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Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity by Gregory Bateson
(review)

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Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity. By Gregory Bateson. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979. 238 pages, \$12.95.)

This book is the capstone to the philosophical edifice which Gregory Bateson has been building for several decades. In brief, it is a series of proofs that Cartesian dualism and Lockean sense-data theory — and behind them, one might say, the entire dominant epistemology of Western Civilization — are incorrect. That is, they do not fit the systematic nature of things, which Bateson embodies in the book's title and subtitle. Furthermore, they lead, in Bateson's view, to "greed, monstrous overgrowth, war, tyranny, and pollution." Unfortunately, however, they continue to run the world.

Bateson means to be subversive, and to do his part toward the ultimate healing which has already been suggested by systems theory, cybernetics, ecology, and humanistic psychology, not to mention the works of John Muir, Mary Austin, Frank Waters, Gary Snyder, Joseph Wood Krutch, and many other western American writers. His theory of what is wrong and his hope for a truly transformative, holistic philosophy, are very much in the main line of western regional writing and will seem familiar to students of the field.

With such high, democratic aims, Bateson's prose is strangely difficult. Through his jumpy and oddly juxtaposed paragraphs, one may pick one's way with great care — perhaps with occasional irritation — and now and then catch glimpses of the promised world ahead. But it is work. Bateson could take a lesson from Walt Whitman, who preached essentially the same overcoming of single vision but took greater care to contact and guide his readers. This book is not a "meal equally set," except in the final essay, a memorandum to his fellow Regents of the University of California system, in which Bateson speaks directly and practically, and with unmistakable feeling.

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The Half-Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th-Century American Fiction. By William J. Scheick. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1979. 113 pages, \$9.75.)

The persistence in popular American culture of the half-breed problem is indicated by the frequent airings not long ago of Cher Bono's lament of that title. Yet even at this time of recovering respect for Native Americans, the presentation of the mixed-blood in our literature has rarely received attention.