

H A R V A R D
DIVINITY
B U L L E T I N

SUMMER/AUTUMN 2010

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ethics

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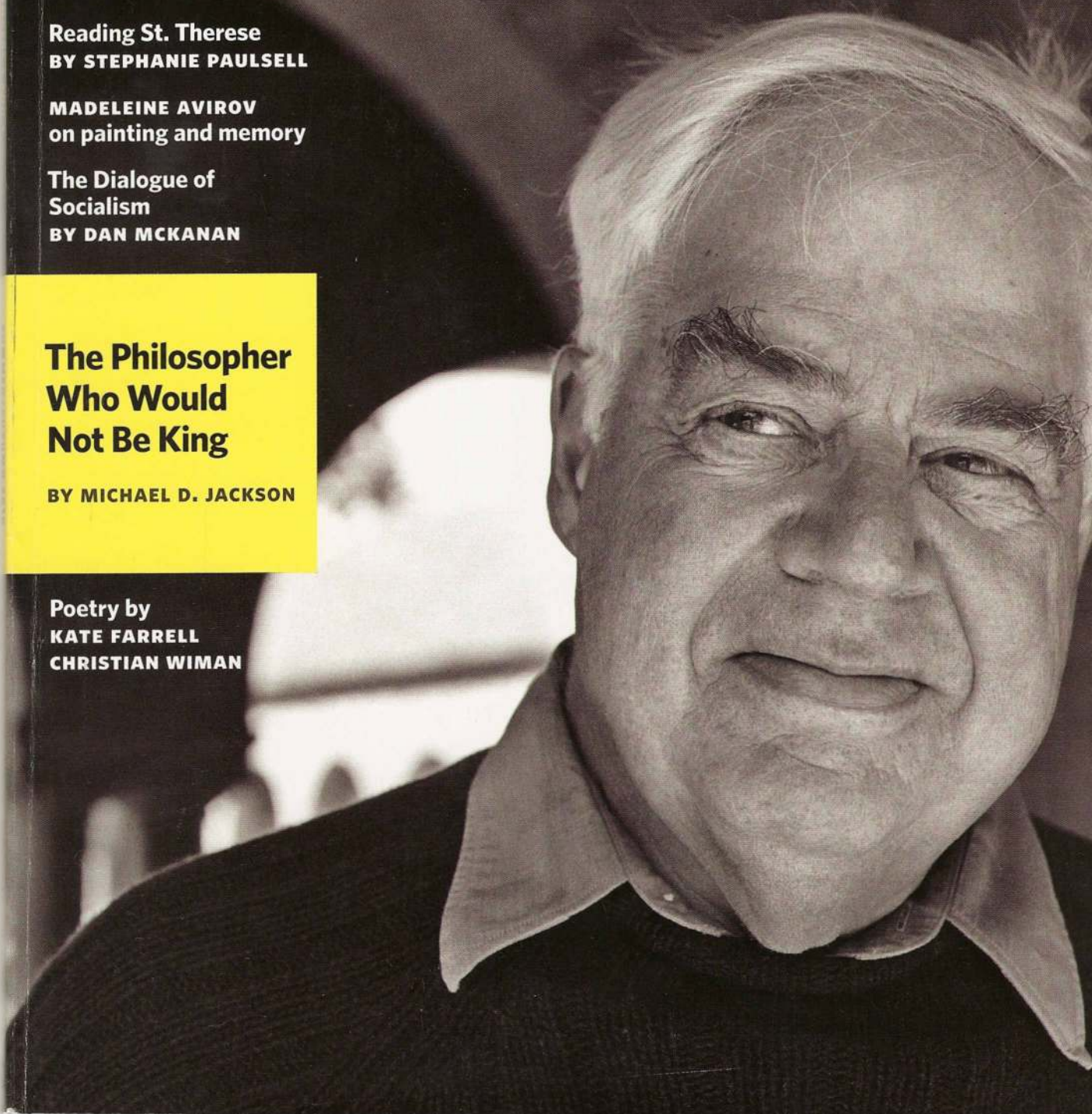
MADELEINE AVIROV
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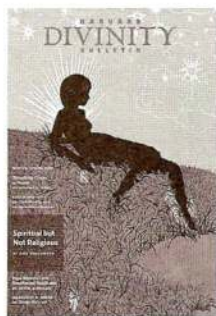
The Dialogue of
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**The Philosopher
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Attending to Our Roots

It was a joy to read Richard Delacy's thoughtful and penetrating article on Indian cinema, "A Homeland Imagined and Consumed" (Spring/Summer 2009). Cultural norms and evolutions certainly can be viewed through arts produced, and India's cinematic output of hundreds of films per year provides an important lens to understand the country's growth.

As Delacy explored in his article, the film *Swades* explores the dynamic of the non-resident Indian's (NRI) relationship with the home country as well as the rural and urban divide within India. My wife and I had a chance to see *Swades* with a few Indian and non-Indian friends while living in India. The article reminded me of the complicated notion of "responsibility," whether to one's "country" (by birth or ancestry) or "neighborhood" (in my case, a very rural area in the United States).

I would suggest an additional part of the film's lack of success rests on the fact that the main character found his technical and social enlightenment in the United States—in many ways offending the notion of a self-sustaining culture. Several folks we saw the film with, who were Indian, felt unhappy with the "outsider as savior" notion of the film. This opened a conversation, which lasted a fair part of the night, on what they personally were or should have been doing to help rural India. I suspect as India and NRIs prosper, the intense conversations highlighted in *Swades* and the critiques explored in Mr.

Delacy's article will continue in cinema and living rooms alike.

*Doug Shipman, MTS '01
Atlanta, Georgia*

Our Earth's Keepers

The piece entitled "Cities, Climate Change, and Christianity" by Sallie McFague drew a complicated picture of today's world. I applaud Professor McFague in highlighting the consequences of abusing our planet, ignoring our obligation to its care and that effect on our fellow human beings. For example, Hurricane Katrina was not man-made, but the decision to remove large areas of natural wetland buffers around New Orleans for construction and allowing the Army Corp of Engineers to redirect the flow of the Mississippi in the name of progress was a good example of human ignorance and the dire consequences of those decisions.

However, while climate change (used to be called global warming) is evident, to say that 90 percent is man-made is unsubstantiated. We are coming out of a winter where huge amounts of snow, ice, and bitter temperatures broke records across the world. Space agencies are reporting changes in our entire solar system, visible with the Hubble. NASA recently launched an Atlas V rocket to study changes in the sun, including increasing solar activity affecting the earth's atmosphere. Russian scientists have reported changes in the upper levels of the earth's atmosphere where

HO gas is forming that wasn't there before, not related to global warming or fluorocarbon emissions. Something is changing, but is it all man-made and does it warrant implementing a global regulating body which can impose large taxes and strict regulation on any country, and redistribute wealth to even out living standards across the world? That should raise a red flag to free societies everywhere.

How does Christianity fit with her topic? I agree that we have become and are raising a generation which has lost the ability to be silent, to listen to nature, and in that silence, hear God's message. Interaction has become constant and yet impersonal, whether socially, for constant entertainment or learning; everything is done electronically. Do we need phone, Internet, games, and music at our fingertips 24/7? Do we see where all the discarded, outdated mounds of toxic electronics go when the latest and greatest is imported for our pleasure each year?

The message of the Bible is wealth is not the enemy, sin and all its fallout is, and we are all guilty of being in the place we now find ourselves. A self-correction took place without warning and we are living in a "bounded economy," living with restraint. To blame wealth for society's woes is like saying the gun shot the person. Education and opportunity raise people out of poverty and slums, and this is proven in areas worldwide where missionaries build schools, hospitals, help set up farming facilities and clean water sources, hand out food, books, medicine and provide lifesaving health care while sleeping in tents alongside the poor. This is not free, but done through donations and sacrifice by hardworking people who give of themselves, in essence, who make room for all. Democracy provides people the freedom to educate, work hard, and build that mansion if that is their dream or go out in the mission field and build a school instead.

Our parents survived the Great Depression, returned from World War II and created homes, started families, built industries, and prosperity followed. Then somehow homeownership went from a privilege to a right. Professor MaFague keeps using the statement "Well-off city dwellers," vs. slum dwellers. It reminded me of the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, where

Potter controls all and "decides how people live," while George Bailey hangs on to the one free enterprise. George called Potter "a scurvy little spider in the big scheme of things." George lends money to responsible citizens who build homes, create a life, and pay it back. It's called responsibility. The money repaid goes into the next loan, and a community rises and flourishes. George did not bundle the loans into assets of exaggerated value upon speculation and sell for profit all over the world. There was no such thing as derivatives.

Our banks, mortgage companies, car, insurance, and investment companies became Potters. Wealth did not create the crime; the criminal committed the crime. So what were the consequences for reporting false gains, inflating numbers and selling, in reality, negative assets to the extent of causing a global financial meltdown? Bad business practices were saved, restored, and rewarded. . . .

Professor McFague is right, we need to be good stewards of the earth and we need her voice to bring us back to responsibility, to remind us that we are our brother's keeper and this earth is a gift. She defends her approach as simply being about a re-focusing, a turn of the eyes of theologians away from heaven and toward the earth, insisting on a *relevant* theology, which she suggests is a better portrait of Christian faith for our day.

Maybe turning away from heaven is how we got into this mess. Ultimately, personal responsibility is her message, and taking care of our planet is part of that, but it's not a religion. At the end of the day, no amount of recycling can save a soul.

Linda Smith
Santa Rosa Beach, Florida

ERRATA *The Bulletin regrets the inclusion of two errors in the Winter/Spring 2010 issue. In "Pope Benedict, Disaffected Anglicans, and Holocaust-Denying Bishops," by Kevin Madigan, the name of Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire Gene Robinson was incorrectly given as Eugene Robinson. In "Young, Hip, and Muslim," by Jane I. Smith, the Arabic word for "an initiation ceremony to welcome a new baby seven days after birth" should be aqiqab, rather than aqida (which means "belief").*