical and purposeless world, could we not think of one in which order and finality give evidence of God's existence?

It was on one of my frequent walks through the marshes and bogs that abound in Southeastern Massachusetts that I experienced this feeling of "reaching out." It was as if I had escaped my body, and my mind had sunk back into its primeval beginnings. Whole epochs passed in a few hours as I mingled with the running water. The secret that allows a man to immerse himself in the past and then to flow back into the present is quite indefinable; but it is bound up in some way with water. Water extends everywhere on the earth; it extends to the deepest fissures and, as vapor, it reaches upward to the limits of the atmosphere; it is in motion and seems to bridge the past and present.

The watershed through which I walked was not unfamiliar to me. I had, in the fifteen odd years of wandering through them, acquired a deep knowledge of each stream, puddle, and pond. Perhaps it was this familiarity which kept me from seeing below the surface of the murky swamp water.

I wandered over the low wooded knolls and through the bogs and swamps round about my home.
home. For many hours I walked alone, satisfying my curiosity and steeping my soul in solitude. The flooded marshes and soggy bogs drained off into rapidly flowing streams. They put the warmth of summer into my soul. I rejoiced in my loneliness, savored it, and held it close. My thoughts were as new as the yellowish green leaves that covered every branch, and as fresh as the cool water that swells the streams at the start of summer. And in the midst of all this motion, everything had stopped. Man, the highest creature, was the epitome of evolutionary development. Every other creature arrayed itself in stagnation behind man. The great development of centuries had reached its climax in the creature called man.

I surveyed everything with the smug superiority of man. The new grass and leaves, the birth, from nowhere, of insects, the death of a sparrow, all passed before me but not through me.

I followed well known paths, listened to the wind coughing through the damp marsh grass and chattering in the skeletons of milk-weed husks. The summer sun was warm and bright as I explored hidden dens, splashed in shallow puddles, and strayed further afield. I found that life was everywhere. It pushed up plants in every piece of earth; it teemed and swarmed with bugs; it was traversed by birds, and haunted by reptiles and amphibians. How many eons ago had the first fish crawled out of the ocean onto a tidewater flat like this, warily looked around, and taken the first enormous step onto the land? Was it out of this muck and wrack that the first creature had reared its fishy head?

I stopped beside Jones' River, one of the slow moving streams that flow into Duxbury Bay, to cool myself. The sight of the sky and aspens and the shimmering ripples of water gurgling in the shallows as the tide went out on its way to the Atlantic stirred me, hot and tired as I was from several hours of walking, with a new idea; I was going to float.

Alembic
Jones' River, at the edge of the marsh, is a lonely and deserted spot where the fresh water meets the salt water. Very few people, except an occasional duck hunter in the fall, ever come near it. The water is slow moving in the shallows but strong near the center. When the tide is moving out there is a swift current as it approaches the bay. While I was splashing about in the thigh deep water, I was tugged by an incessant desire to float out and go with the slow moving water.

I hesitated before I let myself go. Then I sprawled out on the water with the sun in my eyes, and pushed out into the river. The water bubbled around my head and the sky revolved over me. As I twirled out into the main stream I had a feeling of slipping downward head-first into a chasm. Then I could feel the tingle of the cold inland water on my arms, and the warmer bay water pulling me outward. I could taste the sand and mud of the whole continent moving with me, flowing like the river, grain by grain, into the sea. I was flowing over the Triassic swamps where dinosaurs had once grazed; I was wearing down the face of time and carrying blue hazed hills with me into the immensity of the ocean. I felt the ooze of time melting around me. I was moving through the one-way door of the past, peering into the murky depths of man’s forgotten past.

I floated past sand and silt eroded from ancient mountains; I glided over the shoals where Pilgrims had moored their boats and horseshoe crabs had crawled for millions of years. I was drifting alive under the blaze of the sun, and sliding quietly through murky reeds. I became part of the water and the curious amalgams that draw creatures out of the water. Every creature, fish, bird, snake, and man are all miniature saline seas, each carrying its own ocean, walking or crawling as images of the incomprehensible concoction which has emerged at various times, in different strengths. It was different forms, but basically water. I felt the sand come up under me as I hit the low shoal in the bay. I tried to
stand, but my legs felt rubbery. I felt the un-
supporting air and the body's protest at its emer-
gence into the world and its loss of the primary
element which holds and produces ninety percent
of all life.

I could see everything: the marshes, the little
streams trickling into larger streams which flowed
into a silvery pond. Before my trip everything
had been independent. What had been this stream
and that stream, this bird and that bird, became
part of a whole network, part of a whole plan.
As I mingled with the flowing water the parts fell
into place. The whole process of birth being
played out before me took on the beauty of a
symphony conducted by the master conductor.
It started with the sun warming the earth and
melting the ice. Buds that had been secretly form-
ing all winter pushed cautiously out of their pale
green skins. Squirrels stirred at the first tempera-
ture rise to compete for food with flocks of vagn-
rant sparrows and migrant robins. Insects that
stirred and swarmed when the sun shone, dis-
appeared when it set. Muskrats cleared their dens
of winter debris and cavorted in the cool water.
Rabbits with new litters, raced dumbly and nois-
ily through briar thickets. My earlier wonder at
how it all happened seemed all the more wondrous
and awesome.

The most minute of creatures had its place
in the master plan. Nitrogen fixing bacteria fed
plants. Tiny insects fed upon the plants, and were
eaten by larger insects or by frogs and birds. They
were in turn eaten by larger animals. There was
a balance in nature, delicate, beautiful and com-
plex. Thousands of drops of water fell upon
leaves and dripped onto the ground where they
came together to seep and flow downward into
little rivulets. They flowed in ever increasing
number until they collected in pools, and swamps,
and oceans, where life abounded. Was it a mis-
take, a queer chance that brought these things
about? Or, was it a master conductor who put them into harmony?

As for men, each a walking ocean of corpuscles, they were but another method by which water reached out beyond the river. I was a microcosm of flowing streams and pulsing life, haunted by the mysterious workings of creation. It was the flowing tide pulsing and resurging with the beat of my heart, seventy percent water: a minute throb like the universal pulse that pushed up the continent and now was tearing it down.

Man has been places and seen the ooze from the primeval sea crawling everywhere in the form of mass on barren rocks. He has seen it living in the almost dry deserts as spiders and snakes. Somehow it has pushed into every corner as egg-layers and mammals, and every conceivable form. It has reached out to the highest and the lowest points. Yet, the reaching is still in progress. Man, confident that he is the final creature, limits God to this form.

*Alembic*

The word content is unknown to life; it is also unknown to man. Man pushing into space is like the tiny fish and giant reptiles which pushed against the frontiers of the elements. He is life reaching out trying to go home.

The Darwinians did not find the start of life in the ocean depths, nor in the sterility of a laboratory. The secret of life is as strange as ever. The sea water that for millions of years laid and bubbled has produced all of the strange shapes and does not hold the answer to where life came from.

We look at a fish and see a billion years of making in that mass of cells. We can stand, watch, and feel the extension of life, the projection of everything in our lives. It is the strange power of the mind that bridges the past and present. It is the supreme reaching out.

Those who would reject a supernatural explanation for life are forced into only two possible explanations of life upon earth. There is the suggestion of Arrhenius that life did not come about
on this planet, but was transported here from outer space. Spores, that could have resisted the cold and heat, might have been transported here with meteors. These spores and seeds, once settled here, grew and evolved, and adapted until the present forms were evolved.

It explains nothing. It does not give the nature of life, but removes the problem to another place. It would be better to assume that life did arise on this planet. There are limitations of time and space which make the transportation of life spores to this planet remote.

Then there is the proposition that says we are protein, possessing the powers of organizing in a manner which forms a cell, and the cell has power to multiply. But, this does not answer the question why there is such a variety of forms. There is no answer to the blue, red, and brown birds, or the tiny frogs and huge elephants, nor to the strange workings of thought.

If we ever see the chemicals thrown together in a laboratory come to life under man’s direction, there will be much need for humility. For it will be hard to see that the secret of life is still closed off. We can chart all of the compounds and movements, and mistakenly link life and matter together. We will miss the true wonder of both. Man will forget the ages and vast complexity of life in his own moment of glory.

Myself, I think back to my strange journey down the river when I felt all of the continent under me. I see the thousands of streams of life flowing into one mainstream heading toward the sea and eternity. The sky extending out over the ocean in a vast globe which never fills is an image of the vastness which confronts us. I will wonder at the way all of the cells and particles of life blend into such plans and symmetries. I will wonder why at death, all of the thousand of molecules,
which worked and interplayed to make life into such a complex, stop working and rush to get back to the chaotic earth.

I do not think that even when we finally make life that any questions will be answered. There will be no explanation of why anything moves. I think that even the most blatant Darwinian will have to admit that if life can evolve out of sterile matter it merely shows one of the many sides of the divine power behind the world.
groves of academe
By Terrence Doody '65

would they have us believe reality
is published hard-bound, numbered page by page,
with annotations, indices,
to cross-refer in lecture halls the Age
of Newton with old Adam's apple tree?

once, when I read that Alexander cried
I fumbled for the reasons of his pain,
and hoped to learn in school. with studied ease,
the prof retold the plans of his campaign,
his horse's name, and, yes, the date he died.
Such Lips as Would Tempt to
an Eternity of Kissing

By Kenneth Daly '65

You came to me last night
As I lay in my bed.
You laughed, you cried, you sighed,
You kissed my weary head.

You sat down beside me
And took my sleeping hand.
You leaned o'er and kissed me.
You woke me by command.

You lay upon my lips
As I looked up to see.
You closed your eyes for joy.
You were the death of me.
metamorphosis

By John A. Thompson '66

we know and love in a furnace of life tempered with cooling tears
for what is wanted yet feared.
the turbulent roaring heat bathes us outwardly in confusion and stirs to life an inward hope.
we shall find our souls blown skyward on a cloud of soot and milk-smooth heat, in fancied fear.

clinging to smould’ring rags of ignorance,
we shall fly heavenward.
warm with trembling hope we shall soar
into an eternity of love.
black with knowledge of love we shall love more strongly.

pour round us, o world of sulphurous fumes,
and fan the draft to an upward surge of hope,
and buoy up the dusty, dead, dry ash of life as yet unlived.

Alembic
What is truth? Such a general question is almost meaningless unless we are aware of the more specific questions which lead up to it: Am I? What am I? How do I know that I am? What is out there that impresses itself upon me? Is that which I think is out there really out there? These are some of the primitive questions which provoke the epistemological question of truth, and they are, at the same time, fundamentally ontological. That is to say, the question of truth presupposes a metaphysics of being, for the act of intellection implies a doer and something which seems like an extra-mental reality, though it may only be a figment of the imagination. However, that I am capable of establishing a metaphysics of being implies that I know, that is, that I have truth about something. Knowledge, then, is not something outside the realm of being, for it would be non-existent; rather, it is itself a part of being and proper to ontological investigation. Epistemology cannot be successfully divorced from ontology because knowledge is of something; nor can ontology be divorced from epistemology, for we come into contact with being through knowledge. In metaphysical investigation, we have a primitive tension between knowledge and being: knowledge is our only entrance into the realm of being and it is also but one aspect of being. Our access to being is, in short, governed by the structure of our knowledge. We can say, in light of this, that every epistemology implies an ontology and every ontology implies an epistemology.

This primitive fact about the structure of knowable reality—i.e., that being and truth are inextricably and intimately bound up—is the fundamental intuition of the Cartesian System and it is aptly and succinctly formulated in Des-
Descartes' famous *cogito, ergo sum*. Descartes' formulation is an expression of a profound intuition of being. His statement is not a purely epistemological exclamation like *cogito*; nor is it a purely existential proposition like *sum*. It is, if the expression be allowed, a gnoseo-existential proposition, hinting at the essential unity of being and truth. Descartes purges from his mind all gnoseological and existential realities by means of his methodical doubt. Yet, the intuition of his being as a thinking being forces itself upon him. For he tells us:

> But then, immediately, as I strove to think of everything as false, I realized that, in the very act of thinking everything false, I was aware of myself as something real; and observing that truth: *I think, therefore I am*, was so firm and so assured that the most extravagant arguments of the skeptics were incapable of shaking it.¹


Descartes perceived that he is aware of his own being, and, in that perception, intuits the intimacy of truth and being. If I am, I am a thinking being, and if I am thinking, I am. By thinking being, Descartes does not mean strictly a being engaged in rational discourse. A thinking being, for him, is the center of all types of knowing activity. It is the being which "doubts, which understands, which conceives, which affirms, which denies, which wills, which rejects, which imagines also, and which perceives."²

This primitive intuition has its limitations; it cannot get outside of itself to its metaphysical roots—being itself. That is to say, once I have become aware of my existence as a subject, how can I become aware of the existence of extra-mental realities, if any exist? How can I get outside of the subjectivity of my being to begin the ontological investigation of the being-of-others? or the ground

of my being? How can I ever pose the question of the existence of the not-I, if I do not in some way have an awareness of the not-I, already? Descartes assumes the data of the mind; that is, he accepts as given the fact that I have ideas of other existents distinct from me. The problem then must be rephrased to ask: How do I know that these 'ideas' which I have in my mind correspond to some external realities?

The answer Descartes gives to this question shows the basic limitation of his intuition of being. For he says:

I am sure that I am a thinking being: but do I not then know what is required to make me sure of something? Certainly, in this first conclusion, there is nothing else which assures me of its truth but the clear and distinct perception of what I affirm. But this would really not be sufficient to assure me that what I affirm is true if it could ever happen that something which I conceive just as clearly and distinctly should prove false. And therefore it seems to me that I can already establish as a general principle that everything which we conceive very clearly and very distinctly is wholly true.3

In effect, Descartes is arguing that the criteria of truth is the clarity and distinctiveness of the idea in the mind of the subject. But if I am sure that nothing exists but myself (or if I suppose this), how do I get these ideas? Descartes tells us that God implanted them in us, and they are true because God would never deceive us.

But from where did the idea of God arise, since I must first have an idea of God before I can attribute veracity to Him? What is the criterion by which I establish the veracity of my idea of God? An examination of Descartes’ proof for the existence of God as given in the Third Meditation is necessary to answer this question. (I use only the proof expounded in the Third

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3 Descartes, Meditations, p. 34.
Meditation because the proof given in the Discourse is much the same but less detailed, and the argument presented in the Fifth Meditation already presupposes the criterion of truth for the idea of God.)

By the word ‘God’, Descartes means an infinite substance which has every perfection to an eminent degree and is the cause of my being and the being of others, if other beings exist. Now, since every cause must contain the perfection of its effects, I, who am a finite substance, could never have the idea of God in me unless it “had been placed in me by some substance which was in fact infinite.” And this cause of my idea of infinite substance (which is also the cause of all my other ideas) exists outside the subjectivity of my being; for “just as this manner of existing objectively belongs to ideas as part of their own nature, so also the manner or fashion of existing formally belongs to the causes of these ideas, or at the very least to their first and principle causes, as part of their own nature.”

Descartes’ argument shows the limitation of his intuition of being because he can never get outside of his subjectivity. In other words, Descartes cannot establish the existence of any objective extra-mental beings despite his argument (which is circular), because his subjectivity only reveals himself to himself and nothing more. This is also why his proof for God is circular: He has a clear and distinct idea of God which is true. The guarantor of the truth of his idea of God is the existent God. But the only way Descartes knows that God exists is by his idea. Hence, he is caught in a vicious circle. For his clear and distinct idea of God assures him of the existence of God, and the existent God assures him of the veracity of

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4 Descartes, Meditations, p. 43.
5 Descartes, Meditations, p. 39.
6 Descartes, Meditations, p. 43.

7 Descartes, Meditations, p. 40.
his idea of God. And if we do not know that God exists—because the argument is circular and proves nothing—we have no criterion of truth for our other ideas. We can begin to see the Cartesian synthesis crumble at its very foundation—the subjectivity of being. Yet, and paradoxically, this very weakness is at once Descartes' strength; for truth and being are first perceived by a knowing subject by the "I" that says: "Cogito, ergo sum."

BOOK REVIEW:
By Peter J. McGuire '65

THE SUICIDE OF THE WEST
By James Burnham

"Liberalism is the ideology of Western suicide." With this statement James Burnham gives the theme of his book The Suicide of the West. That there is such a thing as "Western suicide" he demonstrates in the following manner. During the period from the beginning of the First World War to the present, Western influence and culture has steadily contracted. The cause of this contraction must be internal rather than external since the Western bloc has possessed a preponderance of physical power during the entire period. The West is, therefore, being destroyed from within itself. This the author chooses to call suicide. The remainder of the book is devoted to showing that the liberal ideology "motivates and justifies the contraction and reconciles us to it."
The author begins with a discussion of the basic concepts of liberal philosophy. It is, he says, most importantly a belief about the nature of man: that man has unlimited potential for development and that this development will come through his intellect, the faculty that distinguishes him from all other beings. From this statement there leads a series of corollaries. Because man is perfectible and thus has no intrinsic factors limiting him, his present limitations must come from extrinsic causes—ignorance and bad social institutions. These institutions the liberals consider to be “problems” which can be solved by education and reform. Since these social institutions are a legacy from the past, the liberal tends to distrust custom and tradition and holds that the fact that an institution has existed for some time is an argument for closer examination rather than acceptance. There also follows the further corollary that since evil is the result of bad institutions and ignorance, persons committing evil acts have only limited responsibility for them, and the more a person has been oppressed or underprivileged, the less responsible he is. The education that the liberal prescribes to cure ignorance is a dialogue, or “free market of ideas”, with each person making proposals and all choosing the idea that seems best. Since the liberal is committed to rule of the majority, it follows that truth is at any time the general consensus of opinion.

The liberal, according to the author, finds himself in a non-rational but nevertheless real situation when dealing with the problem of human guilt, man’s universal feeling of vague culpability. This guilt problem is resolved satisfactorily by the Christian with his twin doctrines of Original Sin and Redemption, and by the Freudian with his concept of tension between the unconscious and superego. The liberal, holding that a man is not responsible for his evil acts, cannot accept the concept of personal guilt. He substitutes instead the idea of racial guilt; the white race, which has oppressed all other races, is re-
sponsible for their present condition. Thus the liberal has, as a member of this "guilty" race, the compulsion to "do something", regardless of any accidental effects it might have, to better any and all underprivileged races. He is also led into a sort of "masochism", believing that any affront given to the white race by others is justified because of the injuries the white race has caused.

This liberal compulsion to "do something", to press reform, to provide equality, and to raise the world's other races to our level has its most obvious reflection, the author believes, in the liberals' conduct of our foreign relations. The independence of each new nation, whether it is ready for independence or not, is hailed by the liberal as a triumph of freedom and equality. Once these areas pass out of the area of Western dominion we lose both the property that may be confiscated by the new nation and the forward military and naval bases that protect the Western bloc. In addition, the new nations through inept government are frequently forced into the communist bloc and their resources are used against us.

For Burnham liberalism is therefore a destructive rather than a constructive force. It tears down old customs, old traditions, even old neighborhoods, but it can find nothing to effectively replace them. Because it sees man as a creature that can be educated into goodness, it is hopeless in the face of organized crime, domineering labor organizations, and civil rights movements that infringe on the right of others. It applies force only when it is too late and then sporadically and ineffectively. Because they cannot understand that the communist powers, in spite of their quasi-liberal ideas of equality and anti-colonialism, are bent on world domination, liberals carry on endless dialogues with them, give up territory, and then are surprised when the communists do not respond in the same manner. In spite of their lack of success, however, the liberals are committed by their ideology to continue negotiation and

_Alembic_
hope that the communists will be persuaded to do the same.

The function of liberalism is, according to the author, to reconcile us to our losses and defeats by presenting them in terms of ideology. A nation moving into the communist camp, for example, is a demonstration of self determination, not a strategic loss to the West. The liberal, then, does not cause the decline of the West but does obscure the reality of the decline, making it impossible for us to take some action that might arrest it.

James Burnham seems to be a master logician but he has a problem with his premises. From the title of his book one might infer that the West is committing suicide, but within the covers there is no mention of a conscious determined effort by the West to destroy itself. The West is contracting; it may be drifting, but it is not committing suicide. The most that may be concluded is that the liberals may be responsible for the drift but the proof of this rests on a shaky foundation. The racial guilt, to which Burnham attributes most of the West's problems, is never proved to exist.

The effects which he attributes to one cause may, in fact, come from a variety of causes and here I believe is pinpointed the book's flaw. It attempts to take all of the problems facing the West, tie them into a neat package, and pin them on someone or something. This, even if it were possible, cannot be done in a work of some three hundred pages. The author has raised the questions that need to be voiced, has done his best to slaughter some sacred cows, but he has overextended himself and in doing so, has jeopardized his conclusions.