

Tepid call to faith

by Michael Clow

The audience for the first Killam Lecture of 1978 was treated to a rather pedestrian lecture by Dr. Bernard Cohen whose thought has evidently remained blissfully unaffected by all that has happened since Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was first published 15 years ago. Although proclaiming that the future of Science was inherently unpredictable, his forecast was for more of the same, his vision of the future a continuation of the past.

The essential weakness of the lecture was its basically uncritical framework of conventional presumptions about the nature of scientific enquiry and the role science fulfills in our civilization. His distinctions between science and technology, the affirmation of scientists as revolutionary liberators of people through the

conquest of Nature, his faith in limitless "progress" and admiration of the power produced by science, his call for society to "catch up" with science based technology, and his stern warning not to accuse science of contributing to the world's problems, were all tired reiterations of orthodox themes. The basic message of the lecture was sounded at the beginning: science is the greatest achievement of humanity and is an inevitable force in shaping human destiny. Missing was any rethinking of the goals, structures or context of science in the light of the global crisis of people's relation to their physical environment.

Also missing from his thinking seemed to be a clear appreciation that Science is not nature but a particular body of knowledge reflecting the sort of information

European people, with their values and perspectives, sought from Nature; the whole notion of Science as a purposeful creation rather than discovery was absent. The important realization that the Science we have invented is a limited and atomized perspective on Nature that grows from our own desire first to explore and then to exploit Nature is alien to Cohen's analysis. The thinking of the last decade and a half has made it clear that our Science with its fragmented, quantitative methodology flows the objective of building a materialist paradise by "rationally" exploiting the universe. The type of knowledge our science searches for reflects not the integrated physical world but our own goal of "understanding" Nature in order to manipulate her. Our Science, in direct opposition to Cohen's belief, is not separate or divorced from technology but is coupled to and symbiotic with technology and its fruits.

Science is not simply an abstract body of "facts", it contains a framework of thought, a creed or religious content, that specifies a particular relationship between Man and the rest of Nature, justifying certain values and behaviours and endorsing them with positive moral sanction. The worldview that Nature is for exploitation is not unconnected to the belief that people too should be seen principally from a utilitarian perspective. Those who question the canons of scientific methodology and theology face the same treatment as other heretics, and all that can be labelled as "unscientific" is held to be as devoid of value as the work of a crafty charlatan.

Cohen's view that Science is a revolutionary force, and great scientists revolutionaries, needs some updating and correction. True, Science was one of the revolu-

Comment is an opinion column open to members of the university community who wish to present an informed opinion on a topic of their selection.

tionary forces that fabricated a new society three hundred years ago, but in winning that revolution it became the bastion of what is now the established order. Science is a conservative social force that urges society on to the impossible goal of a technological world of endless affluence and, by no accident, a greater role for those possessing a monopoly over scientific and technological expertise. Science is no longer presentable as a progressive, new ideology because it, and the men who promote it, are expressing the dominant formulation of social well being. Revolutionaries are people who challenge the rules of an endeavour, who question the basic institutional assumptions, goals and dogmas. As great as may have been the leaps of "Einstein's Thought," they neither changed the purpose of scientific endeavour nor the character of Science's role in society. Einstein did not make a new revolutionary break within the institution of science but created a new stream of thought within the tradition. The real revolutionaries in science are the heretics who seek a wholistic, integrated science divorced from utilitarian considerations and which aims at co-existing with, not exploiting, the Nature of which we are but a part.

Cohen's lecture is perhaps best described as a rather uninspired apology for Science as the wisdom of its philosophy lies under attack; blame people for our problems, as if Science were somehow divorced from them and their activities. Proclaiming one's faith in science, technology, and the society of which it forms such an important part as the continuing future of human beings may be natural for one who has spent a lifetime chronicling its "glories", but as a forecast of the future it hardly represents disinterested chairvoyance.

continued from page 4

As long as a professor is doing his job as an educator and realizes that's his first duty, then I don't mind some of my tuition fees going to support his research, for that seems like a pretty fair exchange of resources. But I certainly didn't come here at great expense to subsidize intellectually deadening weeds, did you? Your Student Council offices are located on the second floor of the student union building, use them!

Andrew Lynk
Student Council Science
representative
March 4, 1978

My card came back.

To the Gazette:

I am pleased to inform you that just after writing to your paper concerning my problem with the loss of my Student Card due to withdrawal from Dalhousie, I received a very apologetic letter from Mr. Mancini. Included in this letter was a complimentary Student Card that allows me to full student privileges. Therefore all is settled between me and the Student Union at Dalhousie. I am sorry for my previously upset correspondence, however, at that point I had waited for about a month and a half and I tended to feel somewhat ignored.

Thank you for listening,
Carolyn Naugler

Stork stopper supporters

To the Gazette:

Mr. Hominick's letter (*Gazette* March 2) was irrational and unrealistic. People are going to engage in pre-marital sex whether or not contraceptive devices are available. To protect these people it is necessary to use devices such as condoms. Mr. Hominick was rather unrealistic to expect normal and sexually healthy people to refrain from pre-marital sex. The ad was not making these devices more accessible than they have been for centuries.

People engaging in pre-marital sex are also not necessarily promiscuous, this is an unfair statement, the two do not go hand in hand.

The advertisement was sex education and was teaching the correct uses of condoms, this is not promoting promiscuity. Sex education does not promote irresponsible sex but rather a responsible

and mature approach to sex—no unwanted pregnancies, no spread of social diseases. Mr. Hominick was mistaken about no method being 100% safe—oral contraceptives (the Pill) are 100% safe if used properly.

We suggest that the *Gazette* continue printing advertisements of this kind as a service to the student body and that Mr. Hominick stop condemning people who do not follow his puritan principles.

Signed,
A group of mature and non-promiscuous students:
K.J. Janigan
K.J. Seary
C.A.M. Coffin
L. Edwards
H.C. Burgers
A.M. Murtagh

Gazette parody insults people

To the Gazette:

While selected sections of the "Chronically-Horrid" insert of the February 16 Dalhousie Gazette were cleverly written, the article "Deaf Mute on Bilingualism" was an affront to hearing-impaired and other groups of disabled persons. In an era when "handicapped" persons are seeking their rightful place in the mainstream of society, the terminology and content of such "humorous" passages is particularly aversive.

It is ironic to note that your editorial policy reserves the right to edit material "considered offensive to readers." In this instance, some thoughtful self-editing could have eliminated the perpetuation of unhealthy attitudes toward disabled persons.

Sincerely,
R.P. Reynolds, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
School of Physical Education

Norman is out to lunch

To the Gazette:

I would like to take exception to some remarks made by Norman Epstein in a letter entitled "Poor Crop" in last week's *Gazette*. He stated—"As every good law student knows, the judges of the Supreme Court of Canada allow for interpretation and flexibility of the Canadian Constitution." I would like to know where he gets the authority for such a remark—since he isn't a law student. I am a Canadian law student—I will let others judge

continued on page 8

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