

## Man's Head, Beast Body

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Intolerance is rejection of what we do not identify with. It may direct itself against a wide array of things, but race and religion seem to be the two main targets. *Informative Articles* was the title of two books for secondary school containing an extremely miscellaneous collection of factual and how-to-do-it articles from many different sources. We included in one of these books an excerpt from *Yoga for Americans*, an early and well known book by Indra Devi, an American woman who had taught Gloria Swanson. At the very beginning of this long article, the author says, "Many people still think that yoga is a religion. Others believe it to be a kind of magic. . . . *Yoga is a method, a system of mental, physical, and spiritual development.*"<sup>1</sup> Then in a question-answer session:

Q: *What religion does a yogi profess?*

A: A yogi can belong to any religion or to none at all. In this case, he usually forms his own relationship with the Ultimate Reality once he has come closer to It.

Q: *Can a Catholic take up yoga?*

A: Certainly, since yoga is not a religion. In fact, a Catholic association has recently been formed in Bangalore, India, in order to introduce the Yoga asanas to the Catholic young men there, and to integrate them into the Catholic way of life.<sup>2</sup>

Despite these obvious efforts to head off misconceptions, the three pages of general introduction to yoga that included these quotations was objected to as "religious indoctrination."

The rest of the 25-page article is taken up with descriptions of bodily postures, breathing exercises, and daily health care that typify a course in hatha yoga. Since no yoga teacher could conclude an account of physical practices without returning to the main goal, spiritual illumination, the last half page deals with meditation. I am going to reproduce that half-page because of the school dilemma embodied in it and the response to it.

You may now get up and go about your business or you may have a period of meditation. Simply sit down in Lotus Pose, or else cross-legged, close the eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then sit very still, trying to direct your thoughts to the Infinite Light which is God, Truth, Love, and is beyond form, beyond our understanding. Try to realize that It is everywhere, both outside us and within us; that we, as human beings are the carriers of the Divine Light here on earth, that it dwells in our hearts, that our bodies are the Temple of the Living Spirit, and that we should let this Spirit shine through our eyes, speak through our words, be felt through our deeds.

Then send a thought of peace and love to all those around you, to your family, your friends, those whom you love, those whom you don't love, to all living beings on this earth and beyond. At the end you can say aloud:

From the unreal to the Real  
 From the darkness to Light,  
 From death to Immortality  
*Om*  
 Shanti, shanti, shanti.

*Om* is the sacred sound of the Hindus, and *Shanti* means peace in Sanskrit.

You may also say any other prayer, or use your own wording – this is up to you. But I suggest that at least once a day you remind yourself that you are of divine origin and that you are on this earth to bring love, peace, and goodness to all living creatures.<sup>3</sup>

Since this passage is preceded by innocuous relaxation exercises and concludes the article, it surely constitutes the entire text referred to below.

*Objection:* On page 61 are detailed religious and psychic exercises to be performed in the practice of Yoga. There is even a ritualistic incantation of this heathenish religion cited on this page. Additionally, there is religious doctrine promulgated here, which is repugnant to New Testament Christianity.

Lest the foregoing be misunderstood: no state-supported propagation or teaching of the Christian religion is being advocated here. But it is likewise incumbent upon state-supported education not to advocate or teach any other religion either. The inclusion of this material is a violation of the First Amendment Constitutional guarantees of freedom of religion and separation of religion and state. Students have a basic right to study the Language Arts without being subjected to Eastern religious indoctrination.

That the selection appeared, among some other do-it-yourself pieces, in a book called *Informative Articles* should count for something, as well as Indra Devi's own efforts to leave to the reader the option of omitting the meditation portion and of substituting some other "prayer" for hers. Is there reason to doubt the ecumenical spirit in which this selection is offered? People of all conceivable religions study and practice yoga, and

chants, mantras, or prayers of all traditions may be used, including Protestant hymns, secular poems, and Catholic kyrie eleisons. Most yogis, even if Indian, know the Bible quite well, feel perfectly at home with Christ and the Christian God, and in fact regard all the world's religions as expressions of the same truths. Finally, the First Amendment argument would be more logically carried out if the last sentence of the objection ended "without being subjected to *any* religious indoctrination."

Nevertheless, I think the dissenters have a stronger case here than with any of their other objections, at least on technical grounds. Christians who have been trying for years to get prayer into schools feel especially bitter if a prayer from another religion seems to get the privilege they were denied. The two Sanskrit words can be construed as part of some Hindu liturgy (although *Om* and *Amen* derive from a common source, *Aumen*, and *Shanti* simply means "peace"). And the idea that each individual carries the Divine Light within does represent a doctrinal point not shared by all creeds. So, depending on one's interpretation of "religion," that half-page of the selection may with some justice be interpreted as violating the separation between church and state.

But did the authors of that constitutional principle mean by "religion" *any* universal beliefs about the nature and purpose of life, or did they mean "religion" as a particular church, organization? I think definitely the latter. Consider their background and intentions. The founding fathers wanted church and state separated in order to prevent the perversions of government and the persecutions of individuals that had occurred in Europe and England because temporal rulers became heads of church and spiritual rulers heads of state. Their forefathers had come to America as much to avoid religious intolerance as anything. Furthermore, they were virtually all students of the Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, which stressed tolerance of differences and, more than that, the perception of similarity across the differences, the universality of humankind's spiritual needs. The great majority of the founding fathers were Freemasons and Rosicrucians as well as Christians.

This means that they believed that in essence all religions seek the same thing, that all people share fundamental commonalities, especially before God. They thought in cross-cultural and ecumenical ways. Certainly their goal was not to discourage spirituality in school but to avoid a takeover by one church or sect. These authors of the Constitution would agree with the Kanawha judge who ruled (see chapter 1) that the First Amendment does not declare that religion shall not be mentioned in schools. If it did, students would be prohibited from learning about the many religious and metaphysical ideas that arise throughout the fields of history, art, social studies, and philosophy. It is precisely because religion and culture are so intermingled that we cannot study one without

the other. What schools may not and should not do is adopt, promote, or favor one religion – indoctrinate.

Representing the Bible itself is a matter of hell if you do and hell if you don't. In *Parables* for high school we included only one of Christ's parables, just one to connect the parable tradition most familiar to American children to similar stories in other traditions. We assumed some knowledge of Christian parables and concentrated on ones we knew few children in this country would be familiar with. We also wanted to show how individual professional authors had taken over and utilized the form. Parables represented Ghana, Turkey, Ethiopia, Japan, Indonesia, Denmark, Scotland, and Russia.

There are parables in this book which are good, the parable of The Prodigal Son, parables by Robert Louis Stevenson, and Leo Tolstoy. Most of the other parables represent a poor selection for a book of parables. Surely, better selections could have been made, while still doing justice to the principle of multi-ethnic. Only one of the parables of Jesus is mentioned. Since the Judao-Christian [*sic*] ethic is the most significant philosophical principle permeating Western civilization and American culture, why could not a more proportionate representation of parables from the Bible have been included? Multi-ethnicity does not require a disproportionate, lopsided representation of ethnic groups and culture in educational material.

The objection to our *Proverbs* voiced a similar complaint.

Again, as in the case in the book of parables in this series there is a very disproportionate selection of proverbs from among cultures, civilizations, ethnic backgrounds, etc. insofar as the proportionate make-up of American culture and society is concerned.

We were trying to represent the makeup of world cultures, not just American culture, as is appropriate for an ancient, international folk form. Also, it seemed reasonable to us to assume students had already acquired familiarity with religious and folk material of their own culture. To people imbued with chauvinism, who associate self with fatherland and mother tongue, missing an opportunity to assert your own ethos over others' – and exposing your children to the risky attraction of other cultures – seems inexcusable.

Because of the very principle of separation of church and state invoked in the objections, publishers feel that the only way an excerpt from the Bible can be anthologized is as some form of literature. In *Legends*, for high school, we included the story of Samson from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, prefaced by a straight historical summary of preceding events.

*Objection:* The story of Samson as recorded in the book of Judges in the Old Testament is historical fact. To include this historical account in a book of "Legends" is to cast doubt in the minds of young people upon the veracity of the Holy Scriptures. Moreover, this is at variance with and is calculated to undermine the religious beliefs of young people whose families have taught them to believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible. This is one more example (among many others) of how the editors and publishers of these books take unwarranted and unconstitutional liberties which affront the religious beliefs of fundamentalist youth in the public schools.

This results from an unfortunate misunderstanding about the nature of legends and myths. Now, in popular parlance, a story may be called a legend or a myth to indicate that it is made up, but in serious erudition these forms are not at all equated with fictions. Professional folklorists and the most highly regarded scholars of the forms, like Northrop Frye or Joseph Campbell, consider them as embodiments of the highest truths of a culture.

Some historical veracity partly defines legends, which are stories about people who probably really lived and often have been proved to have lived. Other stories in the book, for example are about William Tell, Robin Hood, American Indian heroes, and figures from King Arthur's court, all of whom are regarded as based on actual people, however embroidered or amplified the stories may be as retold for generations. But even these accretions and exaggerations are considered by the curators of legends not just as fiction but as expressions of the hero's significance not evident in a simple telling of physical events. The epic cycles of Charlemagne and Roland and of the Trojan War heroes are collections of legends generated around real people and events.

The story of Samson and the other stories of the Old Testament are just as historical as those recorded in other ancient documents, and the inclusion of Samson in *Legends* implies nothing less. One does not have to be a Christian or orthodox Jew to accept the chronicle portions of the Old Testament as actual history. The defensiveness of this objection is unnecessary on two counts: the historicity of the chronicle portions of the Old Testament is well accepted, and the classification of "legend" does not disparage a story or imply it is not based on truth.

To criticize textbooks both for not including Biblical material and for placing it under literary headings puts publishers in a double bind, because there is no other way to get Biblical selections into language arts books. It is very important to clear up misunderstanding about both this and the historicity of legends and myths, because fundamentalists take this necessary way of handling Scripture as part of an effort to say the Bible isn't true, including the very existence of Christ. Since I think the Bible contains truth at many levels—some biographical and historical,

some spiritual and metaphysical—I for one would not want to present it as idle tales.

Some objections were made to particular points of ideology or to particular people standing for those points. For example, in *Fictional Diaries* we included one of Ring Lardner's humorous stories told by an immature adolescent. The objection first stated that, "Ring Lardner was a leftist sportscaster, his son Ring Lardner, Jr., was one of the infamous Hollywood 10, who were known Communists." This refers of course to the blacklisting that occurred during the extremist campaign directed against subversives by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. Merely recommending *The Joan Baez Song Book* at the end of a high school book of songs triggered this response:

*Objection:* Miss Baez is notorious as a writer and singer of social protest songs, The [sic] themes and content of which are usually critical of our country, its institutions, traditions, and moral values.

*Interaction* and the *Man* series included a piece by Margaret Mead, the late, much acclaimed anthropologist. Objection was made to her as a person: "Margaret Mead is an atheist and evolutionist who accepts anything as right or good if it is the practice and accepted customs for that particular society." Three charges are made here—atheism, evolutionism, and relativism (see "situation ethics"). Interestingly, all three of these stances are imposed on the scientist, for better or for worse, by traditional mainstream science. That is, the scientific investigator has been expected to keep her belief in God, if any, out of her work and act as an atheist; to assume some version of Darwinian evolution as an hypothesis; and to observe and describe nonjudgmentally the customs and practices of different world peoples. (The right to atheism, by the way, is guaranteed in the Bill of Rights as part of religious freedom.)

Here is a typical objection to evolution. In *Charts and Graphs* was a chart called "Early Man and His Tools," depicting four stages of man from lower to upper Paleolithic, going from 750,000 years ago to 15,000 years ago.

*Objection:* This presentation presupposes in a matter-of-fact way that the theory of evolution is a proven fact. This is scientifically inaccurate. It is contrary to the religious beliefs of many persons, and consequently, is inadmissible material for inclusion in public school curricula when implied as fact.

The First Amendment does not forbid the inclusion in school teaching of some material contrary to someone's religious beliefs (consider how far that claim could be taken!). But the point that Darwinism is scientifically inaccurate and only a theory, not fact, deserves consideration, not

because it is a reason to keep the concept of evolution out of schools but because it touches on legitimate and profound issues of what constitutes knowledge. "Science," after all, simply means "knowledge." It does not stipulate how we come by knowledge.

Esotericists have long spoken of a "spiritual science" and were among the first to denounce Darwin's theory, though poles apart by nature from fundamentalist Christians. Theosophists and Rosicrucians, for example, teach a cosmogenesis and anthropogenesis totally different from both conventional Biblical interpretation and modern Darwinism.<sup>4</sup> Esoteric doctrine does not contradict modern science but says that it conceives of evolution in such material terms that it garbles it badly for lack of a larger (metaphysical) framework. In other words, other people than fundamentalists—very thoughtful, well educated, sophisticated people—also insist on the shortcomings of Darwinism and material science. Indeed, there is a basis on which the theories of this kind of science may be challenged, but this basis concerns the essential nature of knowing itself, not a mere maneuver like "Creation Science," which claims falsely to compete with modern science as an alternative theory.

The creationists' efforts to introduce religion into school disguised as science brought on beneficial airing of the subject. The Public Broadcasting System showed in 1982 a program called "Did Darwin Get It Wrong?" that reviewed the evidence and showed through interviews that even those scientists who criticize Darwinism assume his general theory and reject hotly the fundamentalists' exploitation of their criticisms. Likewise, in a 1982 issue of *Science* Boyce Rensberger wrote:

Unfortunately, the debates within evolutionary biology are often confused in many people's minds with the attack of the creationists on public schools. The creationists, in their attempt to force the teaching of a supernatural creation, often talk as if the debates are a new and startling challenge to some misguided scientific orthodoxy. Actually, Darwin's theory of evolution, like all good theories, has faced tests and challenges ever since it was put forth in 1858.

The history of the theory of evolution over the last hundred years is a stunning testimony to the theory's power. A century after Darwin's death, it is clear that every major advance in biology—from the discoveries of naturalists to the formulas of molecular biologists—fits beautifully into the broad outlines of the picture that Darwin drew. Where new discoveries have conflicted with Darwin's theory, the theory has been modified to accommodate the findings. This is exactly how all scientific theories are built. One result is that the theory of evolution, even with the question marks that remain, stands today with more authority and reliability than ever.<sup>5</sup>

Seventy-two Nobel Prize winning scientists testified before the United States Supreme Court in 1987 that creationism was not a science. In its

landmark decision afterward, on June 19, the Court struck down a Louisiana law requiring schools to teach creationism, ruled that creationism was a pseudo-science employed to find a place for religion in schools, and thus reaffirmed in legal circles the Court's previous stand for the separation of church and state.

When objectors demand that Darwinian evolution be labeled in school as an hypothesis, and that alternatives to it be included as well, I believe they are thinking only of including their version of Genesis. I wonder if they have considered just what other alternatives might be presented in school to be really fair. Certainly among the strongest contenders would be those of the Theosophists and other esotericists, whom fundamentalists would detest. Then what about the variety of creation myths that have issued from virtually every civilization and culture known? Schools will be sorely charged indeed to represent on an equal-time basis all these alternatives to Darwin, and the attempt would require exactly the multicultural program that so antagonizes the objectors.

And what are we to do with the host of other still unproven scientific hypotheses that are being taught as fact because they provide predictability and permit the creation of technology? Electricity and magnetism are still mysteries, just names for still unexplained phenomena. So are most of the main concepts of modern science. In other words, the objectors make an excellent point about ticketing a theory as such and about presenting it in a context of alternatives, but since evolution is only one instance, this point poses general problems of teaching science that have simply never been faced. We let children think we understand nature better than we actually do, and this no doubt makes it harder for them to break through as adults to what we still don't know.

The importance of this issue for objectors centers on whether people are primarily spiritual or material creatures. This is a legitimate concern indeed, but it must not take the form of merely abhorring an animal origin, which even if true would be true only for the physical level and would not preclude a spiritual being as well. The popularization of science for both schools and the general public projects a far too physical view of our understanding of the world. Now that science is dealing increasingly with the invisible, the intangible, and the imponderable—probing very far out through astrophysics and very far in through nuclear physics—it seems inappropriate indeed to continue to purvey science as concerned only with physicality and never relating to what people have called metaphysics. Mathematical descriptions of nature, on which we rely the more we penetrate the universe in any direction, are really abstract philosophy, and we are borne back to the Renaissance integration of science, religion, and philosophy. In fact, it has been some time now since Einstein said that “physics leads to metaphysics.”



No, the objectors are not wrong in exerting a force to keep the teaching of science from closing doors to immaterial reality. A number of selections in *Interaction* gave voice to realities alternative to the standard, mechanistic, materialistic science inherited from the nineteenth century. We excerpted from Ostrander and Schroeder's *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*, Carlos Castaneda's *Conversations with Don Juan*, and Gina Cerminara's biography of Edgar Cayce, the remarkable spiritual healer who was also a conventional Christian. Had it appeared at that time, we would have drawn from Fritjof Capra's milestone fusion of current science and metaphysics, *The Tao of Physics*. The objectors usually did not comment on such selections, and I would not expect them to recognize these authors or personages as allies.

Only Christians of a certain cast of mind have felt that a theory of biological evolution conflicts with the Bible or negates spirituality in humankind. Curious enough is the defense where there is no attack, but more curious still is the almost obsessive apprehension about being classed with or reduced to beasts. For example, in a book called *Information* for upper elementary school we included "The Courtship of Animals" by well known juvenile author, Millicent Selsam, that got shot down not for touching on sex education but for mentioning in the same breath human fertilization and fertilization in animals.

*Objection:* The reproductive process of man should not be included with these examples of lower order life. This is an endorsement of evolution. Evolution is not to be taught in such a manner as to present it as fact. The photo on page 39 is attempting to say that there is no difference between humans and frogs, fish and snakes. Recommend rejection!

This article features the ways sperm and egg come together in the animal world and thus includes some examples of courtship. It makes comparison only at the microbiological level of sperm and egg, nothing being said about human courtship. The "photo" is not a photo but a simple drawing of the sperm and the egg for humans, frogs, fish, and snakes to convey this basic fact of sexual reproduction across the various animal families. At this biochemical level, similarity does of course exist, as it does for many other aspects of physiological functioning such as metabolism, but absolutely nothing in the text or picture implies the extravagant generalization that "there is no difference between humans and frogs, fish and snakes." Nor does the article deal with evolution; the only reason, I believe, that the objector brought it in is that evolution means for him or her that people are dragged down to the level of beasts. Surely there is more to humans than their sperms and eggs.

## Snake\*

Theodore Roethke

I saw a young snake glide  
 Out of a mottled shade  
 And hang, limp on a stone:  
 A thin mouth, and a tongue  
 Stayed, in the still air.

It turned; it drew away;  
 Its shadow bent in half;  
 It quickened, and was gone.

I felt my slow blood warm.  
 I longed to be that thing,  
 The pure, sensuous form.  
 And I may be, some time.<sup>6</sup>

*"Objection:* Insinuates belief in reincarnation."

Reincarnation did not occur to me when I approved the poem for *Lyric Poetry*, except perhaps as one of several potentialities Roethke wants the reader's imagination to play with. He could perfectly well be talking about becoming "pure, sensuous form" in this lifetime, through magical or imaginative transformation, by role-playing the snake, by creating poems, by voluntarily descending from time to time to his reptilian "old brain," etc. Part of a poet's business is to shake up staid perception and help us entertain unlimited possibilities.

I think it right enough indeed to see reincarnation as one of these possibilities, but among those who seriously believe in reincarnation, reappearance of a human as an animal is a repugnant trivialization of a central spiritual doctrine. People reincarnate as people, and generally as a higher being than they were before, because the purpose of returning is to use the material plane as a school for further soul growth. It is part of a belief that souls evolve from lower to higher consciousness. Reincarnation of a person as an animal is a superstitious degeneration of the idea, but it has recurred enough during history to become a solid popular prejudice that may partly account for why the Christian church put it under the table early in its course of gaining state acceptance and wider membership.<sup>7</sup>

Reversion to animality runs as a motif throughout typical fundamentalist thinking and connects inherently with racism, since a racist's hierarchy of lower to higher strains of human beings usually anchors the

\*Reprinted by permission of Faber and Faber Ltd. from *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke*.

lower end in the animal world. Thus Europeans (Christians) looking down on Africans and Amerindians as "barbarians" and "savages" meant that they were little better than animals. These are in fact precisely the epithets that Darwin himself applied to the Tierra del Fuegians, whom he compared to lower animals, partly because they showed no religious feeling, which was clearly one of his main criteria of civilization.<sup>8</sup> Notions of racial purity generally assume that purer races have removed themselves farther from bestiality. This view in turn implies, curiously, an acceptance of some sort of continuity between animal and human such as evolutionists assume.

Part of the curiosity I'm tracking here concerns how differently Darwin and his theory have been villainized than fundamentalists villainized him. In a chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* called "Race-Thinking Before Racism" Hannah Arendt points out how Darwinism, though politically neutral itself, was pressed into the service of various, even opposing, ideologies such as rule by race or by class, pacifism or imperialism. Its notion of inheritance could justify aristocracy; of survival of the fittest, colonial domination; of struggle for survival, revolution by the masses; of individual mutation, takeover by bourgeois upstarts; of gradual scale between humans and animals, racial discrimination. What endured into the twentieth century, she says, was the movement toward eugenics, which implied the possibility of creating racial purity and breeding a master race of supermen.

The process of selection had only to be changed from a natural necessity which worked behind the backs of men into an "artificial," consciously applied physical tool. . . .

But before Nazism, in the course of its totalitarian policy, attempted to change man into a beast, there were numerous efforts to develop him on a strictly hereditary basis into a god. Not only Herbert Spencer, but all the early evolutionists and Darwinists "had as strong a faith in humanity's angelic future as in man's simian origin."<sup>9</sup>

Any concept of evolution must have, after all, two ends of a scale—angelic as well as simian. Regardless of whether one accepts Darwinism or not, it is a kind of negative thinking to look only downward to the ape and not upward to the angel or perfection implied in any evolution. Darwin was describing an *ascent*, so that, among all the other doctrinal possibilities it can be used to support is the one that humans are engaged in a *spiritual* evolution and that we are in transit to God, perhaps after some kind of fall. (Unfortunately, he used the genealogical term "descent" as in "descended from.") Because it is possible to see in Darwinism whatever one likes, it is significant what interpretation a given party does read into

it. (It should be refreshing for us all to regard Darwinism as a sort of Rohrschach test.)

Supposedly, some Christians attack Darwinism because it denies humanity's spiritual origins as told in Genesis. But this assumption of contradiction is unnecessary and not made by most Christians. I feel there is another reason, and it has to do with apprehension about one's animality. By no means does the theory of evolution equate people with beasts, but we will detest this theory if we have a low self-esteem and hence fear that we are little better than an animal. In other words, how we react to a scale of apes to angels depends on where we feel we stand on it. This determines the negative thinking that sees in Darwinism a denial of spiritual origins.

Racism is a displacement onto others of bestiality suspected in oneself. It implies exactly the apes-to-angels hierarchy that threatens people of low self-esteem, who may consign to the lower rungs those not of their own kind. The more of these others rank below me, the farther I must be from the bottom. Opposing intermarriage to maintain racial purity aims to gain or maintain higher standing in the hierarchy. As the Nazis knew so well, however, the backside of eugenics is genocide, the ultimate in racial discrimination.

So doubt of one's worth underlies both racism and the repudiation of evolution. People brought up believing in angels but made to feel they are falling amid apes are especially haunted by apprehensions of animality. Believing in God but not in oneself sets up an intolerable chasm that one crosses not by finding others inferior but by identifying with divinity. As a final note upon this subject at this point, consider the objection made to a picture in *Using Figurative Language* of the *Language of Man* series: "Man's head with a beast body is obnoxious."