

JOHN MATHWIN HEUZENROEDER

John Heuzenroeder died in Sydney, March 9, 1973, at the age of forty-one. Many of the students whom he taught at Adelaide Boys' College, Western Teachers' College, the University of Adelaide, James Cook University of North Queensland, and the University College of Newcastle will feel again the force of Milton's lines on the death of Edward King:

How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,
Anow of such as for their bellies sake,
Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?
Of other care they little reck'ning make, . . .
Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
A Sheep-hook, . . .

John Heuzenroeder was a teacher of whom students remember this or that particular lecture all their lives: he could create a memorable hour of lecture or discussion by force of intelligence and insight. It is this kind of experience that makes worthwhile all our years of learning.

John Heuzenroeder wrote articles for LiNQ Vol. 1 nos. 1 and 3. In the latter article, Hammering the Bronze, John concluded his discussion of "an unexamined assumption of virtue" and "an equally unexamined hopefulness about the ultimate moral triumph" of one's own set of values:

"To such people, at such times, there is no problem without a solution, no pain without a cure, and it gives their piety that naive innocent air. And that's what's worrying about it. They are like people who have just given up smoking and think they're going to live forever.

What's missing is that classic awareness of limitation, the recognition of inevitable errors and failures. I don't suppose it is necessary to go as far as Sartre - "all human activities are equivalent and on principle doomed to failure" - and nor is it necessary for us to entirely give up our lovely lefty liberalism, but it seems to me that we need also a sense of the despair of things to shake us out of our silly pieties.

Next time some worried person ascribes the fall of Rome to loss of moral fibre "such as we see all around us today", instead of sighing with enlightened scorn we might shrug, remember the last time we blamed somebody else for our own emotions, and get back on with our own business.

One of the useful things Sartre said was, "life decides its own meaning." Aggressive piety is on the whole afraid of that and, despite itself, seeks to impose its various answers on us wholesale, e.g., that education is important, that social life is worthwhile, that literature is good, that the perfect orgasm is achievable, that suicide is wrong, that it's better to be creative, whereas the fact is that nobody can know the answers to such questions. The advocates, however, do not agree about this; and that's what makes them pious, as one can see from the unquestioning

seriousness they give to their devotion in whatever form it takes them. Piety is necessarily a matter of faith and choice, albeit unconscious, and we are still inclined to respect it and not only in its more picturesque manifestations."

Perhaps it was a classic awareness of limitation that made John Heuzenroeder a creative teacher. Perhaps he would not have considered this a fact of great importance. But it was a fact.