

SALVO

Issue 46 Fall 2018

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A.I. Apprehension

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Disenchanted

WHAT'S WRONG WITH WOMEN TODAY? IT'S COMPLICATED

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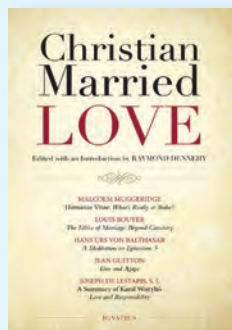
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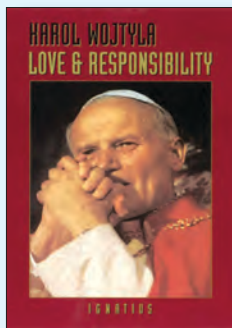
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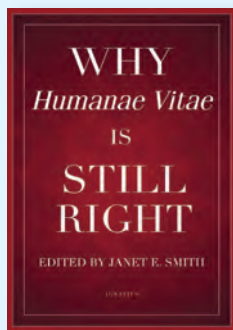


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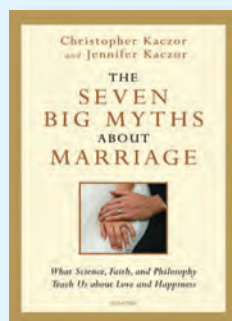


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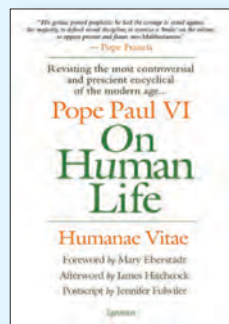


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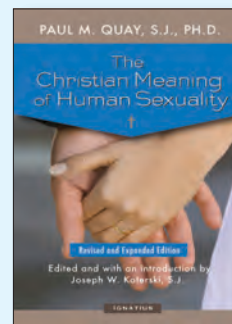
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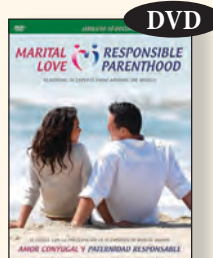
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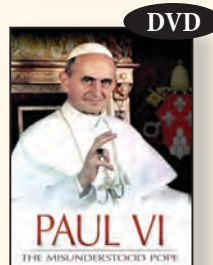
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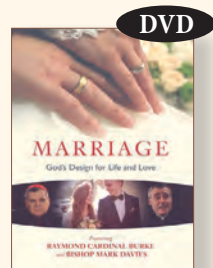
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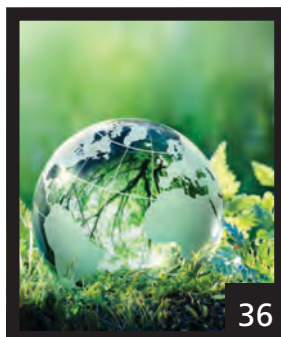
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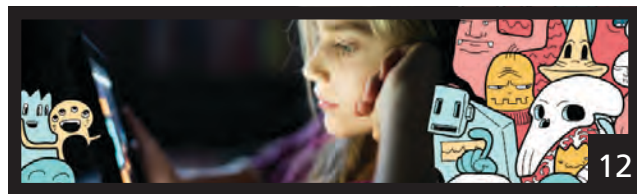
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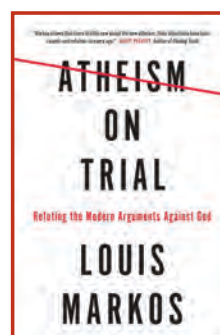
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1. A mental reservation
2. An expedient for protecting one's reputation
3. A forceful verbal or written assault
4. A group of shots fired simultaneously for effect

A publication of The Fellowship of St. James (www.fsj.org), *Salvo* is dedicated to debunking the cultural myths that have undercut human dignity, all but destroyed the notions of virtue and morality, and slowly eroded our appetite for transcendence. It also seeks to promote the Christian worldview. The opinions expressed by individual contributors are not necessarily those of the editors or publisher.

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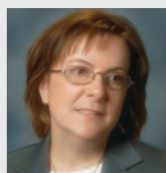




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SALVO ISSUES:



Salvo 45



Salvo 44



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Upset on Planet Earth

a n a lien Meme a bout Sex Boggles the Mind

by James M. Kushiner

In *Salvo* 45, I imagined how human behavior on planet Earth might look to an extraterrestrial observer ("Sex from Outer Space"). Another hypothetical extraterrestrial observer recently has visited Earth, this time in the pages of a new book by Steve Stewart-Williams, associate professor of psychology at the University of Nottingham, Malaysia Campus. Published by Cambridge University Press, *The Ape That Understood the Universe: How the Mind and Culture Evolve* begins with a report from a hyper-intelligent alien who is "a stranger to many elements of human life that . . . we simply take for granted."

The alien observes in his written report that humanoids "come in two main varieties: male and female." Not only do males and females "look somewhat different, they behave somewhat differently too." He suspects that "human sex differences are not purely products of cultural programming," although the differences are "more modest than those seen in most other species." He then warns, "Incidentally, should you ever have the misfortune of meeting a human being, don't mention any of these sex differences. Many humans find them strangely upsetting."

Why upsetting? Our alien doesn't say, but it becomes clear later on. Stewart-Williams is an evolutionary psychologist (and so no friend of intelligent design), whose candor on the current issue of sexual differences is arresting. He begins his chapter on sex by quoting a "wisecrack": "Everyone knows that men and women are different . . . except social scientists." He notes the physical differences in reproductive "equipment," body size, strength, and longevity between the sexes, as well as some non-physical differences, such as that men watch more sports and

porn than women do; that men are more interested in things and machines, and less interested in people, than women are; and that men and women gravitate toward different professions.

There are always exceptions—tall women and female engineers—but "the idea that there are average differences between the sexes seems blindingly obvious to most people. Perhaps equally obvious is the idea that these differences are not merely cultural conventions." They're built in.

But "to voice such thoughts on a university campus has been to wander into a political minefield. What was common sense to most people throughout most of human history transforms into heresy the moment one crosses the threshold of the ivory tower." The three typical responses to assertions of differences between the sexes are, he says, to deny the differences, to blame them on discrimination or a "patriarchal" society, and to chalk them up to socialization.

Some parents have swallowed the socialization theory whole hog, even going so far as to conceal the sex of their infant children—whom they call "theybies"—from others,



ostensibly so their children will be treated without "sexual prejudice" and will be able to determine for themselves at a later date what "gender" they are. (Perhaps "maybies" is a better term than "theybies"?) What is the first question that comes to mind when someone tells you, "I just had a baby!"? Most people want to know, "Is it a boy or a girl?" Parents of theybies oppose this response as purely a product of socialization.

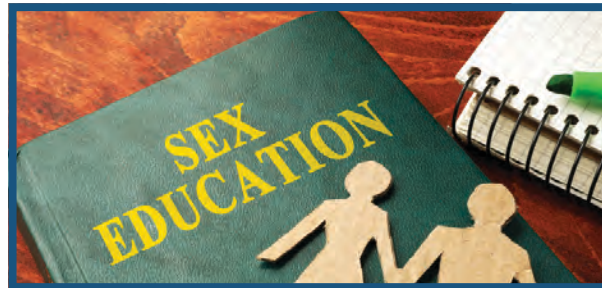
But even preschool children know that boys and girls are different, and not because of social construction. They can see and sense the differences. However, today more and more children are being "educated" to change their minds, to believe that socialization is what makes boys and girls. Ironically, they must be socially reconstructed to believe this—by their schoolteachers or parents.

Many young students realize they will face social censure if they dare to disagree, so they are conforming to the confusion. They don't want to upset their teachers or parents. *Salvo* begs to differ. Falsehood itself is upsetting and needs to be overturned. Pushback is required. ☺

Consensual Sex-Ed

A new law in Indiana gives parents of public-school children the authority to opt their children out of any sex education lessons they disapprove of. Public Law 154, which took effect in July, requires schools to attempt to obtain written consent from a parent or guardian before teaching a child about various topics pertaining to sexuality, including abortion, abstinence, birth control, sexual activity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, among others. School districts must also make sex-ed materials available online for parents to review. Teachers can only

proceed with the lessons and materials if the parents or guardians either give consent or fail to respond to two attempts to contact them. "We have teachers who are going beyond the standards and are getting into what I call more sensual, more nitty-gritty stuff, almost to the area of pornography," said State Sen. Dennis Kruse (R). "We thought . . . we better do something so that it doesn't take over the curriculum." The new Indiana



law, said Liberty Counsel chairman Mat Staver, "is clear that parents, not agents of the state like teachers or outside radical groups, have the right to direct the upbringing and associations of their own children." •

(Source: lifesitenews.com/news/indiana-law-empowers-parents-to-veto-inappropriate-sex-ed-for-their-children)

Pro-Lifers Free to Counsel

In July, a federal district judge refused to issue an injunction against 13 pro-life Christians who had been counseling women outside Choices Women's Medical Center, an abortion facility in Jamaica, New York. The injunction was sought in June 2017 by Eric Schneiderman, then the New York Attorney General (OAG), on the grounds that the pro-lifers were violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act (FACE) by harassing and intimidating women as they entered the clinic. (Schneiderman has since resigned following allegations

that he physically abused four women.) In denying the injunction, Judge Carol Bagley Amon said the testimony of the OAG's witnesses, among whom were several "clinic escorts" and a security guard, was "biased and unreliable." Video evidence, the judge wrote, "contradict[ed] the escorts' accounts of protestor conduct on specific occasions," while the OAG could not cite "a single video" that corroborated the testimony of its witnesses.

Although her order only denied the preliminary injunction request, Judge Amon made it clear that an attempt by the OAG to move the case forward to



trial would be foolish: "In effect, the trial has already been held," she wrote. Since the OAG failed to establish a violation of FACE, it would not be likely to succeed on the merits of its claim in a trial. •

(Source: lifefirst.com/2018/07/23/13-pro-life-christians-defeat-new-york-attorney-generals-attempt-to-take-away-their-free-speech)

U.S. Quits Abusive UN Human Rights Council

Many observers have noted over the years that the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) has become a mockery of its name. It is hard to take seriously a body whose members include such oppressive countries as Cuba, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, Afghanistan, China, North Korea, and Pakistan, among others. According to the Family Research Council, the number of current HRC member nations that are "partly free" (12) or "not free" (14) actually exceeds the number of members that are free

and democratic (21). After years of putting up with a Human Rights Council full of human rights abusers and showing no inclination to reform itself, the United States decided to walk away, relinquishing its seat on the council on June 19. Nikki Haley, the U.S. ambassador to the UN, explained, "We take this step because our commitment does not allow us to remain a part of a hypocritical and self-serving organization that makes a mockery of human rights." Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told reporters that "we need to be honest: the Human Rights Council is a poor defender of human rights. Worse than that, the Human Rights Council has

become an exercise in shameless hypocrisy, with many of the world's worst human rights abuses going ignored

and some of the world's most serious offenders sitting on the council itself." Haley also said that the U.S. would "continue to strongly advocate for reform of the Human Rights Council," and that "should it be reformed, we would be happy to rejoin it." •



(Source: frc.org/updatearticle/20180620/un-win)



Make-Believe “Theybies”

Nate and Julia Sharpe, parents of three-year-old fraternal twins Zylar and Kadya, have never revealed the sex of their children to anyone, not even to the kids themselves. Whether Zylar or Kadya is a boy or a girl is a question that only each child can decide, say their parents. The Cambridge, Massachusetts couple is among a small group of parents raising “theybies”—children being brought up from birth without any admission or acknowledgement of their sex.

“A theyby is, I think, different things to different people,” Nate

Sharpe told NBC News. “For us, it means raising our kids with gender-neutral pronouns—so, ‘they,’ ‘them,’ ‘their,’ rather than assigning ‘he,’ ‘she,’ ‘him,’ ‘her’ from birth based on their anatomy.” Although the children are aware of their own body parts and how they may differ from others’, they are not taught to associate those body parts with being a boy or a girl. This approach, the parents claim, will keep their children from being “pigeonholed” into “gender stereotypes.”

The idea of raising “theybies” first received widespread attention in 2011, when a Toronto couple announced that they would raise their new baby, Storm,



without a sex designation. According to an NBC news story, a Facebook community for parents raising “theybies” currently has about 220 members across the U.S. •

(Source: nbcnews.com/news/amp/ncna8918367)

China Downsizing?

A marked increase in China’s birthrate in 2016, attributed to the relaxing of China’s notorious one-child policy that year, quickly lost momentum, as births fell by 3.5 percent in 2017, erasing almost half the previous year’s rise. Chinese policymakers are now starting to worry about the social and economic consequences of a permanently depressed birthrate. At about 1.6, China’s birthrate is lower than the 1.75 rate in Brazil, a country with a similar GDP per capita. (The U.S. rate is 1.87.)

When the one-child policy was enacted in 1979, the pretext for it was concern about overpopulation. In force for almost 40 years, the policy is believed to have prevented 400 million births and created a sex imbalance of 30 million more males than females. The latter problem means not only that many men are unable to find wives, but also that there are fewer women of child-bearing age in China at a time when the big concerns are a shrinking labor force and the overall ageing of the population.

Other societies confronting similar problems are trying to stem infertility

with incentives such as improving the social safety net, subsidizing education, and improving gender equity. Some also suggest appealing to patriotism with an “at least one child” policy. There is one bright spot in the statistics: 51 percent of the births in 2017 were to couples who already had a child, indicating that many welcomed the opportunity to expand their families. •



(Sources: scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/2151359/patriotism-may-hold-key-china-births-challenge; npr.org/2018/07/16/629361870/despite-the-end-of-chinas-one-child-policy-births-are-still-lagging)

Close Your Bibles!

Officials in the borough of Sewickley Heights, Pennsylvania, have ordered a couple to “cease and desist” from hosting Bible studies and other religious activities on their 35-acre property or pay a fine of \$500 per day. The borough claims that because the couple’s property is not zoned as a “place of worship,” they cannot hold religious events there, even though both the couple and the previous owners of the property have been doing so for decades, and even though there is no restriction on hosting secular activities, like political fundraisers, Super Bowl parties, and book clubs, on the

property. Essentially the borough is using its zoning laws to prohibit people from conducting religious activities on their own private property.

The Independence Law Center has filed a lawsuit on behalf of the couple, claiming that the borough’s order violates their religious freedom as well as their freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and equal protection. Senior Counsel Jeremy Samek commented, “Government should not



target religious activities for punishment, particularly when similar secular activities are permitted. In America, no government can categorically ban people from assembling to worship on one’s own property.” •

(Source: frc.org/updatearticle/20180719/study-ban)

True Courage over Cowardice on Sexual Identity Issues

Early in July, Maine was poised to become the 14th state to ban “any practice or course of treatment that seeks to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity including . . . any effort to change gender expression or to eliminate or reduce sexual or romantic attractions or feelings toward individuals of the same gender.” State bill LD 912 would have applied to all licensed mental health and medical personnel in the state. But Maine governor Paul R. LePage vetoed the bill, explaining his reasons in a letter to the state legislature that deserves wide dissemination. We quote the salient points here:



I am vetoing LD 912 because it is bad public policy. This bill attempts to regulate professionals who already have a defined scope of practice and standard of care per their statutory licensing requirements. I strongly agree that young people should not be physically or mentally abused if they come out to their parents or guardians because they have experienced sexual or romantic attraction toward an individual of the same gender. However, as this is written—“any practice or course of treatment”—can call into question a simple conversation. This is so broad that licensed professionals would be prohibited from counseling an individual even at the individual’s own request. We should not prohibit professionals from providing their expertise to those who seek it. . . .

I also have grave concerns that LD 912 can be interpreted as a threat to an individual’s religious liberty. Parents have the right to seek counsel and treatment for their children from professionals who do not oppose the parents’ own religious beliefs. . . .

No evidence has been presented during the many public meetings on this subject that indicates that conversion therapy is being used by anyone, includ-

ing licensed professionals, in the State of Maine.

Because the standard of practice for these professionals already prohibits any practice or therapy that would amount to physical or mental abuse, what we are really trying to regulate are the private, consultative conversations between a licensed provider and a client.

This session, I submitted a Governor’s bill that posed similar circumstances to this bill. LD 1904 sought to criminalize the cultural practice of the physical mutilation of young girls in Maine. . . . That language was narrow and specific, but could not pass.

Consider the two bills side by side. LD 1904 sought to ban “female genital mutilation,” or “FGM,” a heinous procedure involving partial or total removal of female genitalia for cultural or religious reasons. FGM is practiced on girls as young as infants up until the age of 14. The practitioner is often not a medical professional and the cutting is not typically done in a sterile setting with sterile tools. . . . These girls are mutilated for life.

Doctors and nurses in our

hospitals have seen the brutal results, either on the exam table or in the Emergency Room after it has gone horribly wrong. . . .

Yet opponents in the Legislature said it is not happening in our state so we should not pass the bill, although there was evidence that it is occurring in Maine and the practice has been outlawed by 26 states.

Legislators who could not stand up and outlaw the permanent mutilation of young girls’ sexual organs . . . now are concerned with outlawing conversations, of which there is also “no evidence” that it is happening in Maine. This is a disgusting double-standard.

The sponsor of this bill recently tweeted: “Shame on the politicians who elect cowardice over courage.” I agree. Cowardice is bowing to political correctness and voting against LD 1904, as he did. . . .

I believe we should apply consistent standards when passing legislation to protect our vulnerable young people. For these reasons, I return LD 912 unsigned and vetoed. I strongly urge the Legislature to sustain it.

(Source: maine.gov/governor/lepage/official-documents/128th-legislature-bills-vetoed.html [see LD 912])

Gender Is All in Kids' Minds

"First of all, in terms of the question is that a boy or is that a girl, I would say we don't know—we'll have to ask them. So that would be the start, that only they know for sure. Some people like to be asked and some people don't. I'd say you know, some people think (because by [age] three you're learning) that if you have a penis you're a boy and if you have a vagina or a vulva you're a girl, but actually it's not like that. It's not like that at all. If you're a boy it's because your mind is telling you I'm a boy. If you're a girl it's because your mind is telling you you're a girl. . . . Then the next thing is: Some people think there [are] only two genders. But there [are] lots and lots of genders—it's just like a rainbow. It has all different colors. . . ."

—Response of Dr. Diane Ehrensaft, a developmental psychologist and director of the gender clinic at the University of California–San Francisco children's hospital, when asked by a mother how to explain gender to her three-year-old daughter.

(Source: lifesitenews.com/blogs/in-their-own-words-what-transgender-activists-have-in-store-for-your-child/)



Compelled Self-Denial

"The [lower court's] decision prevents the risk of significant harm to LGBTQ people who feel they have no choice but to attend TWU's proposed law school. These individuals would have to deny who they are for three years to receive a legal education. Being required by someone else's religious beliefs to behave contrary to one's sexual identity is degrading and disrespectful."

—From a concurring opinion to the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada not to accredit Trinity Western University's proposed law school on the grounds that the Christian school's "community covenant" regarding sexual morality would discriminate against LGBTQ students.

(Source: lifesitenews.com/news/canadas-top-court-rules-religious-freedom/)

Truth Is No Excuse

"[T]he 'truth' of the statements in the flyer is not a defence. . . . Therefore, to the extent that Mr. Whatcott intends to call witnesses to establish the truth of his impugned publications, that evidence is simply not relevant to the legal issue and will not be heard by this Tribunal."

—From a decision by a British Columbia tribunal that concurred with a transgender political candidate's assertion that dissemination of an election flyer revealing the candidate's biological sex constituted invasion of privacy and hate speech.

(Source: lifesitenews.com/news/activist-judge-to-christian-charged-with-lgbt-hate-speech-truth...is-simply/)



Philly Foster Careless

March 8, 2018:

"The need for foster parents is urgent. At any given time, nearly 6,000 children and youth are in foster care in Philly. Become a foster parent."

—Tweet sent out by the city of Philadelphia's official Twitter account (@Philadelphia.gov)

March 15, 2018:

The city of Philadelphia announces that it will no longer refer children to Catholic Social Services or Bethany Christian Services for placement with foster parents because the two Christian nonprofit agencies, which had contracts with the city since the 1990s, will not place children with same-sex couples.

(Source: philly.com/philly/news/city-council-lgbtq-discrimination-foster-adopt-child-welfare-hearings-20180315.html)



Boys Beating Girls

Modern-Day eugenics through
abortion, Neglect & abandonment

by Heather Zeiger

Eugenics, from the Greek for “good birth,” was a program in the early twentieth century that sought to improve the human race by utilizing marriage laws and forced sterilizations to ensure that only people with admirable traits had children. After Nazi Germany took the concept of eugenics to its logical ends, official eugenics programs fell into disrepute. But forced sterilizations continued in the United States at least until the 1970s, and California was still sterilizing prisoners until the 1990s.

Modern-day eugenics occurs when some human beings are deemed “unfit” to live. This is seen in sex-selective abortions and the neglect or abandonment of baby girls in countries like India, China, and parts of Eastern Europe. This is also seen in the prevalence of elective abortion of children with genetic abnormalities, such as Down syndrome.

sex selection

The biologically normal sex ratio is

104–106 / 100
males born / females born

**This ratio remains remarkably consistent
when no other factors are in play.**

Hence, when birth ratios of 109 or more males per 100 females are observed, they can reliably be attributed to purposeful acts.

For naturally conceived children, this usually consists of prenatal screening followed by sex-selective abortion; for children conceived through IVF, it usually involves using Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) to determine the sex of the embryos and then choosing only embryos of the desired sex for implantation.

The United Nations Population Fund estimates that there are 117 million women “missing” in Asia and Eastern Europe due to sex-selective abortion or child neglect. This table shows the countries with skewed sex ratios.¹

Country	Males per 100 Females
 Albania	111.7
 Armenia	114.9
 Azerbaijan	116.5
 China	117.8
 Georgia	113.6
 India	110.5
 Montenegro	109.8
 Pakistan	109.9
 Singapore	107.5
 South Korea	106.7
 Vietnam	111.2



More pertinent statistics

India:

- Over the past ten years, **2.4 million girls under age 5 died due to neglect or abandonment.**

(This doesn't include the girls killed through sex-selective abortion.)

- Among children under 5 years old, the mortality rate for girls is higher than that for boys in 29 of 35 Indian states.

- **There are 63 million more boys than girls in India.**²

China:

- Chinese census data started showing skewed sex ratios in the 1980s.

- **China is the largest world-wide contributor to the skewed sex ratios.**

- In some provinces, the ratios are above 125 boys per 100 girls.³

Former Soviet-bloc countries Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia:

- In 2000, the sex ratio in Armenia jumped to 120 boys for every 100 girls, though it has declined since.
- **Also in Armenia, if the first child is a daughter, the sex ratio for the second child is 156 boys for every 100 girls.**
- In 2003, the sex ratio in Azerbaijan was 118 boys for every 100 girls, but it has since been declining.
- In 1999, the sex ratio in Georgia was 119 boys for every 100 girls, but it also shows signs of declining.

- Prior to 1990, Georgia had one of the highest overall abortion rates in the world, with its highest frequency in the 1970s at 1.1 abortions per live birth.⁴

The United States:

- Overall, among couples who use IVF and PGD for sex-selection purposes, there is no significant difference in preference for one sex over the other such as would disrupt the normal sex ratio.

—Among couples of Western origin, there is a slight preference for females.

—Among couples of Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern origin, there is a preference for males.⁵

- According to the 2000 census, third births in families from China, India, and Korea that already had two daughters showed a sex ratio of 151 boys per 100 girls.⁶

Australia:

- The province of Western Australia allows women undergoing IVF to select female embryos for implantation to lower the risk of having a child with autism, which is thought to disproportionately affect males.⁷

Genetic Diseases

The most common chromosomal disease is Down syndrome, in which there are three copies of chromosome 21.

United States:

- Between 1979 and 2003, babies born with Down syndrome increased by 30%.⁸
- Currently, one in 700 babies born has Down syndrome.
- The average abortion rate following prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome is 67%, **with annual rates ranging from 61% to 90%.**⁹

Great Britain:

- **In England and Wales, 90% of women who had a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome aborted their babies.**¹⁰
- In Scotland, a study of 26,262 pregnant women who had prenatal screening done revealed the following:
 - 85.2% of trisomy pregnancies (which includes Down syndrome) were aborted.
 - 65.4% of pregnancies with some other chromosomal abnormality were aborted.
 - 1.9% of pregnancies that did not show any chromosomal abnormalities were aborted.¹¹

Notes

1. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): unfpa.org/gender-biased-sex-selection. Country statistics are for various time periods within the years 2009 to 2015.

2. "Excess under-5 female mortality across India," *The Lancet* (June 2018): [thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(18\)30184-0/fulltext](http://thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(18)30184-0/fulltext).

3. *Sex Imbalances at Birth*, UNFPA and the Pacific Regional Office (2012): unfpa.org/publications/sex-imbalances-birth.

4. "A framework for analyzing sex-selective abortion," *International Journal of Women's Health* (Oct. 20, 2014): ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4208631; "The Mystery of Missing Female Children in the Caucasus," Guttmacher Institute (2013): guttmacher.org/journals/ipsrh/2013/07/mystery-missing-female-children-caucasus-analysis-sex-ratios-birth-order.

5. "Preimplantation genetic diagnosis for gender selection in the USA" *Reproductive BioMedicine Online* (2009): [rbmojournal.com/article/S1472-6483\(10\)60273-8/pdf](http://rbmojournal.com/article/S1472-6483(10)60273-8/pdf).

6. "Son-based sex ratios in the 2000 United States census" *PNAS* (Apr. 15, 2008): pnas.org/content/105/15/5681.full.

7. "Prenatal screening and autism" *The Conversation* (Nov. 17, 2013): theconversation.com/prenatal-screening-and-autism-20395.

8. CDC Data and Statistics on Down Syndrome: cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/downsyndrome/data.html.

9. Jaime L. Natoli et al., "Prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome: a systematic review of termination rates (1995–2011)," *Prenatal Diagnosis* (2012): <https://obgyn.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pd.2910>.

10. Joan K. Morris and Anna Springett, "The National Down Syndrome Cytogenic Register for England and Wales, 2013 Annual Report" (December 2014): binocar.org/content/annrep2013_FINAL_nologo.pdf. Note: This figure (90%) represents the percent of pregnancies aborted following prenatal diagnosis; it is not a percentage of all Down syndrome pregnancies.

11. "Pregnancy outcomes following prenatal diagnosis of chromosomal anomaly: A record linkage study of 26,261 pregnancies" *PLoS ONE* (December 2016): <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/132800/1/132880.pdf>.



Tangled Interwebs

amino vs. Communities of Divine Design

by Terrell Clemmons

When Jay Stockwell moved to a new city with his wife, he had trouble meeting new people. He worked from home, and only made new friends when random events brought him in contact with a potential friend—someone who listened to the same music, for example, or played the same sport or shared a common interest. It seemed odd to him that something as important to health and happiness as relationships would be left to chance, and so the veteran innovator and behavioral scientist teamed up with data scientist Cameron Slabosz, and in 2015 the two created Affinity, a social media app designed to automate what he had formerly left to happenstance: locating like-minded people based on affinities. Or, as the Affinity website describes it, making connections by design rather than by chance.

Epic Catch, another affinity-based app, facilitates connections based on experience sharing. Want to try paddle-boarding, but none of your friends are interested? Epic Catch will help you find a partner for a paddle-board excursion.

In an age of social fragmentation, affinity-based apps can be a useful tool for transients, newcomers, or anyone looking to make new connections. But not

all affinity-based apps are created equal. In 2012, Ben Anderson and Yin Wang happened upon Anime Boston and marveled at the sight of so many complete strangers converging and bonding over their shared fandoms. (Anime is an internet-era, Japanese style of motion-picture animation.) *Why not create a tool that would make it easier for enthusiasts like these to connect around their shared in-*

terests? they thought, and the two created Amino as an affinity-based app for teens.

Amino bills itself as a “network of communities [that] lets you explore, discover, and obsess over the things you’re into.” Each amino is a “community” offering “great content, the friendliest of people and exciting events.” Amino (the software product) is not just one app, in fact, but is a whole ecosystem of them in that each community/amino is actually a stand-alone app. Amino began with about 90 of them, and in 2016, the company added the ability for any user to create an interest channel with the plan that popular ones would be developed into more apps. By early 2018 the number of aminos had grown to more than one million, and some of them were populated by as many as 100,000 members.

Its inception may have been well-intended, but Amino ended up epitomizing a lot of what’s problematic with social media, especially given that its targeted user group is teens (the platform specifies ages twelve and up).

First, Amino was created as a *mobile-only* app, meaning there was no desktop version at all. (This changed somewhat in 2016, when the company released a desktop portal, but it’s still primarily mo-

bile.) This might have been fine in a product intended for adults, but a mobile-only app for children seems suspiciously like a deliberate attempt to bypass parental supervision. Here are some functions Amino enables children to do from a smartphone or tablet:

Explore: watch videos, read blogs, and interact via quizzes and polls.

Discover communities about whatever you're interested in.

Get the latest news and info.

Post your own content and get feedback.

Chat with likeminded people, in public groups or one-on-one.

Customize your profile and grow a following.

Who in his right mind thinks this is good territory for children to roam on their own? Louise Matsakis, who reviewed the product for *WIRED*, wrote that "almost immediately after joining any community, I was inundated with messages from strangers." Amino also has its own built-in web browser, so that even if a parent disables a device's browser, Amino-empowered kids can still surf the net.

Second, all Amino interactions are *anonymous* and *amorphous*. This is by design, as Anderson believes anonymity is integral to self-expression. "We want people to be able to express themselves," he said. "We do want people to create an identity, but we don't necessarily want them to bring their full real-life identity. They can craft this identity around this one topic they're really passionate about."

Although Amino stores a user's information, it doesn't carry his crafted identity across communities, which confirms that identity fluidity is, as they say in software development, a feature, not a bug. You can be one person in *Over-*

watch, another in *Pokémon*, and still a third in *Stephen King*. Some aminos have video chat capability, but you can only chat via an animated avatar that conveys expression but doesn't show your face. Certainly, there are reasons to prefer this layer of removal for minors interacting online, but if the point of an affinity-based app is to provide community, then a pixelated, anonymized medium hardly qualifies.

Third, the design of Amino creates a kind of "Hotel Califor-



Who in his right mind thinks this is good territory for children to roam on their own? Louise Matsakis, who reviewed the product for *WIRED*, wrote that "almost immediately after joining any community, I was inundated with messages from strangers."

nia" effect. In their excellent and thorough Parent's Guide to Amino Apps, Axis.org reviewers explain that once you've created an account, you can join an amino with the tap of a button, but how you leave one isn't nearly so obvious or intuitive. Also, if you join a public chat and then leave it, you continue to receive notifications from it until you manually delete the chat. A similar thing happens if you join but then leave a video screening, except that you continue to get the audio from it until you go back in and figure out how to get out.

Matsakis also pointed out an isolation aspect that is rare for a social network. Because it contains very few links to external sites, "Amino has fostered a culture that often ignores the rest of the internet." When kids go into Amino, they tend to stay in there a long time. Axis says the average user



session is 70 minutes long.

Amino's tagline is "Your Interests . . . Times Infinity." Maybe that sounds cool, but the very design of Amino seems to work against its users' interests. And all of this is apart from the very real threats posed by predators, perverts, and other online pests for whom Amino's cloak of anonymity is especially emboldening.

Social Net Dead ends

It also works against the very thing Amino claims to be about: community. Here's how: Affinity and Epic Catch were created to help relationship-minded people find other relationship-minded people based on shared interests. Like dating apps, implicit in both is the intent to form real-life, in-person

relationships. The apps are only tools you use as a means toward that end. They don't substitute for a relationship, nor are they "places" you go to just to "hang out." By contrast, Amino seems designed to draw children into its own curated cyberspace *and keep them there* as long as possible, all under

Social Networks ... Times Infinity

This raises a point worth exploring. Why are we such relational and communal creatures? The Darwinists say it's because running in packs aids our survival as a species. But Christianity gives us a very dif-

deemed people through the ages. Although choice or affinity may come into play when you join a local church, Scripture portrays this community as an eternal, organic body held together by Christ himself.

Second, both the family and the church are communities in which it's especially difficult to hide who you are. This is fairly obvious with family, but may be a bit more obscure regarding the church, especially to the secularized observer. There's a common line of attack that says church people are hypocritical and fake, and no doubt it's often true. But where this happens, it is not just an instance of faulty behavior. It reveals a misunderstanding of the very basis of Christianity. Why? Because to gain entrance to this community, you must (1) make a confession of sin and brokenness, and (2) admit utter helplessness at self-redemption. Talk about "getting real."

But here also is an area where Christianity shines. One may experience an identity crisis at the threshold, but at entry, we receive a new, full, real-life identity, crafted for us not around our narrow interests but around the eternally existing Second Person of the Trinity. It's the ultimate rags to riches story.

But lest we get a big head, there will be radical training grounds awaiting us once we get inside, which brings us back around to those communities of divine design. Since our three-in-one God prioritizes love as the supreme virtue, he calls us to a radical kind of love—not love in abstract platitudes but in the real-life, day-in-day-out relationships we have with those we live among. The directive applies in any social group, but family and church are custom-made for this, having been designed by the Creator to nourish, train, and grow us into our new identity, which is his likeness. Think of it as "His Interests . . . Times Infinity." And we get all the benefits of the infinity part. ☺

Amino seems designed to draw children into its own curated cyberspace and keep them there as long as possible, all under the guise of being a community where they can "unite with [their] people." But this is not community. This is more like a rabbit hole.

the guise of being a community where they can "unite with [their] people." But this is not community. This is more like a rabbit hole.

At best, Amino offers something like a vanity fair bazaar, where people browse and maybe exchange exotic offerings. (As you might expect, Amino communities tend toward the bizarre and fringe.) Relationships don't happen in this kind of setting. They don't happen in any setting, cyber or otherwise, where people hide behind walls of anonymity, creating and recreating identities *ad infinitum*. And where relationships are not being formed, you have no community.

The Axis reviewers made another observation about Amino-land that is worth reflecting on: "There are a lot of lonely, sad people out there who are looking for affirmation online." This probably comes as no surprise. Our need for relationships and community ranks right up there with our need for food, water, clothing, shelter, and air. But how tragic that people are looking for them in such a labyrinth.

ferent explanation. Christianity tells us we are relational beings because we bear the image of our maker, who is himself a relational Being. There are lots of healthy venues where people can seek out community, but there are two he has designed into the human ecosystem—the family and the church.

Two features especially distinguish these "communities," not just from Amino or social media in general, but from most other social groups, no matter what they're based on. First, both the family and the church are communities whose existence transcends the individual members. With family, except in the case of husband and wife, whose relationship presumably began around some shared interest, the entire matrix of relationships, and to a large extent its members' identities, has nothing to do with anyone's choices or affinities but is based on something larger and more permanent. Our families precede us and, except in rare cases, will live on after us. The same holds for the communion of saints, the ancient phrase for the whole company of God's re-



A Separate Equality

The Gill Foundation's Queer Campaign to Punish Viewpoint Dissent

by Terrell Clemmons

Background:

Tim Gill got hooked on computers in high school and majored in applied math and computer science at the University of Colorado, where he came out gay. In 1981, he started Quark Software on a \$2,000 loan.

After Colorado voters in 1992 passed an amendment to their state constitution that specified "No protected status based on homosexual, lesbian or bisexual orientation," he established the Gill Foundation to advance the interests of LGBTQ Americans, and in 1999, he sold his stake in Quark for a reported \$500 million to devote himself full-time to foundation work. The Gill Foundation underwrites research, polling, data analytics, litigation, and field organizing, while Gill Action, a separate 501(c)(4) organization, funds efforts to elect lawmakers favorable to LGBT politics at all levels of government.

Inside Philanthropy ranked Gill #1 on its list of "Marriage Equality Hall of Fame" funders, and Gill now plans to spend every last dollar in the foundation's coffers on the "fight" for full equality. "We are going to fight . . . and keep fighting everywhere until LGBTQ people are fully protected in every single state," he told *Rolling Stone*.

Reason for Surveillance:

How is "equality" defined, now that *Obergefell* has enforced same-sex marriage across America? Simple: explicit, full, non-discrimination protections regarding



employment, housing, and public accommodation, enforceable by law on pain of punishment by government in all fifty states.

The agenda is pursued on three fronts: (1) A PR campaign curries emotional favor by telling stories of LGBT "victims" of discrimination. (2) Alliances are formed with large corporations to apply economic leverage. When North Carolina passed HB2 (nicknamed "the bathroom bill") in 2016, for example, heavyweights from the NCAA to Paypal to Deutsche Bank threatened to boycott the state. And (3) relationships with big-dollar financiers are cultivated to grow the money stream, two notable figures being hedge fund billionaires Paul Singer and Daniel Loeb.

Gill Foundation funds work similarly to venture capital funds, except that, rather than being invested in a startup company with the expectation of a financial return, they are poured into political machinations with the expectation

of certain political outcomes. The website is clear about this: "The Gill Foundation supports organizations working on policy and advocacy efforts. . . . We do not currently provide grants for direct service or arts organizations." In other words, they don't actually do anything for anyone or provide any services. The Gill Foundation funnels dollars into politics, at

levels reaching into the hundreds of millions.

Most Illuminating Disclosure:

Those decrying money in politics should take note, but I won't belabor that point here. Let's let Gill come out with his intent, which sounds more

like conquest and control than equal treatment. "We have successfully flipped legislatures around this country from Republican control to Democratic control," he said. "And the net result is always good for gay people. Always."

Certainly, people should be treated fairly and equally, but is a purchased political conquest really good for gay people? Americans are some of the most non-discriminating, tolerant people on the planet, but this is not enough for Gill. He's already looking beyond conquest to revenge. "We're going into the hardest states in the country," he said. Why? "We're going to punish the wicked."

People driven to punish non-affirmation of their sexuality have a problem that politics will never solve. The best thing we can do for gay people is to point them to the Savior who transcended politics. He fought the ultimate fight that secured equality for all people for all time. And with Jesus, love really is love. ☺

Daring to Date

How a New Old Script Is Recivilizing Boy Meets Girl

After Benjamin Nolot finished making *Nefarious: Merchant of Souls*, his first film on international sex trafficking, he found himself haunted by one question: *What kind of society produces men willing to buy a woman or child for sex?* So for his follow-up film he turned his attention to the sex industry. His plan was to include a short spring-break scene capturing young adults' attitudes about sex. But what he saw during spring break reshaped the entire project. The result, *Liberated: The New Sexual Revolution*, squarely centers on college students on spring break.

Nolot and his crew ventured right into the bedlam and started asking questions. *What is spring break about?* "A lot of naked people." "Tryna get laid." And alcohol, lots of alcohol.

What does love mean to you? "Blech, no love. Yech," said a bikini-clad brunette giving the thumbs-down sign. "Love is not real," said another. "It's like this filthy thing that society invents so you can have sex with someone," said a third. "Our generation has given up on love."

What does sex mean to you? "Sex is nothing anymore; it's horrible. Sex doesn't mean anything," said Loden, who wears a big cross necklace and moves effortlessly among girls' bodies, getting kisses and grinds. "It's about the number, hahaha," laughs Shay, clearly the stud of his dude squad. It could be three or four a night, and it's better if she's a virgin. "Everybody likes a challenge, and a virgin offers that," he added after showing off the bloodstain from last night's shag.



Sexual Nihilism

Ambivalent, meaningless, random sex for whatever sense of conquest or pleasure you can get—these are the sad new sexual norms being adopted by the ostensible leaders of tomorrow. But what really made Nolot pivot to focus on spring break was the sexual coercion and violence he saw. "Girls are nothing but panty-droppers," said a clean-cut-looking beau on the beach. "You give them a couple of Percocets, a Vicodin, and a beer, and the panties drop. It's nice!" Several other safe-looking boys were similarly crass, talking about how girls were the trinkets by which they got their spring break thrills. It doesn't take a



journalism degree to see a veritable sea of #MeToo moments materializing right under the noonday sun. Lord only knows how bad things got under cover of night.

Some of the girls seem wholly on board with the animalism of it all, but many aren't. "I just don't want to have sex," said the defl- w- ered virgin when Shay called the next day for a repeat. But within seconds, she gave in, "Okay, I'm sure we can probably work that out."

This raises some interesting questions: Why are otherwise intelligent young people giving themselves over to such sexual nihilism? *Why are they even there in the first place* "It's easier to find a f***buddy than a boyfriend," one girl explained matter-of-factly. "Exactly!" echoed another sitting next to her on the sand.

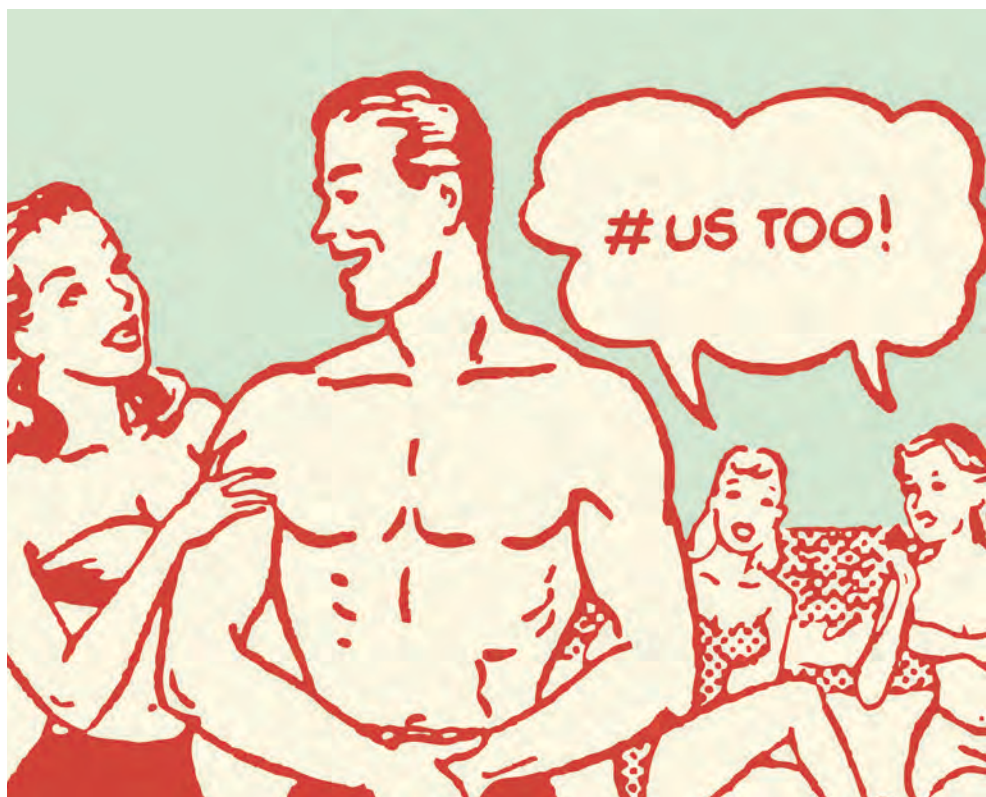
Sadly, it appears they don't know any other way to go about relationships with the opposite sex.

The Dating Project

Dr. Kerry Cronin came to a similar conclusion. About ten years ago, the philosophy professor at Boston College realized her students didn't date anymore. When she found out more about hookup culture, she started encouraging them to consider an alternative: *Why not go on dates?*

Why are otherwise intelligent young people giving themselves over to such sexual nihilism?

Why are they even there in the first place? "It's easier to find a f***buddy than a boyfriend," one girl explained matter-of-factly. "Exactly!" echoed another sitting next to her on the sand.



To her utter surprise, they didn't know how to do that. What exactly is a date? How do you ask someone out? What do you do on a date? What do you talk about? It wasn't that they didn't *want* to. The whole model of how to go on a date was gone. *They didn't even know where to start.*

So she turned it into an assignment. Like any good teacher, she defined the terms and provided structure for carrying it out. She identified three levels of dating, with parameters for each so that students could learn steps for building a healthy relationship. The requirements for a "Level 1" date include the following:

- You must ask in person. (Girls as well as boys may do the asking.) Have a suggested plan before asking—coffee or ice cream, for example.
- If you ask, you pay. Spend no more than ten dollars.
- Have three to four information-gathering questions ready. Do not go to a movie. The point is to find out something about the person.
- There should be no physical contact beyond an



“A-frame” hug (shoulders may touch, but little beyond that).

- The date should last no longer than 90 minutes, 60–75 if it’s going especially well.

Cronin became known as “The Dating Professor,” and after several years of coaching students in the art of dating, she teamed up with producer Megan Harrington to make *The Dating Project*, a feature-length film that looks at single life and the dating paradigm through the eyes of several singles ranging from college age to the forties.

Cronin had a hunch that people were dissatisfied with the hookup culture but didn’t know how to break out of it. And from the comments of *The Dating Project* participants, it appears she was right. Matt, one of her students, asked a girl out and said it “felt really good afterward”—not just the date itself, but the whole exercise, beginning with the forethought and taking the initiative. Shenzi, also a student, said that while asking someone out was scary at first, following the structure helped her learn to discern between merely being attracted to someone and getting to know him as a person. “I think I had bought into the hookup culture more than I realized,” she said afterward.

Chris, a never-married actor in his forties, had more insightful reflections. After taking a circum-spect look at his dating life, he saw how focusing on the physical without getting to know what a woman was all about—what she thought about marriage, kids, life, or religion, for example—was really a mark of immaturity. He realized that avoiding commitment because it felt too limiting ended up, paradoxically, becoming limiting. “The act of committing causes you to go deeper,” he explained. And he found that satisfying. “It just feels more strong, more like a man.”



“So, you’re willing to make out with somebody, take off some of your clothes, or all your clothes, do some stuff that’s very intimate—and *that’s* more casual than going for a cup of coffee with someone?”

Once Cronin said it out loud, her students would see how crazy and nonsensical it was.

Toward Humanity

Acting like toddlers or animals in a spring break jungle is easy. But civilizing the jungle, like civilizing toddlers, will be hard. Following the dating protocol called for a measure of social courage that some of *The Dating Project* participants had never before mustered. They risked rejection. They had to interact in the light. They had to engage in one-on-one, unmediated conversation, which required the give-and-take of listening and articulating thoughts on the fly. It was hard. But these are some of the civilizing disciplines that distinguish humans from animals and adults from children.

Self-reflection is also a trait unique to adult men and women. A seed for *The Dating Project* was sown when Cronin had the common sense simply to reflect back to her students what they were saying and doing. “So, you’re willing to make out with somebody, take off some of your clothes, or all your clothes, do some stuff that’s very intimate—and *that’s* more casual than going for a cup of coffee with someone?” Once she said it out loud, they would see how crazy and nonsensical it was.

Reexamining their relational patterns, then, and following a more civilized relational protocol, turned into something of a crucible through which they grew into more mature men and women. And you can see the joy on their faces as they talk about it. It’s never too late to date, and would-be leaders of tomorrow would do well to try this new old paradigm. Not all of their generation has given up on love, after all. ☺

Hacking the Code

The Dark Side of DNA Editing

"Criminals could manipulate their own DNA to avoid detection on police databases," experts warned recently.¹ The proposed tool is a do-it-yourself gene editing kit that can be purchased online for less than \$150. The technique is CRISPR, a breakthrough "molecular scalpel" method that enables researchers to identify an undesirable DNA segment and replace it with a corrected version. Originally intended to eliminate fatal human diseases and improve agricultural production, the relative ease and increasing accuracy of CRISPR make it a tempting tool for many, including bad actors.

The basic idea is to edit enough of one's own DNA to distinguish it from DNA left at a crime scene or stored in any criminal database. Professor George Church of Harvard, a CRISPR researcher, admitted that criminals could use the technique to vanish from a criminal database.² With DNA as the current gold standard of criminal evidence, prosecutors would have a tough time proving that the pre-CRISPR person and the post-edited individual were the same person. CRISPR editing does not leave a detectable trace.

The do-it-yourself kit is simple enough to be used by high-school science students. But according to Josiah Zayner, its developer, it does not work in human beings.³ Zayner, who has a Ph.D. in biophysics from the University of Chicago and spent two years at NASA working on designs for a colony on Mars, did his own form of self-editing, a microbiome transplant, which was recorded in a documentary. He later injected his arm with DNA coding for CRISPR, a stunt he live-streamed and subsequently regretted.⁴

The Democratization of Science

An outspoken advocate for the democratization of science, Zayner's goal in making scientific breakthroughs more widely available is to accelerate the accessibility of cures, which often take decades to roll out, but not to avoid basic research. Tristan Roberts, a fellow biohacker, imitated Zayner's stunt, but without a solid research basis. Roberts injected himself with a gene therapy to treat HIV in 2010, and Aaron Traywick, another biohacker, performed a similar live stunt with a herpes vaccine in February 2018.⁵ Traywick died in



April.⁶ Do-it-yourself gene therapy has limits; it cannot surmount the ineradicable realities of nature and the way the human body functions. Gene therapies, vaccine concoctions, and CRISPR editing are not playthings but life-altering technologies with potentially life-ending outcomes.

Criminal Evasion— or Even Worse

How realistic is the idea of self-editing to avoid criminal detection? Dr. Alexander Gray of the Leverhulme Research Centre at the University of Dundee in Scotland thinks it would be very difficult to edit enough DNA segments to create a distinct DNA fingerprint.⁷ Church disagrees, but for different reasons. People already undergo a significant amount of DNA change through blood transfusions, he says, “and even if you just get a stem cell transplant you have a new identity.”⁸ A bone marrow transplant turns the recipient into a chimera, since although he retains his own DNA, he also has the donor’s cells with their DNA circulating in his blood. Depending on which cells are tested, the recipient’s DNA could be identified as his own or as the donor’s.⁹

While the specter of arch criminals self-editing their DNA is worrisome, it is also hypothetical at this

A bioterrorist could alter a virus via CRISPR and then use the altered virus to attack an enemy nation’s food supply. Radical bioterrorists might not hesitate to unleash a deadly disease, even at the risk of their own group’s survival. And access to the potentially destructive technology is easier than ever to obtain.

point. Of greater concern is the weaponization of CRISPR technology. In 2016, James Clapper, then the Director of National Intelligence, warned the national security and biotechnology community that gene editing is a global danger, and could introduce “potentially harmful biological agents or products” into populations.¹⁰ He ranked it with other global threats such as North Korea’s nuclear weapons, Syria’s chemical weapons, and Russia’s cruise missiles.¹¹ The security threat, he asserted, is wide-ranging:

Armed with the proper genetic sequences, states or bioterrorists could employ genome editing to create highly virulent pathogens for use in such attacks [to infect hundreds of thousands of people with lethal diseases]. They could, for example, change a less dangerous, non-pathogenic strain of anthrax into a highly virulent form by altering the genome, or recreate pathogens such as the deadly smallpox virus, which was eradicated in the wild in 1980.



Or they could develop specific weapons that target either individuals or even entire races: With the right manipulations, a pathogen could be made to have greater invasiveness or virulence in a target population.¹²

A bioterrorist could alter a virus via CRISPR and then use the altered virus to attack an enemy nation's food supply. Radical bioterrorists might not hesitate to unleash a deadly disease, even at the risk of their own group's survival. And access to the potentially destructive technology is easier than ever to obtain.

Accidents Can Happen

Although gene editing technologies were developed years ago, CRISPR brought down the price (\$5,000 vs. \$30 per order) and scaled up the accessibility, precision, and ease of use.¹³ Ethics oversight and the

The good news is that apprehension about negative consequences is widely felt. The potential for establishing shared global standards and enforcement procedures exists. **The bad news is that it may take a catastrophe such as an escaped virus or the release of a bioterrorist's pathogen to prompt a global response.**

structures of research institutions mitigate the risk of organized experiments going awry, particularly when human subjects are involved. But unsupervised or amateur biohackers, citizen scientists, and scofflaws with criminal intentions evade those protections. They are all vulnerable to a significant risk: accidental misuse. An altered virus could escape from the lab, or a genetic modification (via gene drive technology) intended to alter only a local species or population could spread, eradicating an entire species, with unknown ecological consequences.

International Regulatory Oversight & Limitations

Meanwhile, both American and international scientific and governmental regulatory bodies are debating how to limit the damage that could be done by

bad actors and unsupervised amateurs.

Plant and animal geneticists do not want to slow down beneficial research. Others want to distinguish CRISPR from GMO modification of plants and animals, which is broadly opposed in Europe. That is not to say that nothing *can* be done, but whether something *will* be done often depends on whether or not there has been a catastrophe.

The good news is that apprehension about negative consequences is widely felt. The potential for establishing shared global standards and enforcement procedures exists. The bad news is that it may take a catastrophe such as an escaped virus or the release of a bioterrorist's pathogen to prompt a global response. This is a decidedly darker scenario than a hypothetical isolated criminal escaping detection thanks to a CRISPR "cloak of deception." ☉

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Disenchanted

What's Wrong with Women Today? It's Complicated

The June 5 suicide of famed handbag designer Kate Spade has brought attention yet again to the plight of American women, who are killing themselves in ever-greater numbers.

According to Julie Phillips of Rutgers University, the rise in female suicides has been evident since about 2000. "The rate," according to her statements to the *Daily Beast*, "is highest today for women 45–64 who lack a college degree, which might be the result of weakened social interactions among Baby Boomers."¹ Men still kill themselves far more often than women do—middle-aged white men account by far for the highest percentage of suicides in this century—but the number of women following suit is troubling.

Tying into this alarming rise in suicides, antidepressant use among American women is also up. Women are now twice as likely as men to be on a psychiatric drug of some sort, and long-term use is common.² This is troubling because many of these drugs aren't *intended* to be taken for years at a time, and we don't yet know much about how such use affects the body.

Why are women seeking these remedies more than men? One answer is that women are more likely than men to seek medical care of any kind, and even more so when it comes to mental health. But another answer, according to psychiatrist Dr. David Muzina, is that "women are bearing the brunt of the emotional stressors around us: they're working, raising the kids, trying to juggle all these issues, getting all these things done, and they're more likely to reach out and ask for help."³



In other words, women's lives are crazy-complicated, and evidence indicates that women aren't handling things as well as we like to tell ourselves they are, and perhaps not as well as they used to. If you need further proof of this, see the Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers paper entitled, tellingly, "The Paradox of Declining Female Happiness."⁴ The authors conclude, "By many objective measures the lives of women in the United States have improved over the past 35 years, yet we show that measures of subjective well-being indicate that women's happiness has declined both absolutely and relative to men." Women were happier in the 1970s than they are today.

More Freedom, Less Happiness

What is going on here? In an era in which women have achieved more economic and personal freedom than, arguably, ever before in history, why are they so unhappy?

There is no easy answer to such questions. Women are working more, taking care of their own children less, and divorcing in far greater numbers at

All of these factors—decreased social cohesion, loss of faith, and different, more complicated roles for women—are, I suggest, combining to make women miserable. We are doing more, doing too much even, and doing it alone—without the help of each other, and without seeking the aid of God.



older ages—Kate Spade had been separated for ten months, although her husband insists that divorce was never under discussion—than they used to, and it is very likely that these are contributing factors. Feminists assert that greater freedom and a wider range of options notwithstanding, women still find themselves bumping against gender stereotypes in pursuit of their goals, and when they can't get past them, they are left unfulfilled.

What is clear is that there is something drastically wrong with American womanhood. "Women's liberation"—the push to get every able-brained woman into a cubicle—has not turned out to be all it was cracked up to be. In fact, it may have turned out to be the opposite: Wolfers and Stevenson speculate at the end of their essay that "the changes brought about during the women's movement may have decreased women's happiness. The increased opportunity to succeed in many dimensions may have led to an increased likelihood of believing that one's life is not measuring up."⁵

With more opportunities come greater expectations of achieving a wildly successful life on all fronts. Think of the woman who enjoys a highly successful career, is publishing her first novel, is raising beautifully behaved children, has a home straight off of Pinterest, volunteers at the local women's shelter, sings in her church choir, and enjoys knitting while sitting next to the pool on family vacations in the Caymans.

Actually know any such women? Me neither. It's not realistic. But it's the image in our heads.

Fewer Ties, More Isolation

Stevenson and Wolfers also cite "decreased social cohesion," studied most extensively by Robert Putnam,⁶ as a potential contributing factor to the unhappiness phenomenon. Traditional American social institutions, says Putnam—think of the PTA, churches, the Lions Club and other fraternal organizations, volunteer organizations like the Red Cross, and many others—have all seen drastic drops in membership in recent years.

One particular "social institution"—namely, church—bears further scrutiny. A 2015 study by the Pew Research Center found that the "Christian share of the U.S. population is declining, while the number of U.S. adults who do not identify with any organized religion is growing."⁷ In a mere eight-year period (2007–2014), the share of Americans who identified themselves as "Christian" dropped by eight percent. The fastest-growing segment across all generations is the "religiously unaffiliated"—those who identify as atheist, agnostic, or nothing in particular.

This trend has been going on for the better part of a century. In 1948, only two percent of Americans described themselves as having no religious affiliation.⁸ In 2017, that number reached 20 percent. In 1952, 75 percent of Americans said that religion was "very important" in their lives. That number bottomed out between 1975 and 1980 at 52 percent, and since 2012 has been hovering at around 56 percent.⁹ These are big changes, and they signal far more than a mere drop-off in one of many social institutions. America is losing faith, and that loss has coincided with some of the most active years of the women's liberation movement.

All of these factors—decreased social cohesion, loss of faith, and different, more complicated roles for women—are, I suggest, combining to make women miserable. We are doing more, doing too much even, and doing it alone—without the help of each other, and without seeking the aid of God.

Ways to Prepare & Cope

There are ways that women, young women especially, can prepare for these realities and shield themselves from their worst effects. For instance, young women who suspect that they will want to have children some day should know, for starters, that statistics indicate that most women with children would actually prefer to work part-time.¹⁰ So if you're 17 and thinking about college, but also dreaming of

Think outside the box. Don't be afraid to simplify your roles—wife, mother, friend, volunteer, employee—enjoying one or two at a time instead of five or six. Go to church.

having a family someday, perhaps you should also think about ways in which you could tailor your education to facilitate a part-time or work-from-home career in the years immediately afterwards, when you are likely to have young children. That career could gradually be ramped up as your children get older and need less attention, and then finally head out on their own.

But perhaps the most important thing women can do to protect themselves is simply to recognize the problem, and to understand that the American woman's dream of a corner office, 2.1 children, a golden retriever, and a house in the suburbs may not be all it's cracked up to be. Think outside the box. Don't be afraid to simplify your roles—wife, mother, friend, volunteer, employee—enjoying one or two at a time instead of five or six. Go to church.

Recognition of the issue is the first place to start. May God give us his aid as we seek to establish healthy roles and connections once again. ☺

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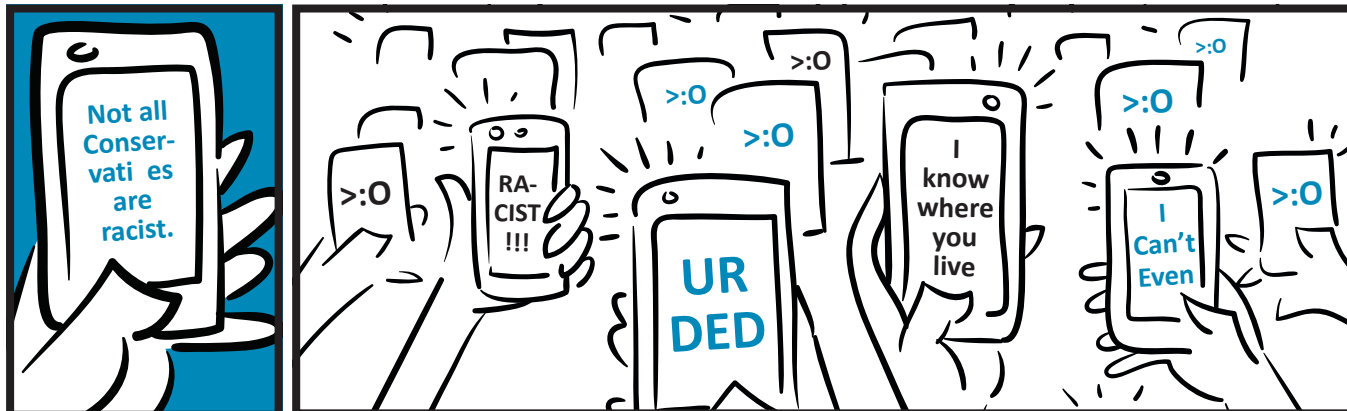
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A Peculiar Notion

The Very Strange Idea of Theistic Evolution
by david anderson

I

t is no longer a secret that evolutionary theory faces severe evidential problems.

As empirical research unfolds, the explanatory deficits of evolution increase.¹ Yet equally important—although not as well recognized—is the fact that the very idea of “theistic evolution” is problematic, especially when considered in light of the Christian tradition.² Indeed, even before an empirical analysis of theistic evolution can be undertaken, one must be clear on the concept itself. And this is where a range of under-appreciated problems immediately emerge, as philosopher of science Stephen Meyer has helpfully pointed out in a recent analysis.³



The main conceptual difficulty arises from trying to join evolution to a meaningful form of Christian theism. As one might expect, various thinkers have made various attempts to do this. Here are eight of the major possibilities on offer:

1. Evolution is random and undirected, and works without plan or purpose. God is behind this process.
2. God started off the universe and let secondary causes take care of the rest.
3. God created and sustains the laws of nature, but leaves the specific outcomes to chance.
4. God created the primary mechanism of evolution, and he foreknew all the outcomes of this process, but he did not intend or plan any outcomes.
5. God may (or may not) have guided the evolutionary process.
6. God guided the evolutionary process in the sense that he set up, intended, and sustains all the outcomes of natural selection and random mutation exactly as they have occurred.
7. God set up and sustains the evolutionary process, but gives it only limited guidance, sometimes intervening miraculously to produce the results he desires.
8. Various combinations of numbers 1–7.



This list is not exhaustive, of course. But it does provide a basic map of most of the variations of theistic evolution. This paper will examine each variation in turn and show how it suffers from one problem or another.

POSSIBILITY 1

Guided Yet Unguided

This version holds that, as one theistic evolutionist asserts, “evolution works without either plan or purpose” and “is random and undirected.”⁴ as stephen Meyer points out, when this version of evolution is coupled with a traditional monotheistic view—which holds that god superintends and guides all natural processes—the result is a position claiming that god planned an unplanned process.⁵ This view plainly involves a logical contradiction. It doesn’t even rise to the level of a coherent thought, much less a theory capable of empirical verification.



POSSIBILITY 2

God Only at the Beginning

Another version of theistic evolution asserts that in the initial act of creation of the universe, god endowed nature with all the causal power it needed to produce, *on its own*, all the flora and fauna that have appeared throughout organic history. In other words, god “front-loaded” the universe with creative power, then checked out and left nature to do the rest.⁶

for those of traditional orthodox faith, the problem with this view is that it is more-or-less deistic. It holds that god does *not* sustain the universe “by the word of his power,” as the writer of hebrews says.⁷ Instead, he is an absent landlord. nature is ontologically autonomous. for Bible believers, such a deistic view is a conceptual dead end from the start.

POSSIBILITY 3

God in General, Chance in the Details

A third possibility countenances greater divine involvement. It holds that god not only designed the laws of nature, but ontologically sustains them as well. yet the almighty is not a micromanager. he does not plan or direct particular events or outcomes in the evolutionary process. This view is somewhat similar to the perspective charles darwin confided to harvard botanist asa gray in a personal letter dated May 22, 1860: “I am inclined to look at everything as resulting from designed laws, with the details, whether good or bad, left to the working out of what we may call chance.”⁸

But from the Judeo-christian perspective, this possibility unduly limits god’s power or knowledge. If god does not plan or direct evolutionary events or outcomes because he lacks the power to do so, then he is no longer omnipotent. If he does not plan or direct evolutionary events or outcomes because he lacks the foresight to know what will happen, then he is not omniscient. either possibility is plainly at odds with traditional monotheism. for those who hold that god is both all-knowing and all-powerful, Possibility 3 is no possibility at all.

POSSIBILITY 4

God Knew but Didn’t Plan

Option 4 posits that god intentionally created the universe so as to bring about the primary mechanism of evolution—natural selection acting on random mutations—and he foreknew the outcomes of this mechanism but did not intend any particular outcomes; he was open to whatever results occurred. This view is compatible with god sustaining not only the laws of nature, but also all the natural processes involved in organic history, including natural selection and random mutation. It is also compatible with god’s omniscience, for it holds that god *knew* all along what the results of these processes would be, although he did not *plan* them. Kenneth Miller, who is both a biologist and a catholic, has suggested something along these lines:

If you let the videotape of life run again, I think you’d get large streamlined predators that swam in the ocean. I think you’d get something that used photosynthesis not unlike plants today. and eventually I think you would also

get a large, intelligent, reflective, self-aware organism with a highly developed nervous system. now it might be a big-brained dinosaur, or it might be a mollusk with exceptional mental capabilities. . . . [M]y point is that I think eventually under the conditions that we have in this universe you would get an intelligent, self-aware and reflective organism, which is to say you'd get something like us. It might not come out of the primates, it might come from somewhere else.⁹

The problem with this view is that it means that human beings, as an outcome of evolution, were not intended or planned by god. But this perspective runs contrary to the Judeo-Christian tradition, which sees humans as intentionally created in god's own image. Although the language in genesis is poetic, it leaves little doubt about god's direct, intimate involvement:

Then god said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

so god created mankind in his own image, in the image of god he created him; male and female he created them.¹⁰

along with the rest of creation, human beings are pronounced "very good."¹¹ The scripture's account of god crafting male and female leaves no doubt that he was intently and happily involved in the project.



POSSIBILITY 5 Maybe God?

Another conception of theistic evolution asserts that god *may* have guided the evolutionary process.¹² This version has been articulated by Francis Collins and Karl Giberson.¹³ Collins and Giberson know that the standard view among biologists is that evolution is not teleological. It is not directed, guided, or planned for any particular outcome. But Collins and Giberson are Christians and so are uncomfortable, it seems, with a view of evolution that excises god's involvement. so their apparent solution is to say that god "may" have guided evolution:

god is certainly *able* to interact with the creation. The unfolding paths of natural history leading to human beings *may* be the signature of this interaction. god *can* influence the evolutionary process to ensure his intended result, in whatever ways he wants. furthermore, an omniscient creator *can* certainly create the universe in such a way that natural laws would result in the evolution of human creatures. The actual patterns of natural history *may*, in fact, be a combination of the pathways specified by laws laid down "in the beginning" and the steady infusion of divine creativity.¹⁴

My guess is that a fair number of thoughtful Christians will see Collins and Giberson's solution as a feeble, if not craven, attempt to marry a secular scientific theory with the biblical view of god and creation. The problem with this view is that it is manifestly true but utterly uninformative. of course an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Being *could* have guided the evolutionary processes. after all, such a Being can do *anything* that is logically possible in accord with his divine nature. That is obvious. What we want to know is what god was *actually* doing during organic history. It helps no one to point out what he *could have been* doing. accordingly, Collins and Giberson's position is not really a position at all; it purports to present a clear idea of theistic evolution but instead only irrelevantly states the obvious.

Evolution Is God's Creative Hand

Suggestion 6 says that god guided the evolutionary process in the sense that he set up, sustains, *and* intends the outcomes of natural selection and random mutation (and other natural processes). On this view, god is not just ontologically and providentially active through the evolutionary mechanism in a general way; but in fact, this mechanism *is* god's creative means of designing all flora and fauna, including human beings. To be clear, advocates of this view accept the sufficiency of natural processes to produce all biological phenomena—they don't regard god as "tinkering" in organic history, such as producing just the "right" mutations at just the "right" time to produce a certain outcome. They maintain that unbroken natural causes are sufficient, as long as these causes are understood to be ontologically sustained and intended by god to bring about his planned designs.

Consider, for example, a recent statement by Deborah Haarsama, the president of Biologos. (Biologos is an organization that vigorously promotes the "harmony" between evolutionary theory and Christian faith.) In a radio debate with Stephen Meyer, Haarsama asserted, "we believe at Biologos that god intended and designed the universe to bring about this life [on earth]." ¹⁵ Haarsama believes that god did so via *secondary* causes, including the mutation-selection mechanism, rather than by direct creative acts.

Problems with this perspective arise at once. First, according to this view, scientific analysis of biological phenomena and history will reveal only natural (or secondary) causes to be at work in creation. While philosophical and theological analysis might affirm god's guiding hand behind these processes, science itself does not affirm the divine. The problem is that, for Christians, such a view seems to run contrary to what St. Paul teaches: "[W]hat may be known about god is plain to them, because god has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world god's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." ¹⁶

The text is clear that "god's invisible qualities" are known "from what has been made"—from nature itself. St. Paul does not say that some kind of philosophical analysis is needed for people to understand the testimony of creation. Instead, the natural world makes "plain" that there is a creator.

Moreover, the broader context of this passage makes clear that Paul's teaching applies to the "gentiles," his term for those who are outside the covenant. Paul's view, therefore, is *not* that god's invisible qualities are evident only when nature is viewed through the eyes of faith. Quite the contrary. Creation itself speaks to *all* people—so strongly, in fact, that everyone is "without excuse."

Second, on this version of theistic evolution, god is a deceiver. He uses what appears to be an entirely unguided process to produce things he has designed and planned for from the beginning. Though our deepest empirical analysis reveals nothing other than natural forces and particles, divine activity is the real creative agent. According to this theory, god actually designed all the flora and fauna, yet hid his agency behind the appearance of an *undesigned* process. ¹⁷

Third, this theory implies that god intends and directly influences

massive amounts of natural pain and suffering. The mechanism of natural selection and random mutation is a process of "nature red in tooth and claw," to borrow Tennyson's apt phrase. Creativity and adaptation arise from two barbarous sources: (1) random mutations, many of which are deleterious to organisms, and (2) natural selection, which requires creatures to fight and scratch for common resources, and predator and prey to tangle in unrelenting struggle. Recall that, on this view, this bloody process just *is* god's ordained means of creativity, a process that he created and sustains, and whose outcomes, both gruesome and great, he intends.

In sum, this version of theistic evolution is, to put it mildly, theologically troubling. It not only runs contrary to the teaching of St. Paul, but it also maligns god's moral probity by casting him as a deceiver and as the great sadist of organic history.

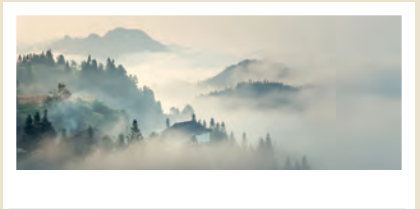
Qualified Guidance

Possibility 7 says that god guided the evolutionary process, but in a limited way. While he set up and sustains natural selection and random mutation (and other natural processes) as the primary means of creativity, he only intends *some* of the outcomes of evolution, and he acts specially to affect natural selection and/or random mutation during organic history in order to produce these desired outcomes. This version is very much like number 6, with one big exception: it asserts that natural processes on their own are causally *insufficient* to produce the outcomes god intends. So god must miraculously step in from time to time to cause

the right mutation or to nudge selective pressures in just the right way.¹⁸

This version of theistic evolution has the advantage of avoiding worries about the problem of evil that plagued possibility 6. yet it, too, has disadvantages. for example, it seems excessively ad hoc. Just how does a person determine *which* mutations or selective pressures god caused directly? If the answer is that scientists can detect these events using the standard methods of scientific analysis, then this position actually appears to be a form of intelligent design theory, since Id holds that the designer has acted in a scientifically detectable manner. Insofar as god's activity in organic history is scientifically discernable, then, this version of theistic evolution is simply a version of Id.

however, if the answer is that the methods of science *cannot* show god's active participation, then there appears to be no scientific way to distinguish between naturally caused mutations or selective pressures and supernaturally caused ones. from a scientific perspective, it's just an ad hoc solution to claim that the "good" mutations or pressures are caused by god, whereas the "bad" ones are not. In this case, theology (and its commitment to god's goodness) intervenes in order to save a scientific theory that cannot stand on its own.



Final Thoughts

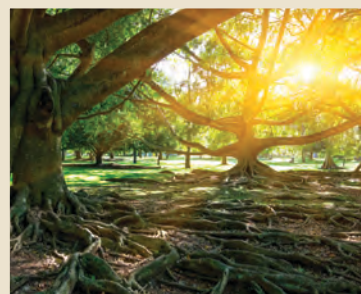
so just what *is* theistic evolution? The question admits of no easy answer. The bottom line is that theistic evolution is a hydra-headed beast. Those who accept it ought to be as clear as they can about what version they hold. They should also be prepared to deal squarely with its many problems—not just its evidential ones, but its conceptual ones as well. ☺

POSSIBILITY 8

Jumbled Amalgamation

Sometimes it is difficult to discern precisely what a given theistic evolutionist means by "theistic evolution" or "evolutionary creation." This may be because the theorist himself is ambiguous about what he means, or because his theory is a jumbled amalgamation of some of the versions outlined above. Theistic evolutionists certainly can get tangled up in their own theories, as stephen Meyer shows:

[Theistic evolution] implies that the appearance or illusion of design in living systems results from the activity of an apparently undirected material process (i.e., classical and neo-darwinism) except that this apparently undirected process is itself being used by a designing intelligence—or at least it could be, though no one can tell for sure. or, to put it another way, we have moved from richard dawkins's famous statement "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose" . . . to the proposition that "biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose, though that appearance of design is an illusion (classical darwinism), even though there may be an intelligent designer behind it all—in which case that appearance wouldn't be an illusion after all." This tangled—indeed convoluted—view of the origin of living systems adds nothing to our scientific understanding of what caused living organisms to arise.¹⁹



such a position is as opaque as it is undesirable.

Notes

1. see section 1 of *Theistic Evolution*, ed. J. P. Moreland et al. (Crossway, 2017).
2. "Theistic evolution" is sometimes labeled "evolutionary creation."
3. I draw on stephen Meyer's excellent essay in what follows. see his "scientific and Philosophical Introduction: defining Theistic evolution," in *Theistic Evolution*, 33–60.
4. Kenneth r. Miller and Joseph s. Levine, *Biology*, 4th ed. (Prentice hall, 1998), 658. Miller has long identified as a catholic who believes in evolution.
5. Meyer, "scientific and Philosophical Introduction," 43–44.
6. Meyer, "scientific and Philosophical Introduction," 45.
7. hebrews 1:3.
8. darwin correspondence Project, "Letter no. 2814" (accessed on feb. 7, 2018): darwinproject.ac.uk/dc/P-le/TT-2814. To be clear, darwin likely did not believe that god ontologically sustains the laws of nature.
9. Kenneth Miller, comments made at the "shifting ground" conference, Bedford, new hampshire, March 24, 2007.
10. genesis 1:26–27.
11. genesis 1:31.
12. Meyer, "scientific and Philosophical Introduction," 47.
13. francis collins and Karl giberson, *The Language of Science and Faith* (InterVarsity Press, 2011).
14. *Ibid.*, 205–206, emphasis added.
15. The radio debate can be found at <http://juli-eroys.com/category/evolutionintelligent-design>. see the 13:25 mark.
16. romans 1:19–20.
17. ann gauger, ola hössjer, and colin r eeves, "evidence for human uniqueness," *Theistic Evolution*, 500–501.
18. at one point some years ago, physicist and anglican priest John Polkinghorne advocated something like this view in his notion that god intervenes in quantum events in order to shape natural history to his liking.
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Battle Royale

The LGBTQ Lobby Goes to the Mat Over Toilet Space

by Amy Contrada



The progress of the transgender rights movement would not be possible without institutional endorsement. Propagandists have successfully induced the leaders of our educational, governmental, cultural, and media institutions to buy into the notion that a physiologically normal male can “really” be a female and that a physiologically normal female can “really” be a male. More and more students, at younger and younger ages, are being indoctrinated into accepting the idea that sex is merely “assigned” at birth and may not match one’s true “identity.” Those who do not accept this obviously false notion are coming under increasing pressure to self-censor their thoughts and actions lest they be attacked, ostracized, suspended from school, or fired from their jobs.

Though the transgender movement represents only a tiny fraction of the population—0.03 percent—the legal apparatus set up to support it has far-reaching ramifications for all aspects of life, including language, relationships, and medical practice. If our cultural and political leaders can force us to deny the biological reality of male and female through language manipulation and anti-discrimination laws, it is not overstating the case to say that a totalitarian impulse is at work.¹ ➡

The Bathroom Wars

Though many aspects of the turmoil caused by transgenderism warrant detailed analysis, here I will limit my discussion to an area where government enforcement is most obvious: what were once sex-segregated private spaces.

The so-called bathroom wars reveal the monstrousness of the trans ideology. Trans encounters in bathrooms affect us on a visceral level. We *feel* that something is fundamentally wrong. Nor are safety and privacy the only things at stake. Many people also instinctively perceive that being forced to accept a person of the opposite sex in their bathroom is the beginning of thought control: *You must believe that this man is a woman*. That's why there is so much resistance—though that understanding is rarely voiced out loud.

To date, most of the talk has been about women's spaces being invaded by men who pretend

to be women. This is a serious concern, especially given that about three-quarters of male-to-female transgenders have intact male genitalia. Women who have had to share an intimate space with a strange male who is probably mentally disturbed² know how disconcerting and even frightening it can be.

But the opposite scenario—female-to-male transgenders invading *men's* private spaces—is also cause for concern, yet hasn't been discussed nearly as much. So it will be the focus of my attention here.

Perhaps the relative silence regarding female interlopers in men's bathrooms and locker rooms is another aspect of the ongoing "war against men" waged by radical feminists.³ These interlopers are, after all, biological women who, in denying biological men's sole right to these spaces, are seeking to blur the line between male and female. On the one hand, it's a method of social conditioning to usher in a genderless utopia, but on the other, it's an assertion of the feminist dogma that a female's sincerity cannot be challenged, even if she identifies as a man.

If a male points out that it's in the female's best interest to stay out of a male space, *he* is guilty of bigotry. Gender ideology now dictates that it's discriminatory for a male to be concerned about a female's safety in such spaces. It's also forbidden to be concerned about the privacy or modesty of the males themselves in their space. That doesn't count anymore.

How will men react to seeing such things? It is natural to feel uncomfortable around anyone who shows signs of being mentally disturbed, and women who are willing to go to such lengths in pretending to be what they are not clearly exhibit such signs.



School Scenarios

The problem is not only, or even mainly, limited to adult encounters. Reports are accumulating of middle-school and high-school girls suing for access to

boys' restrooms and locker rooms. (Trans activists know how vulnerable school districts are to costly lawsuits.) Mainstream news coverage portrays these trans girls (pretending to be boys) as justly suing for their "rights," and courts usually rule in their favor. Little or nothing is said about the boys' rights. Here are some examples, among many that could be cited:

➔ **In March 2018**, a federal district judge in Talbot County, Maryland, ruled for a teenage trans girl who demanded access to the boys' restroom and locker room at her middle school.⁴ The school board policy, intended to protect *all* students, had been that the girl should change for gym class in a gender-neutral bathroom, but the judge declared that such a requirement constituted "discrimination on the basis of gender stereotypes." In reality, of course, the policy made a rightful distinction on the basis of biological sex.

➔ **In April 2016**, a trans girl in Gloucester County, Virginia, who went by the name of Gavin Grimm, charged her school with sex discrimination under Title IX because she was denied use of the boys' restrooms. Children's hospital gender clinics, trans-affirming doctors, LGBT activist groups, and school administrators from around the country supported the girl's lawsuit. So did 59 major corporations.⁵ The 4th Circuit Court of Appeals agreed that her case should go forward,⁶ although the lone dissenting judge said the ruling

completely tramples on all universally accepted protections of privacy and safety that are based on the anatomical differences between the sexes. This unprecedented holding overrules custom, culture, and the very demands inherent in human nature for privacy and safety, which the separation of such facilities is designed to protect.

The case was eventually appealed to the Supreme Court, which sent it back to the lower courts, where it is still being litigated⁷ although the student herself has graduated.

➔ **In July 2016**, a Wisconsin trans girl sued the Kenosha School District after being denied use of the boys' restrooms. Her suit alleged that she was isolated from her "peers"—i.e., male classmates—on overnight school trips. So not only did she want to relieve herself in the presence of boys, she wanted to sleep in hotel bedrooms with them. The case was appealed to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals, which in May 2017 ruled in her favor, forcing the school to pay her \$800,000.⁸

➔ **In February 2018** in Ohio, a ninth-grade girl wrestler who identifies as a boy charged Wilmington High School with gender discrimination because although the school's wrestling coach allowed her on the boys' team, he wouldn't let her change in the boys' locker room. The girl also claimed that a boy wrestler on the team discriminated against her when he said he wouldn't wrestle her because he didn't want to grab her female bottom.

At the time, the girl said she was "about 70 percent through [her] transition" (she appears to have had a double mastectomy and testosterone treatments but not a penile implant), but even so, if the other boys on the team didn't already know she was a girl, they would soon have found out in the course of wrestling with her. (Of all sports, wrestling has got to be the least suited to co-ed teams.) Nevertheless, the girl's mother claimed that the coach "outed" her daughter as a female, and in doing so both humiliated the girl and revealed confidential medical records. The suit also claimed that the other wrestlers, after finding out the girl was trans, threatened and bullied her, though no details were supplied.⁹

To the unenlightened observer, it would seem that the coach and teammate were guilty of no more than observing biological truth and respecting the girl as a female. Yet for the very reason that they wanted to observe common decency and protect her modesty, *they* were deemed guilty of discrimination. How ironic such a story is in this age of MeToo-ism.

Public Restrooms

Trans madness is not only proliferating in schools. It is also being extended to public restrooms.

A goal for many trans females is to stand to urinate, as men do, and various “stand-to-pee” devices have been developed to facilitate this. There are also websites that give advice on their use, such as how to wash out the device after use in a public men’s room without attracting attention and giving away one’s biological sex.¹⁰ The few trans females who have had fake penises attached reportedly have problems, as well; the prostheses don’t look convincing and often have leakage issues.

How will men react to seeing such things? It is natural to feel uncomfortable around anyone who shows signs of being mentally disturbed, and women who are willing to go to such lengths in pretending to be what they are not clearly exhibit such signs. Moreover, trans females face some level of danger themselves when they use men’s public facilities. That they are aware of this is implicitly acknowledged in the advice they are given, such as the following:

[The men’s room] is not a social space. Nobody talks or makes eye contact with anyone else. People don’t stand next to each other at urinals unless they are all filled. Usually folks in the men’s room stand in line in the middle of the bathroom. . . .

Don’t feel out of place for using a stall. . . . If you need to sit down to pee and are worried that someone will notice, try using a can lid or medicine spoon. . . . You can also try one of the various stand-to-pee devices. . . .

If you are feeling nervous when entering a bathroom, take a deep breath and

remind yourself that there’s nothing wrong with you and that you have the right to be there as much as anyone else does. . . .

If you are feeling safe and bold, try confronting bathroom harassers directly. . . . If they question your choice in bathrooms, tell them, “I am transgender and I have a right to be here, deal with it.”¹¹

Trans females are also advised to “bring a buddy” with them for safety when they enter a men’s room.

Why do these women want to put themselves in situations where there may be a harassing or violent reaction to their presence? How safe can they really be in the men’s facilities in highway rest areas, sports stadiums, or health clubs? Sadly, their abnormal behavior may trigger a male who has had too much to drink or who is simply a ruffian. This is uncharted territory, and these women will, at a minimum, spark men’s dismay and repulsion. Yet they forge ahead, crashing men’s spaces and claiming it is their right to do so.

Government Complicity

Boys’ and men’s sense of biological identity is being challenged through this intrusion. But that doesn’t matter to transgender activists; their demands take precedence.

And they are being backed up in their attack on common sense by powerful forces. State and local governments are passing “gender identity” non-discrimination laws and ordinances covering public accommodations.¹² The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has declared transgender restroom use a “health and safety matter,” yet, in disregard of actual health and safety, it advises that no restrictions be placed on an individual’s choice of bathroom.¹³ In this, OSHA is

kowtowing to the radical Human Rights Campaign's dictate that trans individuals take precedence over everyone else: "Co-workers uncomfortable with a transgender employee's use of the same restroom or locker room should be advised to use separate facilities."¹⁴

Official policies now declare that separate, set-aside facilities are harmful to trans persons. They must be allowed in the facility of their choice. But there's no consideration for the other 99.97 percent of the population. We are told there's something wrong with *us* if we are uncomfortable losing our privacy and peace of mind.

False Safety Concerns

Transgender activists claim there's an epidemic of violence against trans individuals, but this claim has been debunked.¹⁵ Still, these agitators say they must use the restroom "matching their gender identity" for safety reasons. But when it comes to trans females' actual safety, their hypocrisy is obvious.

Trans schoolgirls are irrationally putting themselves into unsafe situations with the blessing of the adult activists who back them at every step.¹⁶ Trans girls and women are encouraged to enter spaces holding psychological and possibly physical dan-

ger for them.¹⁷ (It's no wonder transgenders have higher rates of anxiety than the general population.¹⁸)

This intentional risk-taking exposes the phoniness of the "safety" card played by LGBT activists for decades. It was Kevin Jennings, founder of GLSEN (Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network), who in the 1990s first floated the idea that LGBT students faced danger in schools. GLSEN's solution was to introduce gay clubs, "safe zones," and LGBT curricula in schools. It was a sly scheme to bring gay and transgender indoctrination into the education system.¹⁹

"Safety" will also be used as an excuse to remove children from parents who don't go along with the trans ideology that has infected their child. The NEA (allied with the ACLU and Human Rights Campaign) and the Massachusetts Department of Education have laid out circumstances under which trans students should be "protected" from their own parents.²⁰ In February, a judge in Ohio removed a teen from her parents' custody because the parents did not support their daughter's "transition."²¹

If our society is really concerned about safety, the transgender movement must be curtailed. Young people especially are being used as pawns and are terribly harmed in this political battle. Protections for "gender identity" need to be rescinded. People need to speak out. Maybe some real men will come to the defense of the wrestling coach in Ohio! ☹

Notes

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The Miracle Element

Fine Tuning & the Carbonization of Worlds by *Hugh Ross*

A lot of people worry about the carbon footprints of nations, industries, technologies, and even individual human beings and animals. They worry that our activities are pumping too much carbon in the form of carbon dioxide and methane—both powerful greenhouse gases—into the atmosphere, and too much carbon in the form of tiny particles of soot onto glaciers and snowfields. They worry that these activities are warming our planet and raising our sea levels.

However valid these concerns may be, the fact that carbon exists *at all* is nothing short of a miracle. And for Earth to have been blessed with neither too much nor too little carbon, either of which would preclude the existence of advanced life, is another miracle. And the fact that Earth has its stores of carbon distributed into the just-right locations for the thriving of human civilization ranks as yet another miracle of divine design.

Let's explore these miracles in some detail.

Cosmic Mass Fine-Tuned for Carbon

One of the more frequent challenges I get from non-theists is the following: "If there is a God who wanted to create a home for human beings, why would he create hundreds of billions of useless galaxies?" The quick answer is that, given the laws of physics God chose for the universe, it is not possible to make a planet on which humans can live and thrive *without* the hundreds of billions of galaxies. In fact, it is not possible for any kind of physical life to exist without hundreds of billions of galaxies.



How does this work? Well, the universe's population of galaxies makes up much of the cosmic mass density. For physical life to be possible, this cosmic mass density must be fine-tuned—indeed, must have been fine-tuned from the beginning.

How so? Well, the universe began with only one element: hydrogen. This element has an atomic number of 1, meaning each hydrogen atom has one proton in its nucleus. The cosmic mass density of that primordial hydrogen determined how much of it would get fused into helium (atomic number 2) during the first few minutes of cosmic history.

As the universe expanded from the cosmic creation event, it cooled from a nearly infinitely high temperature down to its present mean temperature of about 2.725° Celsius above absolute zero (-273.15° Celsius). There was a brief episode when the universe passed through the temperature range at which hydrogen fusion occurs (150–15 million degrees Celsius).

Since massive bodies attract one another under the influence of the gravitational force, the greater the cosmic mass density, the slower the expansion rate of the universe. And the slower the expansion rate of the universe, the longer the episode during which the universe could pass through the hydrogen fusion temperature range and, therefore, the more of the universe's primordial hydrogen could be fused into helium.



Hence, everything hinged on what the cosmic mass density of that primordial hydrogen was. If it had been the slightest bit smaller, so little helium would have been fused from hydrogen during the first several minutes of cosmic history that the nuclear furnaces of future stars would not have been able to make any elements heavier than helium. In that event, the periodic table of elements would never have expanded beyond hydrogen and helium (see Figure 1).

But if the cosmic mass density had been the slightest bit larger, so much helium would have been fused from hydrogen during the first several minutes of cosmic history that the nuclear furnaces of future stars would have quickly converted all the baryonic matter (matter composed of protons, neutrons, and electrons) into elements heavier than iron. In that event, the periodic table of elements would contain no elements lighter than cobalt (atomic number 27; see Figure 1).

Thus, the periodic tables for both a slightly less massive universe and for a slightly more massive universe would be missing the most life-critical elements: carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, sodium, magnesium, phosphorus, sulfur, chlorine, potassium, calcium, vanadium, chromium, and manganese. Without carbon, no conceivable kind of physical life would be possible. Unless the universe possessed precisely the mass that it does, carbon would be missing—and so would life. It is a miracle of cosmic design that the universe contains any carbon at all.

Nuclear Resonance Levels Fine-Tuned for Carbon

But cosmic mass density is not the only thing that must have been exquisitely fine-tuned for the universe to contain any carbon. The nuclear resonance (or energy) levels for helium, beryllium, carbon, and oxygen also had to be exquisitely fine-tuned for carbon to exist. Here's how that happens.

Stars fuse carbon and oxygen from helium through a series of reactions known as the triple-alpha process, in which three helium nuclei are combined to make one carbon nucleus. In the first step in this process, two helium nuclei (with 2 protons each) fuse together to make beryllium (which has 4 protons). Next, a helium nucleus fuses with a beryllium nucleus to make carbon (which has 6 protons). Then, some carbon nuclei fuse with helium nuclei to make oxygen (which has 8 protons).

The only reason that the triple-alpha process produces any carbon or oxygen at all is because in the first step, the ground state energy level (i.e., the state of an atom when all of its electrons are at their lowest energy levels) of the beryllium-8 nucleus (containing 4 protons and 4 neutrons) almost exactly equals the ground state energy level of two helium-4 nuclei (2 protons and 2 neutrons each). In the second step, the ground state energy level of a beryllium-8

nucleus plus a helium-4 nucleus almost exactly equals the energy level of an excited state of a carbon-12 nucleus (6 protons and 6 neutrons). In the third step, the ground state energy level of a carbon-12 nucleus at 7.65 million electron volts is just slightly larger than the ground state energy level of an oxygen-16 nucleus (8 protons and 8 neutrons) at 7.12 million electron volts.¹

If it were not for the near equivalences or resonances of the nuclear energy levels of two helium nuclei relative to a beryllium nucleus, and of a beryllium nucleus plus a helium nucleus relative to a carbon nucleus, the universe would contain very little or no carbon and very little or no elements heavier than carbon. Life would be impossible.

Furthermore, unless the difference in the nuclear energy levels between a carbon nucleus and an oxygen nucleus were precisely 0.53 million electron volts, the universe would contain



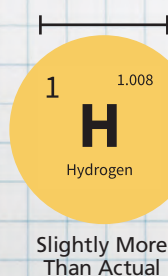
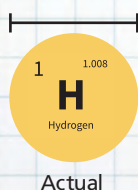
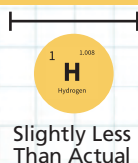
Figure 2

either a lot of carbon and no oxygen or a lot of oxygen and no carbon. Either way, physical life would be impossible in the universe.

In the early 1950s, astronomer Fred Hoyle and physicist Willy Fowler were the first to understand how critical the relative nuclear energy levels of helium, beryllium, carbon, and oxygen were for making life possible in the universe. Commenting on

Figure 1

Cosmic Mass Density of Primordial Hydrogen



Elements Eventually Produced by Fusion

Only light elements present—**no Carbon**

1 H Hydrogen	2 He Helium
--------------------	-------------------

All known elements present—including **Carbon** →

1 H Hydrogen	2 He Helium	3 Li Lithium	4 Be Beryllium	5 B Boron	6 C Carbon	7 N Nitrogen	8 O Oxygen	9 F Fluorine	10 Ne Neon
11 Na Sodium	12 Mg Magnesium	13 Al Aluminum	14 Si Silicon	15 P Phosphorus	16 S Sulfur	17 Cl Chlorine	18 Ar Argon	19 K Potassium	20 Ca Calcium
21 Sc Scandium	22 Ti Titanium	23 V Vanadium	24 Cr Chromium	25 Mn Manganese	26 Fe Iron	27 Co Cobalt	28 Ni Nickel	29 Cu Copper	30 Zn Zinc
31 Ga Gallium	32 Ge Germanium	33 As Arsenic	34 Se Selenium	35 Br Bromine	36 Kr Krypton	37 Rb Rubidium	38 Sr Strontium	39 Y Yttrium	40 Zr Zirconium
41 Nb Niobium	42 Mo Molybdenum	43 Tc Technetium	44 Ru Ruthenium	45 Rh Rhodium	46 Pd Palladium	47 Ag Silver	48 Cd Cadmium	49 In Indium	50 Sn Tin
51 Sb Antimony	52 Te Tellurium	53 I Iodine	54 Xe Xenon	55 Cs Cesium	56 Ba Barium	57-71 Lanthanides	72 Hf Hafnium	73 Ta Tantalum	74 W Tungsten
75 Re Rhenium	76 Os Osmium	77 Ir Iridium	78 Pt Platinum	79 Au Gold	80 Hg Mercury	81 Tl Thallium	82 Pb Lead	83 Bi Bismuth	84 Po Polonium
85 At Astatine	86 Rn Radon	87 Fr Francium	88 Ra Radium	89-103 Actinides	104 Rf Rutherfordium	105 Db Dubnium	106 Sg Seaborgium	107 Bh Bohrium	108 Hs Hassium
109 Mt Meitnerium	110 Ds Darmstadtium	111 Rg Roentgenium	112 Cn Copernicium	113 Nh Nihonium	114 Fl Flerovium	115 Mc Moscovium	116 Lv Livermorium	117 Ts Tennessine	118 Og Oganesson

Only heavy elements present—**no Carbon**

27 Co Cobalt	28 Ni Nickel	29 Cu Copper	30 Zn Zinc	31 Ga Gallium	32 Ge Germanium	33 As Arsenic	34 Se Selenium	35 Br Bromine	36 Kr Krypton
45 Rh Rhodium	46 Pd Palladium	47 Ag Silver	48 Cd Cadmium	49 In Indium	50 Sn Tin	51 Sb Antimony	52 Te Tellurium	53 I Iodine	54 Xe Xenon
77 Ir Iridium	78 Pt Platinum	79 Au Gold	80 Hg Mercury	81 Tl Thallium	82 Pb Lead	83 Bi Bismuth	84 Po Polonium	85 At Astatine	86 Rn Radon
107 Bh Bohrium	108 Hs Hassium	109 Mt Meitnerium	110 Ds Darmstadtium	111 Rg Roentgenium	112 Cn Copernicium	113 Nh Nihonium	114 Fl Flerovium	115 Mc Moscovium	116 Lv Livermorium
117 Ts Tennessine	118 Og Oganesson	119 Uut Ununtrium	120 Uub Unbium	121 Uuh Ununtrium	122 Uuq Unquadium	123 Uup Unpentium	124 Uuq Unquadium	125 Uup Unpentium	126 Uuh Unheptium

the highly fine-tuned nature of these nuclear energy levels, Hoyle wrote in an article he published in *Engineering & Science*,

A common sense interpretation of the facts suggests that a superintellect has monkeyed with the physics, as well as with chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature. The numbers one calculates from the facts seem to me so overwhelming as to put this conclusion beyond question.²

Earth's Perfect Carbon Balance

Without carbon, life is impossible. However, fine-tuning the universe for the *existence* of carbon is not sufficient; unless the *quantity* of carbon in and on a planet is also fine-tuned, physical life—and certainly advanced physical life—will not be possible. A planet with too little carbon will not have a sufficient supply for life chemistry to function. A planet with too much carbon will possess a life-suffocating atmosphere (lung failure occurs at air pressures exceeding three times Earth's) filled with powerful greenhouse gases.

Carbon is the fourth most abundant element in the universe, after hydrogen, helium, and oxygen. It is ubiquitous; there are no carbon-free bodies in the universe. There are, however, a great many carbon-rich bodies. In fact, carbon-rich bodies are the norm.

As I describe in my book *Improbable Planet*, extrasolar planets that are the most similar to Earth, and whose carbon amounts astronomers have been able to measure, or at least estimate, have been found to possess about 1,200 times as much carbon-based atmospheric gas as Earth does.³ This much carbon-based atmospheric gas would rule out photosynthetic life, all animals, and likely all physical life on those planets.

How did Earth become so extremely—and advantageously—carbon-poor? The answer is that it likely was born in a very different location in the Milky Way Galaxy from where it presently resides. Evidence shows that Earth's birth occurred in a dense cluster of more than 10,000 stars (see Figure 2 for an example) located much closer to the center of the Milky Way than Earth is today. There, the primordial Earth was exposed to several nearby supernovae and to the winds of several nearby Wolf-Rayet stars (evolved massive stars that have exhausted their source of hydrogen for fusion burning and are fusing helium and heavier elements in their nuclear furnaces). Consequently, the primordial Earth was bathed in huge quantities of radiation from the radiometric decay of aluminum-26.⁴



Figure 3

The radiation from the decay of aluminum-26 (half-life = 717,000 years; a half-life is the time it takes for a given quantity of a radioactive substance to be reduced by half) blasted away most of the volatiles (gases and liquids) that the primordial Earth possessed. The Moon-forming event—in which a planet at least twice the size of Mars collided with the primordial Earth (see Figure 3)—that occurred a few tens of millions of years later removed all or virtually all of the volatiles that remained.⁵ Later, comets restored a tiny fraction of the volatiles that Earth had lost.⁶

The end result of this unique early history is that Earth ended up with exactly the right amount of carbon to optimally sustain advanced life. But even that is not the end of the story. The exactly right amount of carbon that Earth came to possess is optimally distributed throughout our planet's environment to give the greatest possible benefit to human life and human civilization.

All told, the story of carbon in the universe and on Earth reveals multiple miracles of divine design for the benefit of physical life, and especially for human beings and human civilization. In studying this story, we become witnesses to these miracles, even as we reap their benefits. ☺

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a l a pprehension

Is Artificial Intelligence Taking Over? Or Is a Fashionable Panic Afoot?

Earlier this year, over 150 experts in AI, robotics, ethics, and supporting disciplines signed an open letter denouncing the European Parliament's proposal to make intelligent machines persons.

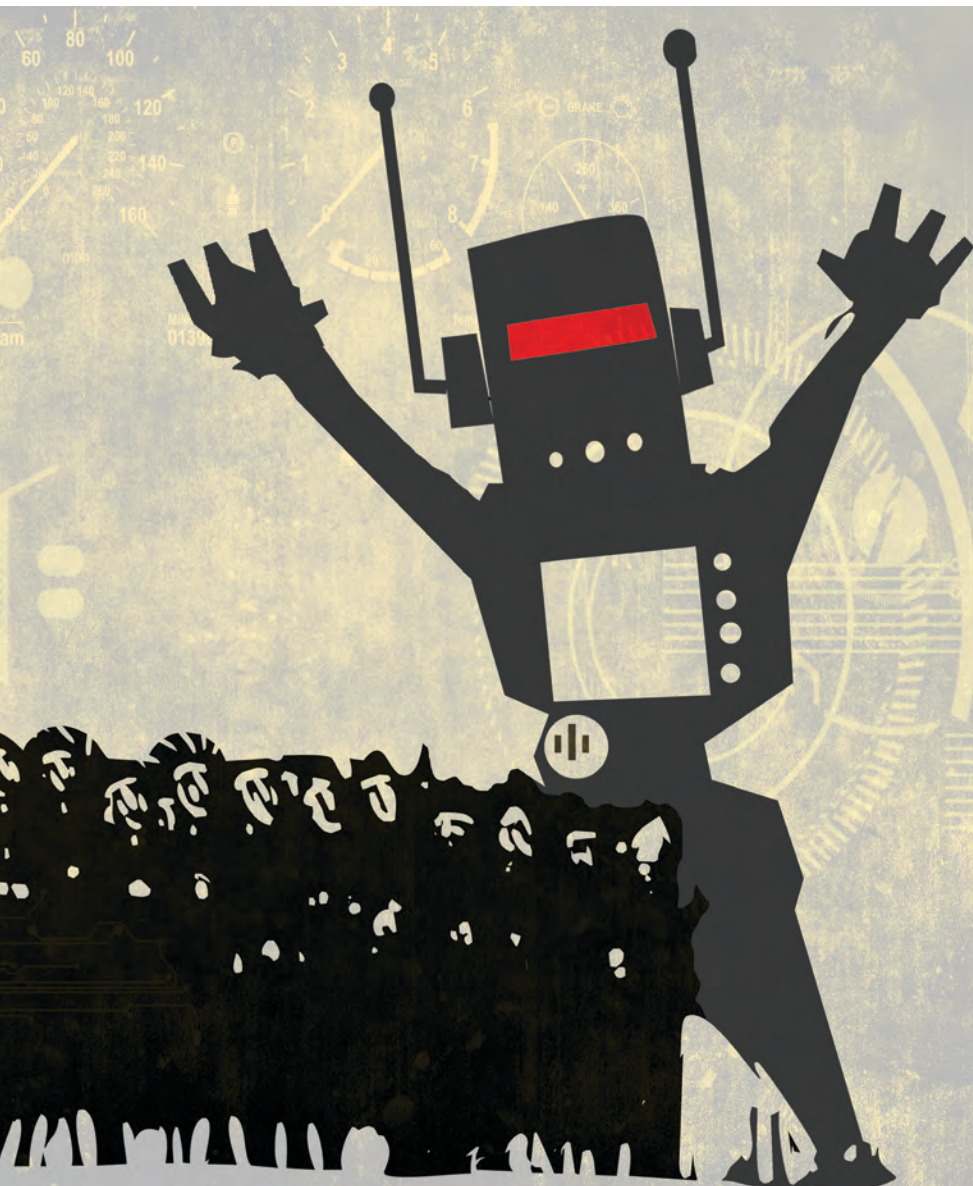
According to Canadian futurist George Dvorsky, the Parliament's purpose is to hold the machines liable for damages, as a corporation might be: "The EU is understandably worried that the actions of these machines will be increasingly incomprehensible to the puny humans who manufacture and use them."

AI experts acknowledge that no such robots currently exist. But many argue, as does Seth Baum of the Global Catastrophic Risk Institute, "Now is the time to debate these issues, not to make final decisions." AI philosopher Michael LaBossiere likewise wants to "try to avoid our usual approach of blundering into a mess and then staggering through it." Maybe, but the wish is often father to the thought, and a grand protocol may tempt many with an interest in the matter to see in AI what isn't there because they need it to be.

For some, it's a moral issue: sociologist and futurist James Hughes considers existing rights language to be "often human-racist" and "unethical." Dvorsky, who describes himself as "Canada's leading agenda-driven futurist/activist," is a big fan of personhood in principle. As founder and chair of the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies (IEET), he wants personhood for whales, dolphins, elephants, and other highly sapient creatures. He doesn't want a noble agenda upset by questionably victimized robots.¹

Predictions Abound

Many internationally known sci-tech fi ures assume, along with the European Parliament, that AI equivalent to humans is a sure thing and coming soon. In March, space entrepreneur Elon Musk called AI "more dangerous than nuclear warheads."² Musk took Harvard's top pop-science



influencer Steven Pinker to task recently for not doubling down on the current panic: "If Pinker doesn't have a grasp of AI, 'humanity is in deep trouble.'"³ Stephen Hawking (1942–2018), however, was a believer. In 2017, he told a Web Summit technology conference that "computers can, in theory, emulate human intelligence, and exceed it," and that AI could be the "worst event in the history of our civilization."⁴

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, on the other hand, is "really optimistic" and thinks Musk's predictions are "pretty irresponsible." Nor does Bill Gates see much danger at present ("we can look forward to longer vacations"). Warren Buffett agrees. That said, in 2015, Gates seemed more worried ("I don't understand why some people are not concerned").⁵

Predictions from lesser lights abound. Product development expert Phil Baker, citing the results of an industry survey, tells us,

Using AI to write high school essays without human intervention will be available . . . in 2026. And the ability of artificial intelligence to drive a

AI will make a big difference, Marks reckons, but not by producing brains with metal shells. Rather, he laments, Google knows where he is every second of the day, and where we are, too. No authoritarian regime in history, not even 1984 in fiction had such potential power.



truck on its own is expected to be available by 2027. Using AI to replace retail clerks will be in place by 2031. Of course, we're already seeing kiosks replace counter personnel at fast-food restaurants. And writing a best-selling book completely by a machine that exceeds the skill of a human author will occur by 2049, according to the survey.⁶

The soft touch world chimes in, too. Mariana Lin, a California poet who speaks regularly at Stanford University on creative writing for artificially intelligent beings, proposes an elaborate integration scheme, including "I-That" relationships to go along with Martin Buber's iconic I-Thou and I-It relationships.⁷

Panic over Alchemy?

AI philosopher LaBossiere argues that the mind need not be strictly limited to organic beings. "After all, if a lump of organic goo can somehow think, then it is no more odd to think that a mass of circuitry or artificial goo could think," he said. "For those who

think a soul is required to think, it is also no more bizarre for a ghost to be in a metal shell than in a meat shell."⁸ But the question is not whether it is "odd" or "bizarre." The question is, are there good reasons for thinking it will happen?

Engineering professor Michael I. Jordan notes that the controversy is partly a question of semantics. Historically, the term "AI" meant an entity with human-level intelligence. But today it also, conveniently, refers to machine learning as well. Great progress has been made in machine learning but not toward human-level intelligence.

Taking the field as a whole, Jordan notes that there are "major open problems in classical AI," including the need to "infer and represent causality" and "the need to develop systems that formulate and pursue long-term goals."⁹ More bluntly, Matthew Hutson wonders at *Science* if AI has become the new alchemy: AI researcher Ali Rahimi tells him that researchers "do not know why some algorithms work and others don't, nor do they have rigorous criteria for choosing one AI architecture over another."¹⁰

In other words, panic is mounting over supposed dangers arising from an enterprise with major open, unsolved problems that lack rigorous criteria.

Some Things Do Not Compute

Are there good reasons for thinking that human-like AI *cannot* really happen? Yes indeed. Mathematician David Berlinski observes shrewdly,

The great goal of artificial intelligence has always been to develop a general learning algorithm, one that, like a three-year-old child, could apply its intelligence across various domains. This has not been achieved. It is not even in sight. And no wonder. We have

There is no evidence that algorithms, by themselves, become creative and produce large amounts of new information. **The source of large amounts of new information is still elusive.**

no theory that explains human or animal behavior.

So we don't even know what we are trying to replicate.¹¹ Baylor computer engineering professor Robert J. Marks notes that Gödel's Theorem, a key moment in mathematics, shows that some things are outside the laws of mathematics. In any event, they are not computable. And there is no evidence that algorithms, by themselves, become creative and produce large amounts of new information. The source of large amounts of new information is still elusive.

AI will make a big difference, Marks reckons, but not by producing brains with metal shells. Rather, he laments, Google knows where he is every second of the day,¹² and where we are, too. No authoritarian regime in history, not even 1984 in fiction, had such potential power. In my next two Deprogram columns, we will explore both the reasons why ID theorists like Marks think that AI programs will not morph into minds and how AI represents a serious threat anyway, by dramatically lowering the cost of 24/7/365 surveillance of whole societies. ☹

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Beyond Adaptation

The Human Brain Is Something New

Who or what are we? The materialist viewpoint is that we are matter in motion governed by our brains, a wetware operating system of three pounds of grey and white matter. Our identity is packed into our brains, and if they die, so do we. There is no soul, and consciousness is an illusion. Is that what we are?



From the materialist point of view, our human brains are the product of evolution—an ape-like brain grown larger and more sophisticated. Physically, a human brain is three times the size of a chimpanzee brain, and it uses considerably more energy. Our brain represents 2 percent of our body weight but uses 20 percent of the oxygen we breathe.¹

However, our brains are not merely enlarged ape brains—there are other differences. Our brains contain neural structures, enhanced wiring, and forms of connectivity between nerve cells not found in any animal.² Our neurons continue dividing well into adulthood and have a ten-fold higher density than those of chimps. The human brain is something new, something different, as can be seen by the things we do that animals don't.

In fact, our differences are likely greater than our similarities. David Premack, the late psychologist from the University of Pennsylvania said,

In examining claims of similarity between animals and humans, one must ask: What are the dissimilarities? This approach prevents confusing similarity with equivalence. We follow this approach in examining eight cognitive cases—teaching, short-term memory,

causal reasoning, planning, deception, transitive inference, theory of mind, and language—and find, in all cases, that similarities between animal and human abilities are small, dissimilarities large.³

An Embarrassment for Evolutionary Theory

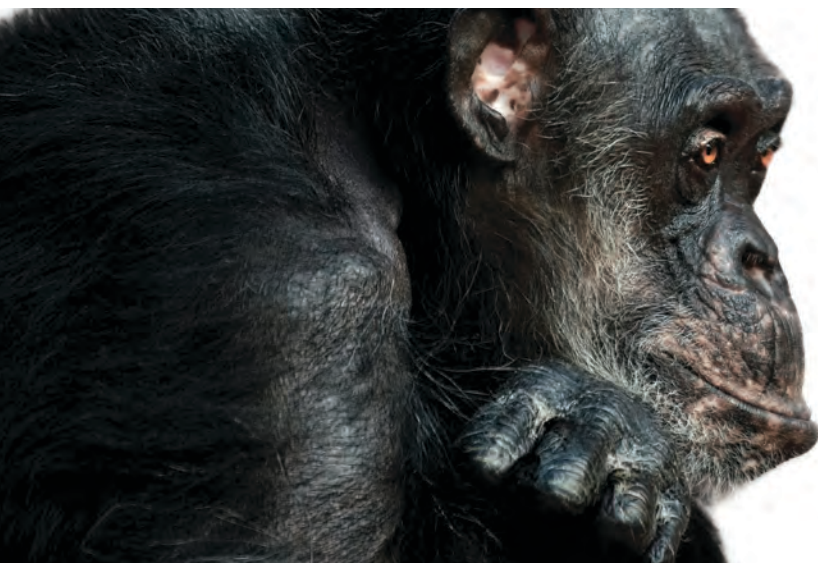
Are the dissimilarities so large as to make Darwinian evolution of our brains and abilities impossible? Our brains have vastly more ability than is needed for survival, most notably the capacity for language and abstract thought. Our capacities are orders of magnitude beyond anything animals can do.

Let's consider language. As a thought experiment, imagine what life required about 500,000 years ago (noting the irony of the experiment as you do so). The people alive then were hunters and gatherers. Their tools were Acheulian hand-axes and sharpened wooden spears. Open fires were used for cooking. Listen to David Premack again:

I challenge the reader to reconstruct the scenario that would confer selective fitness on recursiveness. Language evolved, it is conjectured, at a time when humans or protohumans were hunting mastodons. . . . Would it be a great advantage for one of our ancestors, squatting alongside the embers, to be able to remark, "Beware of the short beast whose front hoof Bob cracked when, having forgotten his own spear back at camp, he got in a glancing blow with the dull spear he borrowed from Jack"?

Human language is an embarrassment for evolutionary theory because it is vastly more powerful than one can account for in terms of selective fitness. A semantic language with simple mapping rules of a kind one might suppose that the chimpanzee would have, appears to confer all the advantages one normally associates with discussions of mastodon hunting or the like. For discussions of that kind, syntactical classes, structure-dependent rules, recursion, and the rest, are overly powerful devices, absurdly so.⁴

Life did not require complex sentences when "Look out!" or "Pass the meat" would have done.



In fact, at no time in our history have we ever needed language capable of prose like this:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers of love is Hell.⁵

Do chimpanzees love? We do.

I cannot conceive of chimpanzees developing emotions, one for the other, comparable in any way to the tenderness, the protectiveness, tolerance, and spiritual exhilaration that are the hallmarks of human love in its truest and deepest sense.⁶

Jane Goodall said that.

More than Our Brains

I think it is safe to say that we are much more than our brains. Our brains enable us to interact with our bodies, and through them with the physical world.

In some sense they mediate between us and the world. When the brain is injured or disturbed, so is our perception and interaction with the world. But our brains are also capable of rational thought. Otherwise, we would never have sent anyone to the moon.

Consider what it means to think, to reason. The materialist view says thought is an epiphenomenon, and what we think is the product of material processes in the brain, processes that are biochemically and genetically determined. Free will and rationality are illusions. But why believe in reasoned thought if your every thought is foreordained by chemical interactions and responses to stimuli? If an atheist tells you we are nothing but meat machines with no souls or free will, ask him on what basis he thinks he can say that. If his every thought is

determined, not free, then there is no reason to think he has arrived at his viewpoint rationally. There is no reason to think he thinks.

Here are some more reasons to think we are more than our brains, that we exist not only as individuals in some sense at one with our brains, but also in another sense independent of our brains. We can train our brains to rewire themselves. People with obsessive-compulsive disorder can be taught to think differently, and it makes an actual difference in the physical wiring of their brains.⁷ Also, people can be missing large parts of their brains and still function normally!⁸

With our brains we write music, dance the ballet, paint landscapes, play chess, and do theoretical physics. We send men to the moon and then bring them back. We contemplate our origin, what and who we are, and give thanks. Non-human primates don't do these things. Furthermore, these abilities far exceed what is needed for survival, and at least in the case of theoretical physics and traveling to the moon, are not useful for finding true love. The verdict on chess is still out.

But poetry may work. I can't think of a better way to demonstrate our theme.

Human language is an embarrassment for evolutionary theory because it is vastly more powerful than one can account for in terms of selective fitness



How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and
height

My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.

I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.

I love thee freely, as men strive for right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's
faith.

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints—I love thee with the
breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God
choose,

I shall but love thee better after death.

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning
(1806–1861)

Poetry like this is beauty, love, and language, all wrapped in a rhyme scheme, evocative imagery, and rhythm. It's useless, evolutionarily speaking, but very much a product of a designing intelligence. I learned long ago that beauty and intelligence do not come from chaos. Randomness is no better than chaos, and natural selection is blind to beauty and has no need for poetry, ballet, music, or chess. But, ah, these things a designing mind loves. ☺

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smart c lassics

Three Not-so-Musty Must-Reads

Over the past six years in this column, I have presented and discussed many old books from many different times and places, and in each case I have striven to show the enduring relevance of these books for our own time. I've enjoyed immensely the opportunity to showcase authors and books and ideas I regard as instructive and important, but I have to confess that the selection process that lies behind each column has not always been an easy one.

There are scores, even hundreds, of books that I think are truly great books, books that have educated and transformed me and that I want to write about, yet have not been able to. Strangely, it often happens that while a book may be overflowing with insight and wisdom, no idea from it strikes me as translatable into the focus of a column. So for every book I've actually written about, many other books, every bit as good, have been considered, then set aside. Yet I want the readers to know about these books. I've long wondered what to do about this problem, and finally a solution has occurred to me:

Why not highlight several of these works in an "omnibus" column, not attempting to derive a detailed contemporary lesson from any of them, but instead describing their virtues in a more general way?

Here, then, is a short list of books, related to the broader concerns of *Salvo*, none of which (I think) you will regret reading, and some of which may end up on your own list of all-time favorites.

h omer, *The Iliad*

The Iliad is close to the oldest, and certainly among the greatest, of the great books of Western civilization. Originally in Greek, this epic poem has been rendered into many prose and poetic versions. I'm partial to the verse translation

of Richmond Lattimore.

One of the key sources of Greek mythology, and arguably the forerunner of Greek tragedy, the *Iliad* is one of the most stirring tales of wartime heroism, yet at the same time the first great Western work of anti-war literature. The glory of war and the cost of war are shown here with compelling force. The people of the story—Achilleus, Agamemnon, Hektor, Andromache, Priam, Odysseus, and so many others—are presented with a depth that guarantees their careers as continuing characters in future Western literature. The arrogance of Achilleus, the nobility of Hektor, and the ruthless wiliness of Odysseus are all vividly portrayed.

There are thrilling scenes of personal combat, but also scenes of touching compassion; one would have to be almost inhuman not to be moved when King Priam comes as a suppliant to Achilleus for the body of his slain son Hektor. The discussion about the relationship between Zeus and Fate contains some of the deepest probings in Western religious thought. There is even comic relief, often in the form of the machinations of the Olympian gods. The book must be read only when one is in the mood for a long epic, but in that frame of mind, it's not to be missed.





simone Weil, *Waiting on God*

It is perhaps ironic that a woman whose Christian theology constantly verges on unorthodoxy (or at least questionable orthodoxy) produced one of the great classics of twentieth-century spirituality and religious thought. *Waiting on God* has been a perennial favorite among Christian readers, Catholic and Protestant alike. French by nationality, Jewish by ethnic origin, Christian by vocation, Platonist by philosophical temperament, mystic by religious experience, philosophy teacher and factory worker by occupation, Weil produced hundreds of pages of notes on religious and spiritual themes, most of which were not published until after her death during World War II. Much of her writing is in short bits, reminiscent of the *Pensées* of Pascal. This book, however, features a number of her longer, more sustained pieces, and some of them are quite powerful, including "Forms of the Implicit Love of God," and "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies."

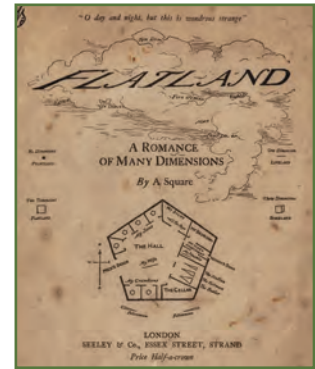
Weil can be maddening in her personal intellectual pride and in her seeming relish for suffering as a means to spirituality, yet her writing is filled with religious and theological expressions of captivating beauty. She has the self-critical and introspective intensity of Kierkegaard, yet seems less gloomy and more affirming of the good in the world. In her theological speculations, she is sometimes less academically disciplined than C. S. Lewis, one of my favorite Christian authors, but at the same time her presentation of Christian life smells less of the Oxford study, and engages one at the gut level more than Lewis does. I find it impossible to agree with her on everything, yet find it necessary to take her seriously even where I most disagree. Certainly I have never seen her particular blend of mysticism, philosophy, poetry, spirituality, and social activism elsewhere. She is a truly original Christian voice, and I think every Christian should read at least one of her works.

edwin Abbott, *Flatland*

This is a Victorian classic of imaginative fiction. Imagine that you are a Square, living in a two-dimensional world, Flatland, where virtually everything and everybody is a two-dimensional figure of some kind. Your sight enables you to look only along the plane of your world, and all the people you encounter can be perceived only as lines, approaching and receding from you. What would happen if, in such a world, you had a three-dimensional visitor, a Sphere? Given that the Sphere can only intersect your world on a single plane, how much of him could you see? And if he told you he was from the world of Spaceland, a world that, in addition to north and south, and east and west, had a third dimension of "up and down," would you believe him? Would you even be able to comprehend such a world?

And what if you, a Square, were transported to a one-dimensional world, Lineland, in which everyone was merely a point on a line? Even if you lined up one of your edges to coincide with the line of Lineland, the Lineland people could see only a single point on your body, the point on the corner of your body in front of them. Would you have any hope of persuading those inhabitants that your two-dimensional world, your plane of Flatland, really existed, and that you had traveled from there?

These are the intellectual problems faced by the characters in this story, a tale laced with gentle satire about Victorian mores, but with a serious point about the tendency of human minds to be restricted in thought by their parochial assumptions about what can and cannot exist. The work originally helped to prepare a popular audience to grasp the then-emerging notion of a four-dimensional world—the world of space-time—but the idea has applications beyond mathematics and physics. Aren't people of all eras constrained in vision by their assumptions about reality? For example, aren't many psychologists constrained by materialism when they insist on interpreting the mind as a mere epiphenomenon of the body? *Flatland*, in a very amusing way, helps to shake us out of our smug assumptions that we know what is real and what is possible or impossible. And for the geometrically challenged, it comes with diagrams! This short little masterpiece shows how wit and playfulness can be made vehicles of serious thought. ☉





skeptic shock

A Broken radio Dials in on an Unbeliever's skepticism

by regis nicoll

"I just witnessed an event so mysterious that it shook my skepticism." So wrote Michael Shermer, editor of *Skeptic*, the official magazine of The Skeptic Society, of which he is the founder.

A skeptic's skeptic

Michael Shermer is a skeptic's skeptic whose skepticism is most strenuously exercised against all things supernatural. From a full-throated materialistic bent, he argues that all phenomena are reducible to natural causes ultimately explainable through science.

In his writings, interviews, and debates, Shermer projects an intellectual swagger that has become fashionable in freethinking circles. A number of years ago, during a PBS panel discussion on religion, when the topic of the Resurrection came up, he pressed a Christian physician for an explanation of how (how!) God did it. By presuming that the Resurrection *must* have occurred through a clever medical manipulation or else it wasn't credible, Shermer's question was designed to ensure that naturalism wins.

It was also designed to make his Christian opponent appear badly misinformed, intellectually challenged, or worse. For in our enlightened scientific age, smart people everywhere know "there is no such thing as the supernatural or the paranormal," Shermer reminds us; "there is just the natural, the normal, and mysteries we have yet to explain by natural causes."¹

Such unswerving confidence in



Michael shermer

naturalism seals the imagination from any consideration of supernatural causation, even for things currently inexplicable by science (for example, dark energy, quantum behavior, abiogenesis, consciousness, the

big bang, and so forth). However, when life collides with our worldview, it can create cracks in our ideological foundation and shake our confidence. In 2014, Michael Shermer experienced just such a collision.

A fissure-forming Event

The collision occurred on the day of his wedding in his California home. As Shermer tells it, his German wife-to-be, Jennifer, who shares his skepticism, was feeling lonely, with all her family and friends being thousands of miles away. She was particularly saddened that her late grandfather, the only father figure she had known, wasn't there to give her away.

Months earlier, Jennifer's belongings had been delivered to Michael's home from Germany, and among them was a precious keepsake: a nearly forty-year-old transistor radio her grandfather

had owned. Describing his efforts to revive it, Shermer writes,

I put in new batteries and opened it up to see if there were any loose connections to solder. I even tried "percussive maintenance," said to work on such devices—smacking it sharply against a hard surface. Silence. We gave up and put it at the back of a desk drawer in our bedroom.

Just as the wedding was about to proceed, the couple retreated for a few moments to a back area of the house, from which

we could hear music playing in the bedroom. We don't have a music system there, so we searched for laptops and iPhones and even opened the back door to check if the neighbors were playing music. We followed the sound to the printer on the desk, wondering—absurdly—if this combined printer/scanner/fax machine also included a radio. Nope.

At that moment Jennifer shot me a look I haven't seen since the supernatural thriller *The Exorcist* startled audiences. "That can't be what I think it is, can it?" she said. She opened the desk drawer and pulled out her grandfather's transistor radio, out of which a romantic love song wafted. We sat in stunned silence for minutes. "My grandfather is here with us," Jennifer said, tearfully. "I'm not alone."²

In that silence, a crack formed in Shermer's worldview.

Later, his daughter told him that right before the ceremony



she, too, had heard music coming from the bedroom, yet when Michael and Jennifer had been there just minutes earlier getting ready, they had heard nothing. Another crack. Another still, when, after playing classical music throughout the night, the radio went silent and didn't revive the next day, nor any time since.

Shermer admits that had this been another person's story, he would have chalked it up to a random probabilistic occurrence. "With billions of people having billions of experiences every day, there's bound to be a handful of extremely unlikely events that stand out in their timing and meaning."

As shermer found out on that, uh, providential day, personal experience can trump logic and probability to **shake one's settled assumptions and beliefs.**

I should mention that Shermer's discovery of statistics was pivotal in his move from being a born-again Evangelical Christian pursuing theology to becoming a premier atheist pushing skepticism. Which makes his admission all the more interesting.

In his 2005 essay "Why I Am an Atheist," Shermer explains,

In science, I discovered that by establishing parameters to determine whether a hypothesis is probably right (like rejecting the null hypothesis at the 0.01 level of significance) or definitively wrong (not statistically significant), it is possible to approach problems in another way. Instead of the rhetoric and disputation of theology,

there was the logic and probabilities of science. What a difference this difference in thinking makes.

But as Shermer found out on that, uh, providential day, personal experience can trump logic and probability to shake one's settled assumptions and beliefs.

Having had a mysterious experience he is at a loss to explain scientifically, might Shermer now entertain an openness to the existence of the supernatural? While he stops short of endorsement—"such anecdotes do not constitute scientific evidence that the dead survive or that they can communicate with us via electronic equipment"—he confesses that he has been rocked back on his heels, his skepticism shaken.

What Was it?

So was this a rare, probabilistic phenomenon of nature or a message from beyond?

Shermer dismisses the first possibility and remains agnostic on the second, but he says that whatever causal mechanism may be attributed to these kinds of occurrences, they gain their significance from their emotional impact, which, for his wife, was the heart-warming sense "that her grandfather was there and that the music was his gift of approval."

The word "gift" suggests that Michael Shermer could be onto something—a mystery that hitherto has eluded him: the grace of God.



In a piece on the compatibility of science and religion, Shermer asks how we can know that a God outside of time and space exists unless he steps "into our spacetime to make himself known in some manner—say through prayer, providence, or miracles?"³

Well, he has and he does, by those means and others.

Throughout history God has entered our world—through a burning bush, pillar of fire, angel, dream, or vision. Then, two thousand years ago, he entered through a stable to give us his ultimate revelation—the Word made flesh in the wriggling body of an infant, to demonstrate beyond all rational argument that he is a God of love, who loves with a love symbolized by a cross.

Today, he speaks to us through his Scriptures, creation, prophets, Church, and the Holy Spirit. Each is a gift of grace from a God who wants to be known by beings with whom he can have fellowship.

If God spoke to a first-century Roman centurion in a vision (Acts 10:1–8), and is speaking through visions to people today, as has been widely reported in the Muslim world, my bet is that he has spoken to a couple of skeptics through an old, broken radio. ☺

Notes

1. Michael Shermer, "Science and Religion: Incompatible?", *HuffPost* (May 1, 2012): <https://tinyurl.com/yb7kaj2e>.
2. Michael Shermer, "Anomalous Events That Can Shake One's Skepticism to the Core," *Scientific American* (Oct. 1, 2014): <https://tinyurl.com/y6wpu5e3>.
3. Michael Shermer, "Why I Am an Atheist" (June 23, 2005): <https://tinyurl.com/ybhesbyh>.



Kim phuc phan thi with her husband and son

a Fiery cup

Vietnam's Napalm Girl & the Goodness of God

by terrell c lemmons

Kim Phuc Phan Thi was eight years old in 1972, number six in a line of eight siblings, and her childhood was everything a childhood should be. Carefree, abundant, *alive*. Although her village was seeing more "forest people" (her word for the tunnel-dwelling, Communist-backed Viet Cong rebels who came out at night), she did not bother herself with the adult goings-on of war. There were games to play, books to read, and a jungle of guava trees to climb. She was especially devoted to CaoDai, the religion of her family, and she poured all her heart into living up to its lofty ideals.

The CaoDai temple became an especially comforting refuge when the forest people turned her village into a base of operations. *What an adventure!* she told herself on arrival. It could be like summer camp!

Burned

Two days into "summer camp," a military plane swooped down to within feet, it seemed, of the outbuilding where she was playing,

and it dropped a bright purple and gold smoke grenade. She glanced up to see a soldier, eyes wide, mouth the words "Jesus Christ." *Get out! Run! Go! Children, run first*

Kim knew terror when she saw it. She ran with all her might and was off the temple grounds and onto Asian Highway Route 1 when the follow-up plane dropped four large black cannisters from its massive underbelly. They weren't loud or heavy like ordinary bombs.

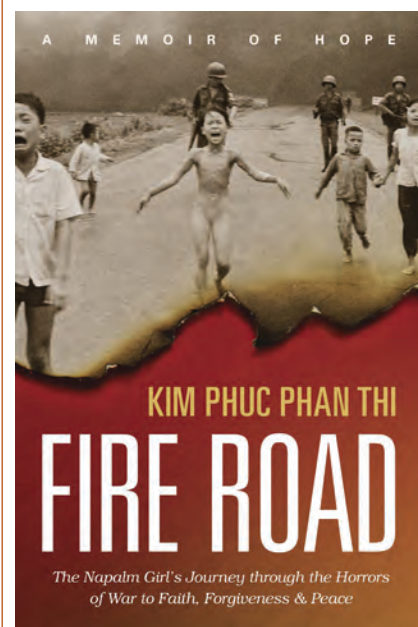
These flopped down eerily, and within moments the road behind her exploded into a towering inferno of smoke and fire.

Too hot! Too hot! "I am dying! I am dying!" she shrieked, still running.

A young AP journalist dropped his camera to help her, but not before snapping a picture of her running toward him naked, the napalm having incinerated her clothes on contact.

scarred

She came to in the morgue of a Saigon hospital to the sound of her mother's voice. Hospital staff had left her for dead, her little body swollen and bloody, and her badly burned skin starting to rot. She remained in critical condition for nearly forty days. At one point, her Ma, who had searched her out and demanded she get medical attention, pleaded with the CaoDai gods to end her suffering and take her from this life.



Kim's story is told in *Fire Road: The Napalm Girl's Journey through the Horrors of War to Faith, Forgiveness & Peace* (tyndale Momentum, 2017)

But the CaoDai gods looked away, and fourteen months later Kim returned to her decimated home and village. More agonizing than the searing pain she could never fully escape, a new sorrow clouded her every day: *I am ugly now. I have scars. I am unfit to be loved.*

Used

By age nineteen, she was ready to be done with this life herself. Three times in her teen years she'd tried to escape Communist Vietnam and failed. Now, government officials had discovered that the "napalm girl," as she'd come to be known because of the photo, made a nice propaganda tool. "You are very important now! Your government needs you, and you must comply," the minder said through clenched teeth. They would regularly kidnap her for appearances or interviews, and after she protested that she needed to be in class, they had her dismissed from university, thus killing her only remaining reason for living—the hope of becoming a doctor and caring for children as she had been cared for. (She

wouldn't learn until many years later that they never translated what she actually *said*, but instead supplied whatever lines they'd been given by the higher-ups.)

She was as alone as a person could be. Friends and family had all but evaporated for fear of coming under the shroud of surveillance that haunted her every move, and she began contemplating a different kind of escape—one that involved running headlong into the center lane of a busy street. Surely the pain of getting run down wouldn't be any worse than what she'd already endured.

Jesus the One & Only

One day she found herself crouched in the religion section of Saigon's central library. Truth

be told, she was hiding from the minders, but she started thumbing through books and came upon a New Testament. *What's this Christianity all about, anyway?* she wondered.

After an hour of skimming the Gospels, two themes became

Worse than the pain in her body, she knew there was hatred in her heart, and it was a burden of bitterness too heavy to bear. She wanted forgiveness. She wanted to let go of her pain. **She wanted to pursue life instead of contemplating death.**

clear. First, in direct contradiction to what she'd been taught through CaoDai—that there are many gods and many paths to holiness—this Jesus presented himself as *the way, the truth, and the life*. *What!* she recoiled. *How can this be so?* There are *thousands* of ways to get to God. Everyone knew this fact. How brash was this man Jesus!

The second theme was more intriguing than shocking. Jesus had *suffered* in defense of this claim. CaoDai said Jesus was a prophet and a good man, but certainly not God. *Why would he do what he did if he were not, in fact, God?* she wondered. *His pain must have been for a purpose, or else he wouldn't have endured it so faithfully.*

This was a Jesus she had never been exposed to. Her hands trembled as she closed the book. Had she spent nineteen years worshiping the wrong gods? Could this Jesus help her make sense of her pain? Might he help her come to terms with her scars? A distant



Street scene in Trang Bang, Vietnam, Kim's hometown

relative named Anh served as an associate pastor at a nearby Christian church. She perked up. *Perhaps he can answer my questions!*

Anh took her barrage of questions in stride and carefully consulted his well-worn Bible to respond to each one. Meanwhile, Kim grew more and more conflicted. Something inside her recognized the truth of his words, but there were still these pressing questions. *But Anh, what about the napalm attack and these wretched burns I was made to endure? Where was this "God" when I was left for dead? Why did he not spare me from these years of pain?* Anh patiently endured the litany, but his time in Saigon eventually came to an end. He connected her with a local church and moved on.

For weeks, Kim wavered between the beautiful thought that she could be loved by one so holy as Jesus Christ himself and the burning, unanswered questions provoked by the pain in her body and soul. Finally, she proposed a deal: "If you will just give me a friend," she said to the heavens, "just one person who knows you and who can help me know you, then I will agree not to take my life." She gave God twenty-four hours to come through. The next morning, a Sunday, she arrived early at church, and a young woman sitting alone turned as she approached. "Good morning. I am Thuy. Have you come to worship today?"

Her friend. God had provided a friend! For several weeks, Sunday after Sunday (they dared not meet during the week for fear of surveillance), Thuy taught Kim to read and to search the Bible for herself. Most of all, she taught Kim how to pray. "The more we cry, the more we pray," Thuy explained. All Kim's life, religion had meant deference to the gods. She had no concept of having a *relationship* with God. This Christianity was different, and she studied and studied the Scriptures, devouring the promises

of God like thick chunks of guava.

On Christmas Eve, when Pastor Ho Hieu Ha invited any worshiper to open his or her heart to Jesus, Kim nearly leapt from her seat. Worse than the pain in her body, she knew there was hatred in her heart, and it was a burden of bitterness too heavy to bear. She wanted forgiveness. She wanted to let go of her pain. She wanted to pursue *life* instead of contemplating death. "Yes, you are my Savior now! You are my Father, and I am your child," she said as she hurried down the sanctuary aisle. The next morning, she awakened to the joy of her first-ever true celebration of Christmas.

Cuba

The new year brought new challenges, though. Her family effectively disowned her, and with her education plans derailed, she might have ended up destitute were it not for a compassionate journalist who knew that something was *not right* about her sunny answers to interview questions. He sought her out, and the ensuing publicity eventually led to an invitation to travel to America, along with three scholarship offers from American universities.

No Communist official could ever release such a useful organ as the napalm girl to a free Western country, but the Vietnamese bureaucrat charged with handling the delicate matter devised a way to grant Kim her greatest wish without ending his own career: "Your plane will leave in the morning," he said. "You will resume your schooling in Cuba." Kim had no idea where Cuba was, but that didn't matter. She was getting out of Vietnam *and* becoming a full-time student again. Life was looking up.

A Cup Overflowing

More blessings followed. Kim hadn't thought she would ever be

loved, but in 1992, with great joy she married Toan, another Vietnamese national studying in Cuba.

And still more: they were given leave to travel to Moscow for a two-week honeymoon. Kim started dropping whispered hints about ways to defect, but Toan would not consider it. "Graduating from university is our only hope," he said.

But Kim had learned to look to a different source for hope. Their return flight included a short layover in Newfoundland, Canada. Once inside the terminal, she closed her eyes and prayed, "Dear Lord, I want to stay in Canada. Show me how to do that." She opened her eyes and saw a hallway with seven passengers from their flight. *They are planning to defect! She just knew it.*

"Please hand me your passport," she said to Toan. They both knew what that meant, and in the blink of an eye, he made his decision. Kim would long remember the customs agent's first words when she handed over both passports: "Welcome to Canada."

And yet more: Kim and Toan settled in Toronto, and although doctors had said her body could never bear children, their sons Thomas and Stephen were born in 1994 and 1996. In September 1997, her parents traveled to Toronto for a one-month visit. It turned into a welcome indefinite stay, and on Christmas Eve, both renounced the Cao Dai gods for Jesus, whom they now knew was *real*. By 2004, all seven of Kim's siblings had come to faith in Jesus.

Today, Kim advocates for peace and serves victims of war worldwide through her nonprofit organization, the KIM Foundation International. "There is nothing as good as the goodness of God," she says. Though her cup of blessing has been a fiery one, she continues to sing, smile, and praise the God who delivers and blesses through faith. ☺

A Brighter Enlightenment

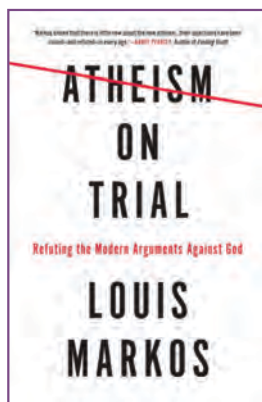
A Review of *Atheism on Trial: Refuting the Modern Arguments Against God*, by Louis Markos

by Terrell Clemmons

Louis Markos became interested in the history of ideas in high school. While in college, he learned from reading C. S. Lewis about the widespread phenomenon Lewis called “chronological snobbery,” the ill-founded assumption that current beliefs are *ipso facto* superior to those of the past. As a graduate student, then, inundated with the prevailing modernist assumption that “enlightened” ideas had long been held back by ignorance, superstition, and religious hierarchy, he tossed the textbooks aside and started reading the actual works that gave rise to Western civilization.

It was an enlightening endeavor. He discovered that the secularist *isms* of our day—materialism, empiricism, skepticism, and the like—had not been held back by a corrupt church, as the metanarrative goes, but rather by such giants as Plato, Aristotle, Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, and more. “Long before the days when Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett helped make atheism a household word,” he writes, “these great philosophers, theologians, and apologists had put atheism on trial and uncovered its faulty logic, its inconsistencies, its special pleadings, and its decidedly mixed motives.”

In *Atheism on Trial*, Markos doesn’t specifically put atheism to the test again. That trial has been held and reheld. (God wins.) Rather, he surveys this historical discussion around ten common arguments for secular perspectives



that trace back to antiquity. They fall into four categories:

- ***The Nature of the Universe*** addresses the longstanding assertions that everything can be explained by natural causes, that nature is a closed system, and that miracles are not possible (philosophical naturalism).
- ***The Nature of Knowledge*** explores the age-old arguments that we can only acquire knowledge through our senses (empiricism) and that there are no absolutes (relativism).
- ***The Nature of God*** takes up challenges to God’s character, such as that he is not good on account of the atrocities of the Old Testament, or that he can’t be both good and all-powerful on account of the evil in the world.
- ***The Nature of Man*** looks at two secularist views that purport to ennoble man but end up dehu-

manizing him: that we are merely products of our environment, and that we are by nature good and therefore perfectible.

The upshot of it all is that the history of ideas has not followed the ever-evolving, out-of-darkness ascent secularists call “Progress” but rather has been marked by an ever-lively, rough-and-tumble, back-and-forth exchange of contending and counter-contending argumentation, much like what we see today.

Though it involves the academic, *Atheism on Trial* reads like an armchair narrative with perceptive flashes of insight that at times wax devotional. Part Three, “The Nature of God,” for example, includes a rich discussion of the theological tenet, unique to Christianity, that God is both fully transcendent (existing outside of time and space) and fully immanent (intimately involved in all that happens in his creation), two seemingly contradictory precepts most fully resolved in the Incarnation. *This* God, Markos says, as opposed to the man-made gods of human religion, is the one

who provokes such wrath from Enlightenment skeptics and new atheists alike. For it is only this God, transcendent and immanent, exceedingly distant and profoundly close, that must be wrestled with, that must be accepted or rejected, obeyed or defied. Not rituals or laws or religion, but a personal, passionate God who would know and be known.

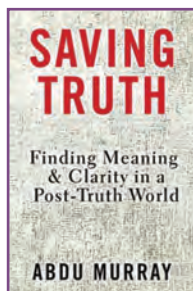
This God is the subject of contention.

In 2003, two California educators launched a movement for atheists called the “Brights.” The Brights may be smart, but they’ll find a brighter enlightenment in this intellectual history. ☺

Inconvenient Facts: The science that Al Gore doesn't want you to know

by Gregory Wrightstone

A geologist with more than 35 years' experience studying the earth meets the "lavishly funded clique of totalitarian pseudo-scientists [peddling] climate alarmism" with 60 inconvenient facts, all supported by well-documented data. These facts expose glaring flaws in the climate-catastrophe arguments and suggest that the greater threat to humanity is not climate change but agenda-driven politics in the guise of science.

**Saving Truth: Finding Meaning and Clarity in a Post-Truth World**

by Abdu Murray

In the history of ideas, *modernism* eschewed the biblical metanarrative, and *postmodernism* eschewed belief in any metanarrative. Now *post-truth-ism* eschews concern for truth altogether and elevates personal preference or an idea's *utility* over its *truth status*. Murray likens post-truth-ism to a virus that has mutated and become immune to antibiotics, and he wrote *Saving Truth* to help Christians see through the fog of confusion and regain clarity so they can meet the challenges post-truth-ism presents.

iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood

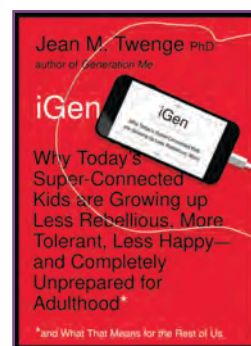
by Jean M. Twenge

A psychology professor and mother of three presents her findings on the iGen, those born between 1995 and 2012, for whom the internet and smartphones have been lifelong presences. According to her research, iGen kids are more immature, insulated, insecure, irreligious, socially inept, and fearful about life than were earlier generations. This is a very informative resource for parents, teachers, and youth workers.

**Target Africa: Ideological Neocolonialism in the Twenty-First Century**

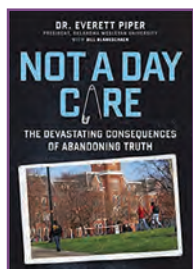
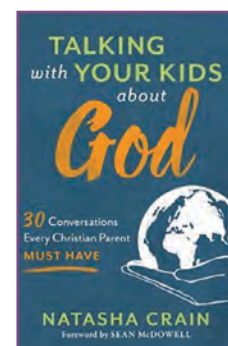
by Obianuju Ekeocha

A Nigerian-born biomedical pathologist decries Western nations' "aid," much of which reduces to Western sexual ideologies—contraception, abortion, feminism, and LGBT normalization—being imposed under the banner of human rights and population control. These ideologies are offensive to the sensibilities of most Africans, she says, and are especially oppressive to women and families, but they're hard for corruptible government officials to resist.

**Talking with Your Kids about God: 30 Conversations Every Christian Parent Must Have**

by Natasha Crain

Natasha Crain started her blog, ChristianMomThoughts.com, to connect with other parents. When she started getting challenges from skeptics, she took them seriously, and she has now become a go-to apologetics translator, especially known for breaking down complicated matters into understandable, digestible segments. This excellent resource walks parents through conversations about the existence of God, science, and common challenges to Christian faith.

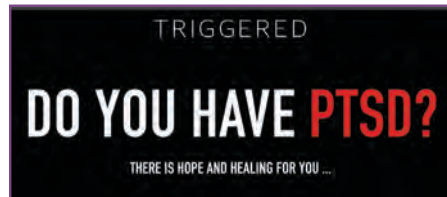
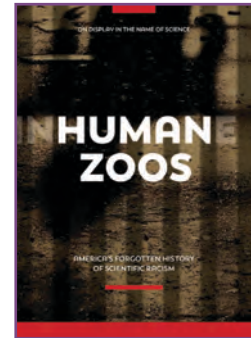
**Not a Day Care: The Devastating Consequences of Abandoning Truth**

by Dr. Everett Piper with Bill Blankschaen

Ironically, although Christian schools have been accused of keeping students in a bubble, today it is the secularists demanding safe spaces insulated from reality and constructing Orwellian bubbles of their own. Here, Dr. Piper, president of Oklahoma Wesleyan University, issues a clarion call to restore academia to its original purpose—the pursuit of truth, tested by time, defended by reason, validated by experience, and endowed to us by our Creator.

Human Zoos: America's Forgotten History of Scientific Racism

In 1906, a new exhibit opened at the Bronx Zoo Monkey House. It featured 23-year-old Ota Benga, a Congolese pygmy purchased at an African slave market, alongside apes and chimps. Religious leaders, both black and white, protested, but elite scientists, journalists, and zoo administrators defended the exhibit as sound science, merely evolution on display. *Human Zoos* exposes this and other abhorrent, little-known chapters in the history of Darwin-bound science.



Triggered and Triggered Too

Over the course of a lifetime, almost everyone will experience one or more traumatic events. This pair of films, one designed for the military, the other for civilians, takes a compassionate and hopeful look at post-traumatic stress disorder. What are the symptoms? How does it affect families? What are some effective treatment approaches? The most important thing for the sufferer to know is that, with good treatment and perseverance, PTSD can be overcome. Produced by Victor Marx and All Things Possible Ministries.

Take Your Pills

Prescription stimulants are a \$13 billion industry, with Ritalin, Adderall, Vyvanse, and Concerta the legal drugs of choice for alarming numbers of college students, athletes, and ambitious professionals. Is this legitimate medicine? Or are these a form of performance-enhancing drugs? What risks are involved? This 2018 Netflix original takes a sobering look at what may be the next epidemic coming down the pike.



Voices of the Silenced: Experts, Evidences, and Ideology

A radical sexual political orthodoxy is forcefully reshaping all facets of Western culture. This film takes a sweeping look at the historical influence of the Judeo-Christian sexual ethic, and it brings together the testimony of sexuality experts and ex-gays who dissent from the new totalitarianism. Filmed in six countries with individuals of nine nationalities, it encourages people of conscience everywhere to reject it as well, in all its manifestations.

Fatal Flaws: Legalizing Assisted Death

"Death with Dignity," "Doctor-Assisted Death," "Medical Aid in Dying"—these are all euphemisms for vacating the 2,000-year-old Hippocratic Oath and giving medical professionals the legal power and authority to terminate lives. Canadian filmmaker Kevin Dunn looks at the alarming outworkings of euthanasia in practice, both in Europe and North America, and poses the question, *Are these laws becoming more dangerous than the diseases?*



Fragments of Truth

A team of scholars led by Dr. Craig Evans of Houston Theological Seminary defends the authenticity of the New Testament texts. What is their history? Where are they housed today? Most important, how were they copied, distributed, and translated? Skeptics say the New Testament has been corrupted by centuries of accumulated copying errors, but the experts in this film conclude that the evidence for the reliability of the New Testament is stronger today than it has ever been.



Children Aren't Optional

Self-Sacrifice vs Self-Fulfillment

by John Stonestreet & Roberto Rivera

The fertility rate in the United States is declining. According to the Centers for Disease Control, the average American woman will have 1.76 children during her lifetime.

To put that in perspective, that's lower than the largely secular Western European countries of France, Norway, and Sweden. It's only 10 percent higher than China, with its history of forced abortions and the "one-child," now "two-child" policy.

The decline in fertility has become so serious that even outlets like the *New York Times* have started to ask what's behind this decline. In fact, the *Times* recently ran an article entitled "Americans are having fewer babies. They told us why."

The answer was, in a word, "economics." Four of the top five answers cited financial or economic reasons, led by "Child care is too expensive." The top two non-economic reasons were "Want more time for the children I have" and "Want more leisure time."

I don't doubt at all that the respondents were sincere. Financial and economic considerations of course play an important role in the choices people make as to when to have children and how many children to have.

But the key words are "when" and "how many." Nothing in the *Times'* article challenges the *cultural* assumptions that even more than the economic considerations are driving down fertility rates in the Western world.

The first assumption to consider is what we mean in the West by

"the good life." In Luke 12, Jesus says, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." In Colossians 3, Paul calls covetousness a form of idolatry.

But modern ideas about the good life turn this on its head. Covetousness is the means by which commercials sell us things. It is the dominant marketing strategy in our nation. In fact, we're not even sold stuff anymore; we're sold experiences, self-fulfillment, novelty, and most of all, *freedom* from any restraint and consequences.

And that's especially true when it comes to sex. The personal freedom we're sold denies any inherent connection whatsoever not only between sex and marriage, but between marriage and children. As one liberal commentator put it, for many Americans having kids is a discretionary activity, like collecting classic cars or visiting every parrot sanctuary in the world.

Unfortunately, "many Americans" includes Christians. The indissoluble link between sex, marriage, and children may be the single most ignored, most obvious biblical principle in Christian circles.

I know this because every time we bring up the subject of contraception, or surrogacy, or the call to have children, we catch a lot of flak. Especially when I talk to young Christians, I can get them to



acknowledge a link between sex and marriage, but the idea that sex, marriage, and children are—for the Christian—a package deal, is a really hard sell.

Christians, of all people, should understand that self-sacrifice is at the heart of what the Bible calls the good life. The only way to save our life is to lose it. For many Christians, that should start with children.

As we've said before, marriage, "from the beginning" in God's plan for humanity has unitive and procreative functions. It's why we mourn with couples who experience the deep pain of infertility. We know something is wrong. On the other hand, intentionally childless marriages are incompatible with God's intention for marriages. This would be true even if our fertility rate were three times what it is now.

But, of course, it isn't, which leaves me wondering if we aren't taking our cues from the wrong sources: a culture that worships self, pursues freedom from restraint and consequence as the good life, and ultimately separates the pleasures of sex from the contexts of marriage and procreation. ☸

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