

ADVANCED READING

PASSAGE 1

Nearly every writer on the philosophy of civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., makes a connection between King and Henry David Thoreau, usually via Thoreau's famous essay, "Civil Disobedience" (1849). In his book *Stride Toward Freedom* (1958), King himself stated that Thoreau's essay was his first intellectual contact with the theory of passive resistance to governmental laws that are perceived as morally unjust. However, this emphasis on Thoreau's influence on King is unfortunate: first, King would not have agreed with many other aspects of Thoreau's philosophy, including Thoreau's ultimate acceptance of violence as a form of protest; second, an overemphasis on the influence of one essay has kept historians from noting other correspondences between King's philosophy and transcendentalism. "Civil Disobedience" was the only example of transcendentalist writing with which King was familiar, and in many other transcendentalist writings, including works by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller, King would have found ideas more nearly akin to his own.

The kind of civil disobedience King had in mind was, in fact, quite different from Thoreau's view of civil disobedience. Thoreau, like most other transcendentalists, was primarily interested in reform of the individual, whereas King was primarily interested in reform of society. As a protest against the Mexican War, Thoreau refused to pay taxes, but he did not hope by his action to force a change in national policy. While he encouraged others to adopt similar protests, he did not attempt to mount any mass protest action against unjust laws. In contrast to Thoreau, King began to advocate the use of mass civil disobedience to effect revolutionary changes within the social system.

However, King's writings suggest that, without realizing it, he was an incipient transcendentalist. Most transcendentalists subscribed to the concept of "higher law" and included civil disobedience to unjust laws as part of their strategy. They often invoked the concept of higher law to justify their opposition to slavery and to advocate disobedience to the strengthened Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. In his second major book, King's discussion of just and unjust laws and the responsibility of the individual is very similar to the transcendentalists' discussion of higher law. In reference to how one can advocate breaking some laws and obeying others, King notes that there are two types of laws, just and unjust; he describes a just law as a "code that squares with the moral law" and an unjust law as a "code that is out of harmony with the moral law." Thus, King's opposition to the injustice of legalized segregation in the twentieth century is philosophically akin to the transcendentalists' opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law in the nineteenth century.

PASSAGE 2

In *Democracies and its Critics*, Robert Dahl defends both democratic value and pluralist democracies, or polyarchies (a rough shorthand term for Western political systems). Dahl argues convincingly that the idea of democracy rests on political equality—the equality capacity of all citizens to determine or influence collective decisions. Of course, as Dahl recognizes, if hierarchical ordering is inevitable in any structure of government, and if no society can guarantee perfect equality in the resources that may give rise to political influence, the democratic principle of political equality is incapable of full realization. So actual systems can be deemed democratic only as approximations to the ideal. It is on these grounds that Dahl defends polyarchy.

As a representative system in which elected officials both determine government policy and are accountable to a broad-based electorate, polyarchy reinforces a diffusion of power away from any single center and toward a variety of individuals, groups, and organizations. It is this centrifugal characteristic, Dahl argues, that makes polyarchy the nearest possible approximation to the democratic ideal. Polyarchy achieves this diffusion of power through party competition and the operation of pressure groups. Competing for votes, parties seek to offer different sections of the electorate what they most want; they do not ask what the majority thinks of an issue, but what policy commitments will sway the electoral decisions of particular groups. Equally, groups that have strong feelings about an issue can organize in pressure groups to influence public policy.

During the 1960s and 1970s, criticism of the theory of pluralist democracy was vigorous. Many critics pointed to a gap between the model and the reality of Western political systems. They argued that the distribution of power resources other than the vote was so uneven that the political order systematically gave added weight to those who were already richer or organizationally more powerful. So the power of some groups to exclude issues altogether from the political agenda effectively countered any diffusion of influence on decision-making.

Although such criticism became subdued during the 1980s, Dahl himself seems to support some of the earlier criticism. Although he regrets that some Western intellectuals demand more democracy from polyarchies than is possible, and is cautious about the possibility of further democratization, he nevertheless ends his book by asking what changes in structures and consciousness might make political life more democratic in present polyarchies. One answer, he suggests, is to look at the economic order of polyarchies from the point of view of the citizen as well as from that of producers and consumers. This would require a critical examination of both the distribution of those economic resources that are at the same time political resources, and the relationship between political structures and economic enterprises.

PASSAGE 3

The old belief that climatic stability accounts for the high level of species diversity in the Amazon River basin of South America emerged, strangely enough, from observations of the deep sea. Sanders discovered high diversity among the mud-dwelling animals of the deep ocean. He argued that such diversity could be attributed to the absence of significant fluctuations in climate and physical conditions, without which the extinction of species should be rare. In the course of time new species would continue to evolve, and so the rate of speciation would be greater than the rate of extinction, resulting in the accumulation of great diversity. Sanders argued that the Amazon tropical rain forest is analogous to the deep sea: because the rain forest has a stable climate, extinction should be rare. Evidence that some species of rain-forest trees have persisted for some 30 million years in the Amazon basin, added to the absence of winter and glaciation, supports this view.

Recently however, several observations have cast doubt on the validity of the stability hypothesis and suggest that the climate of the Amazon basin has fluctuated significantly in the past. Haffer noted that different species of birds inhabit different corners of the basin in spite of the fact that essentially unbroken green forest spreads from the western edge to the eastern edge of the region. This pattern presented a puzzle to biologists studying the distributions of plants and animals: why would different species inhabit different parts of the forest if the habitat in which they lived had a stable climate?

Haffer proposed a compelling explanation for the distribution of species. Observing that species found on high ground are different from those on low ground and knowing that in the Amazon lowlands are drier than uplands, he proposed that during the ice ages the Amazon lowlands became a near-desert arid plain; meanwhile, the more elevated regions became islands of moisture and hence served as refuges for the fauna and flora of the rain forest. Populations that were once continuous diverged and became permanently separated. Haffer's hypothesis appears to explain the distribution of species as well as the unusual species diversity. The ice-age refuges would have protected existing species from extinction. But the periodic geographic isolation of related populations (there have been an estimated 13 ice ages to date) would have facilitated the development of new species as existing species on the lowlands adapted to changing climates.

Although no conclusive proof has yet been found to support Haffer's hypothesis, it has led other researchers to gauge the effects of climatic changes, such as storms and flooding, on species diversity in the Amazon basin. Their research suggests that climatic disturbances help account for the splendid diversity of the Amazon rain forest.

PASSAGE 4

Although surveys of medieval legislation, guild organization, and terminology used to designate different medical practitioners have demonstrated that numerous medical specialties were recognized in Europe during the Middle Ages, most historians continue to equate the term “woman medical practitioner,” wherever they encounter it in medieval records, with “midwife.” This common practice obscures the fact that, although women were not represented on all levels of medicine equally, they were represented in a variety of specialties throughout the broad medical community. A reliable study by Wickersheimer and Jacquart documents that of 7,647 medical practitioners in France during the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, 121 were women; of these, only 44 were identified as midwives, while the rest practiced as physicians, surgeons, apothecaries, barbers, and other healers.

While preserving terminological distinctions somewhat increases the quality of the information extracted from medieval documents concerning women medical practitioners, scholars must also reopen the whole question of why documentary evidence for women medical practitioners comprises such a tiny fraction of the evidence historians of medieval medicine usually present. Is this due to the limitations of the historical record, as has been claimed, or does it also result from the methods historians use? Granted, apart from medical licenses, the principal sources of information regarding medical practitioners available to researchers are wills, property transfers, court records, and similar documents, all of which typically underrepresent women because of restrictive medieval legal traditions. Nonetheless, the parameters researchers choose when they define their investigations may contribute to the problem. Studies focusing on the upper echelons of “learned” medicine, for example, tend to exclude healers on the legal and social fringes of medical practice, where most women would have been found.

The advantages of broadening the scope of such studies is immediately apparent in Pelling and Webster’s study of sixteenth-century London. Instead of focusing solely on officially recognized and licensed practitioners, the researchers defined a medical practitioner as “any individual whose occupation is basically concerned with the care of the sick.” Using this definition, they found primary source information suggesting that there were 60 women medical practitioners in the city of London in 1560. Although this figure may be slightly exaggerated, the evidence contrasts strikingly with that of Gottfried, whose earlier survey identified only 28 women medical practitioners in all of England between 1330 and 1530.

Finally, such studies provide only statistical information about the variety and prevalence of women’s medical practice in medieval Europe. Future studies might also make profitable use of analyses developed in other areas of women’s history as a basis for exploring the social context of women’s medical practice. Information about economic rivalry in medicine, women’s literacy, and the control of medical knowledge could add much to our growing understanding of women medical practitioners’ role in medieval society.