

SALVO

Issue 57 Summer 2021

SEARCH & DESTROY



Woke Fundamentalism?

**How Radical Progressives Are
Taking Down Western Civ**

by Robin Phillips

- Confronting Injustice Truthfully
- A Guide to the Social Justice Left
- Planned Parenthood & the KKK • 3-D Reality Is No Accident
- Mixed-Up Toys & Kids • Not-So-Peaceful Science

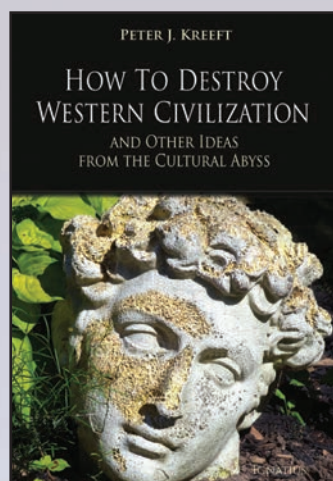
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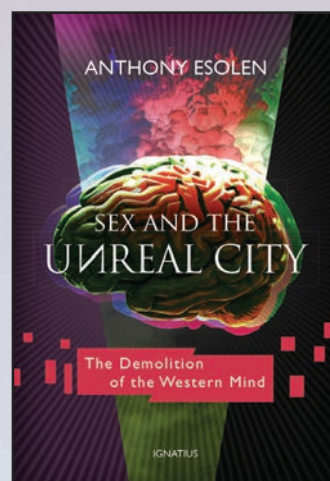


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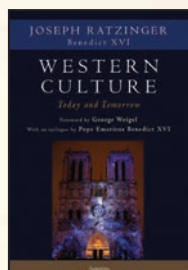
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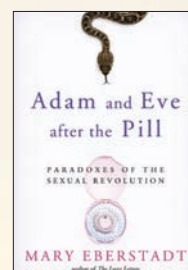
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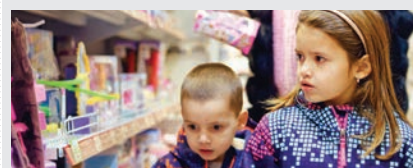
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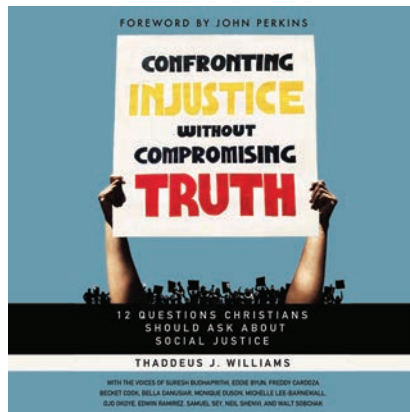
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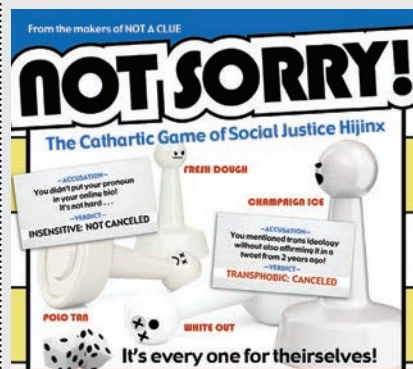
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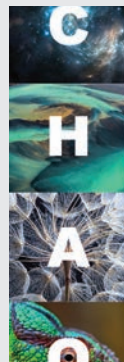
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We find that we live in an insignificant universe, in a humdrum galaxy, lost in a cosmic foam, tucked away in some forgotten corner of a multiverse, in which there are far more universes than people.

—Science popularizer Tyson Karls

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Founder Richard A. Moselle

Executive Editor James M. Kushiner

Associate Editor Anita Kuhn

Art Director Jerry Janquart

Senior Editors Thomas S. Buchanan,
Rebecca Hagelin, Casey Luskin,
Marcia Segelstein

Contributors & Columnists

Terrell Clemmons, Paige Comstock Cunningham,
Nicole M. King, Regis Nicoll, Denyse O'Leary,
Hugh Ross, Jonathan Witt, Heather Zeiger

Editorial Assistant Robin Phillips

Office Manager Carolyn Frève

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salvo n. (sălv'vō)

1. A group of shots fired simultaneously for effect
2. A forceful verbal or written assault

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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Terrell Clemmons (pp. 10, 12, 53) has a B.S. in Computer Science and worked as a software engineer with IBM until she hopped off the career track to be a full-time mom. She began writing on Christian living and apologetics in 2004 and joined *Salvo* in 2007. She has also worked with Ratio Christi and Anchorsaway apologetics ministries for youth and is currently training to become a Stephen Minister. She lives in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Anthony Esolen (p. 50) is a professor at Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts in Warner, New Hampshire, and the author of many books, including *Life Under Compulsion* (ISI Books), *Real Music: A Guide to the Timeless Hymns of the Church* (Tan, with a CD), and *Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture* (Regnery). He has also translated Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Random House).

Nicole M. King (p. 22) is the managing editor of *The Natural Family*, the quarterly publication of the International Organization for the Family.

James M. Kushiner (p. 5) is the executive editor of *Salvo* and *Touchstone* magazines.

Casey Luskin (p. 10) is a senior editor of *Salvo* and the Associate Director of the Center for Science and Culture at the Discovery Institute (www.discovery.org), where he helps direct the ID 3.0 Research Program. He holds a Ph.D. in geology from the University of Johannesburg and is also an attorney, giving him expertise in both the scientific and legal dimensions of the debate over evolution.

John D. Martin (p. 28) was born and raised in Indiana. He earned his doctorate from the University of Illinois and has written academic articles and articles for the popular press, including *Touchstone*, *First Things*, *Salvo*, and *The Federalist*. His first novel, *Charis Colony: The Landing*, appeared in November 2020. He lives in Germany with his family.

Denyse O'Leary (p. 46) is a Canadian journalist, author, and blogger. She blogs at *Blazing Cat Fur*, *Evolution News & Views*, *MercatorNet*, *Salvo*, and *Uncommon Descent*.

Ken Pedersen (p. 32) has a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering and is a retired vice president of Raytheon, with a 45-year career in system engineering and information processing. He is the author of *Modern Science Proves Intelligent Design: The Information System Worldview* (Archway, 2019), *Jenny's Universe* ("O" Publishing 2002), and many technical articles.

Robin Phillips (p. 24) is the author of *Gratitude in Life's Trenches: How to Experience the Good Life Even When Everything Is Going Wrong* (Ancient Faith, 2020). He has a Master's degree in history from King's College London, and is currently completing a Master's in library science from the University of Oklahoma. He works as a freelance author for a variety of publications and operates a blog at www.robinmarkphillips.com.

Roberto Rivera (p. 56) is a Senior Fellow of the Chuck Colson Center and a columnist for BreakPoint.

Hugh Ross (p. 38) is an astrophysicist and the founder and president of the science-faith integration ministry Reasons to Believe (RTB) (www.reasons.org).

John Stonestreet (p. 56) is President of the Chuck Colson Center and co-host of its BreakPoint radio commentaries.

Howard Isaac Williams (p. 16) is an Orthodox Christian who is semi-retired from the messenger and pest control industries. He is the grandson of immigrants whose neighborhoods were harassed by the Ku Klux Klan.

Jonathan Witt (p. 42) is a senior fellow with Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture and the author or co-author of numerous articles and books, including *Heretic: One Scientist's Journey from Darwin to Design*, with Matti Leisola (2018), and *A Meaningful World: How the Arts and Sciences Reveal the Genius of Nature*, with Benjamin Wiker (IVP, 2006).

Heather Zeiger (p. 19) has an M.S. in chemistry from the University of Texas at Dallas, and an M.A. in bioethics from Trinity International University. She resides in Dallas and currently works as a freelance science writer and educator.

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A Hint from Heaven

The Source of Meaning Comes from Above

by James M. Kushiner

In 1941, Viktor Frankl, 36, a Jewish neurologist, psychiatrist, and philosopher in Vienna, Austria, faced a dilemma. Austria was occupied by the Nazis, but the United States had not yet entered World War II. Offered a visa by the American Consulate to escape to America, Frankl hesitated out of concern for his aged parents, who would likely end up in a concentration camp. He wished for "a hint from Heaven" about what he should do.

It was then that I noticed a piece of marble lying on a table at home. When I asked my father about it, he explained that he had found it on the site where the National Socialists had burned down the largest Viennese synagogue. He had taken the piece home because it was a part of the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. One gilded Hebrew letter was engraved on the piece; my father explained that this letter stood for one of the commandments. Eagerly I asked, "Which one is it?" He answered, "Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land." At that moment I decided to stay with my father and my mother upon the land, and to let the American visa lapse.

So Frankl remained, and as he feared, in 1942 the Jews of Vienna were rounded up and sent to concentration camps. He spent three years in four camps, including a stint in Auschwitz. He survived, but his parents, his wife, and his brother all died in Nazi camps.

After the war and his return to Vienna, Frankl wrote about life and death in the camps in *Man's Search for Meaning*. Many other prisoners, lacking hope, had been crushed by the brutal conditions of the camps, despaired, and died. Prisoners who found a sense of meaning in their lives were much better able to cope and survive. Survivors often thought about a future reunion with their wives and children, or their return to meaningful work. Frankl dreamed of his wife and scribbled notes for the book that he wanted to write about the lessons he was learning through his suffering.

He had lost his original notes on entering a camp, where he was stripped of the coat in which they were hidden. He was given the worn-out rags of an executed prisoner, in which he found in a pocket a "single page torn out of a Hebrew prayer book, containing the most important Jewish prayer, *Shema Yisrael*, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord is one, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength.'"

In the camps, Frankl noted:

The religious interest of the prisoners, as far and as soon as it developed, was the most sincere imaginable. The depth and vigor

of religious belief often surprised and moved a new arrival. Most impressive in this connection were improvised prayers or services in the corner of a hut, or in the darkness of the locked cattle truck in which we were brought back from a distant work site, tired, hungry and frozen in our ragged clothing.

In spite of all the enforced physical and mental primitiveness of the life in a concentration camp, it was possible for spiritual life to deepen. Sensitive people who were used to a rich intellectual life may have suffered much pain . . . but the damage to their inner selves was less.

Frankl had submitted to the Ten Commandments, which begin, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the house of bondage." The Jews cherish freedom because they have known servitude. Meaning is not found through comfort but often through struggle or suffering.

Freedom is found in choosing the right path, following "hints from Heaven." Frankl rejected the atheist/materialist claim, "Man is nothing but the result of biological, psychological and sociological conditions, or the product of heredity and environment," a view "which denies man is free." Man's nature comes from above. He observes:

[M]an is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the *Shema Yisrael* on his lips.

In this we see man at his worst and at his best. The choice is ours. ☺



“Poor” Planned Parenthood Closes Clinics

In the first three months of 2021, Planned Parenthood closed three abortion centers in Washington state,

one in Seattle and the others in the outlying towns of Kent and Shelton. That still leaves open more than two dozen PP locations in the state, but at least Mason County, where Shelton is located, no longer has one. Shelton residents must now travel some 25 miles, to Olympia, to visit a PP clinic.

While the decrease in clientele due to Covid

played a role in the closures, a spokesperson for Planned Parenthood of the Great

Northwest and the Hawaiian Islands said the main financial problem was the “inadequate” Medicaid reimbursement rate. Medicaid patients make up about 40% of the affiliate’s patient base. If the state legislature does not increase the reimbursement rate, six other clinics in Washington might have to close. The closures are good news, of course, yet one wonders about Planned Parenthood crying poverty, considering the hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars the organization receives every year. •



—Source: <https://crosscut.com/politics/2021/03/planned-parenthood-closes-3-clinics-wa-citing-low-medicaid-rates>

Down Syndrome Clinic in Denver

On March 21, World Down Syndrome Day, the Jerome Lejeune Medical Center, devoted to caring for people with Down syndrome, opened in Denver, Colorado. The first of its kind in the United States, the center is named after the French geneticist-pediatrician who discovered the cause of Down syndrome in the 1950s and spent the rest of his life searching for a cure, providing care to patients, and advocating on behalf of the medically vulnerable. Lejeune died in 1994, but his work continues through the Jerome Lejeune Foundation and its medical institute in Paris, of which the

Denver facility is an offshoot.

Keith Mason, executive director of the Jerome Lejeune Foundation USA, said, “The unique aspect of the medical center in France is that it is fully holistic and research-based.” The Denver center will have access to the 40 years’ worth of research conducted in the Paris institute, as well as to its biobank of DNA samples, which Mason says is the largest in the world, and is used in research projects all over the world. “The data we gather from those projects is what we institute directly into care for these patients,” he said. The new center also plans to offer



seminars on various topics that will help families support and care for their loved ones with Down syndrome and other genetic disorders. •

—Source: <https://denvercatholic.org/lejeune-foundation-opens-first-u-s-clinic-in-denver-to-serve-down-syndrome-patients>

School Choice in States

The Covid lockdowns have revealed to many parents just how powerful the teachers’ unions are, and how they often use their power for their own benefit rather than to support dedicated teachers and their students. Multiple state legislatures have responded with measures to expand educational choice.

In March, West Virginia enacted perhaps the most far-reaching law, creating the nation’s first universal

education savings account program, open to all children in the state. Participating students will receive 100% of

what the state would have spent on their public-school education, which they can use to pay for private school, online learning, private tutoring, and other educational options. Between January and March of this year, an unprecedented 29 states introduced legislation that will create or expand vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, and education savings accounts. Not only will these measures provide more and



better educational opportunities for families, but they are also a rebuke to the teachers’ unions and their education-obstructing behavior. •

—Source: dailysignal.com/2021/03/30/in-a-rebuke-to-teachers-unions-school-choice-is-going-gangbusters-in-the-states

Cambridge Affirms Polyamory

The Cambridge, Massachusetts city council voted on March 8 to broaden the definition of “domestic partnership” to include relationships involving more than two people. The redefinition means that polyamorous groups now qualify for the same legal rights as married couples. Cambridge is the second city in the country to recognize polyamory, following its neighbor Somerville, which did so in July 2020.

The new definition declares that “two or more persons” not related by blood who “are in a relationship of mutual support, caring and commitment and intend to remain in such a relationship” and who “consider themselves to be a family” form a domestic partnership. The legal change also eliminates the requirement that members of a domestic partnership

live together and that they submit evidence to the city of their relationship as a family.

Ryan Anderson, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, told the Catholic News Agency last year that he wasn’t surprised by efforts to redefine marriage to include multiple people. “Of course it was never going to stop with same-sex couples,” he said. “Once the law and culture says the male-female aspect of marriage violates justice and equality, we haven’t ‘expanded’ marriage, we’ve fundamen-



tally redefined what it is. And those redefinitions have no principled stopping point.” •

—Source: catholicnewsagency.com/news/second-massachusetts-city-to-recognize-polyamorous-relationships-24552

UN Committee Affirms Child Sexting

In April, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child—a panel of “experts” appointed to make suggestions regarding implementation of the international treaty known as the Convention on the Rights of the

Child—issued General Comment No. 25, which purports to tell governments, businesses, and parents how to apply children’s rights when it comes to the internet. After interviewing a number of children and adolescents, who told

them they “especially wanted access to free, confidential, age-appropriate and non-discriminatory mental health and sexual and reproductive health services online,” the drafters of the Comment affirmed that children have the right “to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, using any media of their choice.”

The Committee specifically dealt with “sexting,” where people, including children, send sexually explicit pictures of themselves to friends and even strangers through the internet. Although sexting done by children is illegal in many places, the Comment says that “child-friendly channels should be created to allow children to seek advice and assistance where it relates to self-generated sexually explicit content.” In other words, sexting by children should not only be legalized, but facilitated.

While General Comments such as this one have no force in law, they are often accepted by governments and businesses as legal norms to be imposed on parents and their children. This is true even in the United States, one of the few countries that never ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Parents, take warning. •



—Source: https://c-fam.org/friday_fax/un-committee-calls-for-internet-channels-for-child-sexting

Woke Theater

In March, the Chanhassen Dinner Theater in Minnesota, near the Twin Cities, decided to scrap its planned production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *Cinderella* because when artistic director Michael Brindisi took a look at the cast, he realized "it was 98 percent white. That doesn't work with what we're saying we're going to do" with respect to promoting "diver-

sity, equity and inclusion, the commitment to social justice and getting more diversity into our business across the board," he explained to the local press on March 22. Of course, the insufficiently diverse actors had to be fired, but Brindisi insisted that "every one to a person said they got it and that they respected the very hard decision we had to make." The

theater has hired a diversity consultant to help ensure that future productions are properly woke. •

—Sources: <https://redstate.com/alexparkner/2021/03/25/minnesota-theater-cancels-musical-production-of-cinderella-because-the-cast-was-too-white-n350404>; twincities.com/2021/03/22/in-a-new-push-for-diversity-chanhassen-dinner-theatres-scrap-its-plans-to-stage-cinderella



boyfriend and *girlfriend* (to be replaced with *spouse* or *partner*). *Homosexual* is an "outdated" term, but strangely enough, *queer* has been "reclaimed from being a derogatory term" and now "represents a deliberately inclusive and political(!) identification." The document also states how to use "appropriate" terms relating to race and

Woke School

The Grace Church School in Manhattan, a private, Episcopal school for junior kindergarten through 12th grade, issued a 12-page guide to students and staff last spring

to "provide the community with more inclusive language that is aligned with the mission" of the school. Among the terms to be avoided are *boys* and *girls* (to be replaced with *people*, *folks*, or *friends*), *mom* and *dad*—and even *parents* (to be replaced with *family*, *folks*, or *guardians*), and *husband* and *wife*,

ethnicity, and has sections on such topics as "Equity," "Implicit Bias," and "Microaggression." The Rev. Robert Pennoyer, assistant head of the school, defended the guide to a *City Journal* writer by asserting that its goal is to "promote a sense of belonging for all of our students." •

—Sources: https://pdfhost.io/v/MSUTbDaqD_GCS_Inclusive_Language_Guide_21pdf.pdf; <https://nypost.com/2021/03/10/nyc-school-encourages-kids-to-stop-using-words-mom-dad>

Woke College

In response to complaints from students, faculty, and staff at Wheaton College in Illinois, a plaque honoring two alumni of the Evangelical school, missionaries Jim Elliot and Ed McCully, was removed from the wall of Edman Chapel in March. In 1956, Elliot and McCully were among five missionaries who were speared to death in Ecuador while attempting to evangelize the Waorani, an indigenous people also referred to as the Aucas because of

their ferocity—"Auca" being the Quechua word for "savage." The plaque commemorating the martyrdom of Elliot and McCully was erected the following year. What riled the woke warriors at Wheaton was this true statement inscribed on it: "For generations all strangers were killed by these savage Indians." Wheaton College president Philip Ryken concurred with the complainants, saying the word "savage" was pejorative and dehumanizing, and that a task force would be appointed to come up with acceptable rewording. •



—Sources: <https://illinoisfamily.org/education/awokeness-at-wheaton>; christianpost.com/news/wheaton-to-alter-missionary-plaque-to-nix-pejorative-wording.html

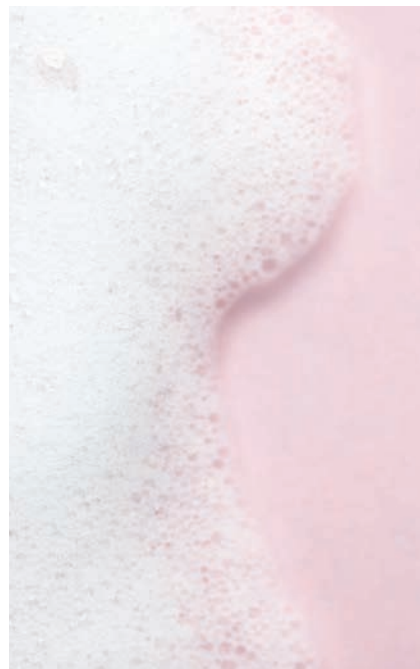
Woke Shampoo

In mid-February, shampoo manufacturer Pantene posted a two-minute commercial on Twitter featuring a young boy who is being raised as a girl by two homosexual women. A graphic at the end of the commercial proclaims that “Family Is Beautiful LGBT” and that Pantene is “proud to support transgender visibility.” The Daily Wire’s Michael Knowles called it “the most disturb-

ing commercial I have ever seen,” and said in a podcast that “Pantene, the shampoo company, is now defending—mainstreaming—the sexual abuse of children.”

Although Sawyer, the boy in the commercial, declares that the family motto is “Everybody loves everybody no matter what path you follow,” it seems clear that the two lesbians, via their sexual liaison and exclusion of males from their lives, have at least implicitly conveyed a different message:

that really only women are loveable. Thus, as Doug Mainwaring of LifeSite News writes: “What choice does this vulnerable young boy have other than to remake himself in



a way that he perceives will make him more loveable to the women who have charge over his life? The result, as the commercial shows, is tragic.” •



—Source: lifesitenews.com/blogs/disturbing-commercial-features-young-boy-raised-as-a-girl-by-lesbian-moms

Woke Prisons

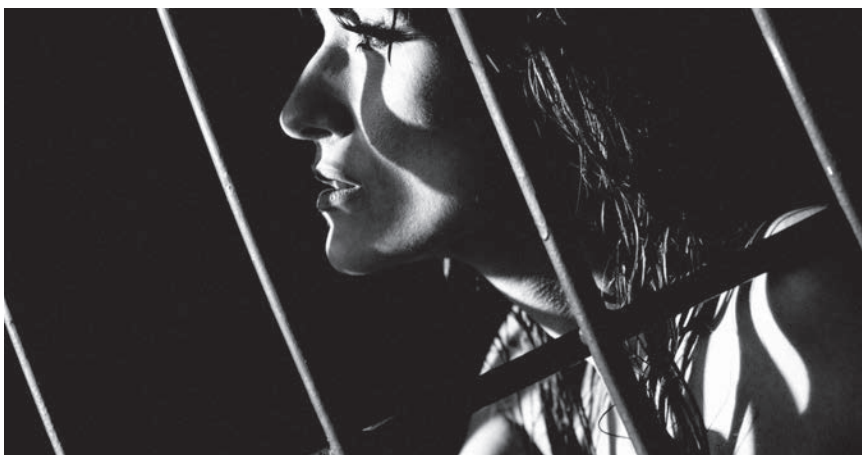
In the first three months of this year, 261 California state prisoners requested transfers to facilities that house the opposite sex—and 255 of them, all but six, requested to move from a men’s to a women’s cor-

rectional facility. The requests came in the wake of SB 132, a new law providing that any prisoner who self-identifies as “transgender, nonbinary, or intersex” must be “addressed in a manner consistent with the incarcerated individual’s gender identity,” and be “housed at a correctional facility designated for men or women based

on the individual’s preference.” The law applies “regardless of anatomy.” Governor Gavin Newsom signed it last September, and it went into effect on January 1.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, just over one percent of California’s prison population, or 1,129 inmates, have identified as nonbinary, intersex, or transgender, meaning that about a quarter of them have requested transfers. As of April 6, only four transfers—from a men’s to a women’s prison—had actually taken place, but 21 others had been approved, and none had been rejected.

The *Times* also cited a study claiming that so-called transgender inmates experience excessive violence in prison and that the rate of sexual assault against them is 13 times higher than it is against other inmates. But it also acknowledged that some inmates are thought to have applied for a transfer “under false pretenses” and that some female prisoners are afraid of males being housed in their facilities. •



—Source: breitbart.com/politics/2021/04/05/261-transgender-prisoners-request-transfer-under-california-law-255-to-womens-prison



Evolving Situation

Joshua Swamidass's "Peaceful" Proposals Are Anything But

by Terrell Clemmons & Casey Luskin

Background:

Joshua Swamidass is a Christian who was raised a young earth creationist (YEC). His family believed Adam and Eve were specially created by God, without parents, and that all humanity was descended from them. Even though he was exposed to the competing evolutionary story of human origins, he trusted Scripture, despite unanswered questions.

But as he studied science, he felt pulled apart. The evidence for evolution appeared strong, while the YEC camp seemed weak, if not dishonest. As a student, he was once "fully convinced of ID [intelligent design]," but then he considered "leaving science" because of the "conflict and animosity" surrounding the 2005 *Kitzmiller v. Dover* trial, a season

he described on Premier Christian Radio as an "overwhelming . . . time of shadows [and] darkness." Following that, he aligned with, but then separated from BioLogos (a group dedicated to winning Christians over to evolutionary thinking), after which he came to express confidence in his Christian faith based on the Resurrection of Jesus, while also affirming mainstream evolutionary science.

Today, he is a computational biologist and associate professor at Washington University in St. Louis. He is also seeking to become a prominent voice in the conversation over Christianity and science, having founded the website and online discussion forum Peaceful Science, and authoring *The Genealogical Adam and Eve: The Surprising Science of Universal Ancestry* (2019), funded by the

pro-evolution Templeton Foundation. Though he officially disfavors the "theistic evolution" moniker, the views he promotes are nearly indistinguishable from it.

Reason for Surveillance:

There is nothing troubling about anyone taking a winding road to confident Christian faith. But what Swamidass is offering the Church on human origins is scientifically and theologically problematic, and the tone of dialogue modeled at Peaceful Science is worrisome. Most recently, he's been using his position and prestige to advocate against academic freedom for non-evolutionary viewpoints—hardly "peaceful science."

Seeking to broker peace with mainstream science, Swamidass has proposed the "genealogical Adam and Eve" (GAE) scenario in his book of that title: Adam and Eve are no longer the sole progenitors of all humans, but their offspring interbred with a population of humans who evolved outside the Garden. In this view, two human origin accounts—one of Scripture and another of evolutionary science—"would be taking place alongside one another, outside each other's view." There are "textual" humans made in the image of God, who descended from Adam and Eve, inherited Adam's sin, and for whom Christ died. Then there's another entirely distinct category of "biological humans," who evolved from animals.

In the GAE scenario, textual humans included "everyone alive across the globe by, at latest, A.D. 1," so that when Christ died, all living humans needed salvation. The implication is that before Christ, there were untold numbers of non-textual biological humans, whom Scripture never mentions, who did not necessarily inherit Adam's original sin, and for whom Christ did not necessarily die. In Genesis 3:20 Eve is called "mother of all the living," but a core

element of Swamidass's model is that Eve did not become an ancestor of all the living *until millennia after her creation*. He dismisses Acts 17:26 ("from one man, [God] made all the nations") with the casual, "They do not specifically deny mixing with other lines in the distant past."

Not only does Swamidass's proposal seem inconsistent with Scripture and traditional theology, but because it incorporates a fully evolutionary model of human origins, it's also inconsistent with good science. (For discussions of the science, see the books *Science and Human Origins* and *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*.)

Though he wrote a 260-page book advocating this view, Swamidass is officially noncommittal, calling it "a thought experiment," which he finds appealing because it offers a creation story that fits with evolutionary biology.

His Peaceful Science website states the "aim to build trust across divides" using "empathy," "humility," "tolerance," and "patience." He wants to "create space for those with whom we disagree." Many who have interacted with Swamidass indicate that the reality is starkly different. One participant (not an ID supporter) publicly accused Swamidass of doxxing him after he repeatedly disagreed with Swamidass's views in the forum. Others familiar with the forum say it frequently seems dominated by harsh personal attacks against anyone critical of evolutionary theory or supportive of design—an odd way to "build trust across divides."

Swamidass has called ID proponents "dishonest" or accused them of "lying," but his most high-profile personal attack occurred when he partnered with Nathan Lents to review Michael Behe's 2019 book *Darwin Devolves* in the prestigious journal *Science*. They falsely charged that Behe "ignores evidence," "misrepre-

sents theory," and "avoids evidence that challenges him." As the Discovery Institute observed, "The not-so-subtle subtext . . . is that Behe is an untrustworthy scholar who ignores criticism, so don't pay any attention to his book." Swamidass made this explicit in a webinar critiquing Behe when he said, "over and over again I don't know if I can really trust where [Behe]'s coming from."

Perhaps concerned about his public reputation as a "peaceful" Christian after slandering Behe's character, Swamidass then posted an article titled, "I agree with Behe," praising Behe as a "hero" (before deleting the phrase), emphasizing agreement, and suppressing disagreement. The Discovery Institute's John West quite reasonably asks, "Is [Swamidass]'s approach likely to produce genuine dialogue?"

Having been repeatedly burned by unfair and harsh treatment, today few if any leading ID proponents participate in Peaceful Science.

Most Recent Threat:

Most recently, Swamidass has implied that Christian educational institutions that dissent from Darwin should face penalties. Earlier this year, he authored an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* that targeted the academic freedom of Christian institutions that promote YEC.

According to Swamidass's op-ed, YEC groups should be "tracked," such that their "deviations from national norms in a science curriculum" are "reported" and "prominently disclosed." He called this a gracious gift of "institutional tolerance" and "academic

freedom"—and in return for that generosity, YEC institutions should be forced to "give more space to students and faculty who disagree" with their views.

Incredibly, he calls this "compromise," where YEC institutions should be forced to "defend academic freedom for those who

dissent from scientific creationism," a "two-way street" of "academic freedom." But what do YEC groups get in return? Will they now be tolerated at mainstream institutions? Of course not! Swamidass's Orwellian "academic freedom" would deny religious groups the right

to enforce faith statements and to define themselves around certain beliefs.

In a Facebook conversation Swamidass later admitted that his arguments could also cut against ID-friendly universities. If he forces this false "compromise" upon ID, will mainstream biology departments be required to hire ID proponents in turn? Again, of course not. Claiming to defend "academic freedom" while calling for Christian institutions that question Darwin to be hamstrung seems as Orwellian as calling your approach "peaceful" while personally attacking ID proponents.

Swamidass told an interviewer, "We know where [ID] leads. It leads to you getting kicked out of science." Perhaps this figures into his abandoning ID and calling for official discrimination against those who do not toe the Darwin line. ☹

—An expanded version of this article, with full notes and citations, is available at salvomag.com.

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A Grand Inquisition

Better Left Unsaid Examines the Left & Clears a Path for Better Things to Be Said

by Terrell Clemmons

Toronto filmmaker Curt Jaimungal saw political polarization intensifying in both Canada and the U.S. and set out in 2018 to investigate. He knew that ideological extremes in the twentieth century had resulted in untold millions of deaths, and that some people were saying that the current specter of identity politics, with its speech suppression and demands for safe spaces, was putting us on a path to the same kind of mass murder that had happened in Stalin's Russia and Mao's China. *Were they right?* Or did the current political landscape merely reflect legitimate collective redress for the wrongs of Western civilization's past? Put differently, were the demands of the extreme left simply the price of progress?

Curt considered himself moderately left of center politically, but what he was seeing was something altogether foreign to the liberal values he'd always associated with the left. The first question he wanted to explore had to do with this apparent schism. *What delineates the moderate left from the extreme left? When does the left go too far?* An exceedingly inquisitive thinker trained in math and physics, he intended to seek answers to these questions using reason, logic, and evidence. And because of their political nature, and to avoid bias, he crowdfunded the project on Kickstarter, rather than seeking conventional sponsorships.

The result is *Better Left Unsaid*, a fast-paced documentary that combines interviews, news clips, and Curt's own analysis into a



fascinating foray into the world of ideas, complete with snazzy digital animations to help you visualize the concepts as he "thinks out loud." And he is an exquisitely exacting thinker. I'll start with an overview of the film, and then return to his conclusion.

Down the Social Justice Left Rabbit Hole

The film is organized into four chapters. Chapters one and two cover the decade of the 2010s, when we saw a radical strain of

politics emerge. Not only did social justice activists get violent, they outright *endorsed* violence as justified, nay, even necessary. To hear them tell it, their political opponents are so *bigoted* and so *racist*, there's no point talking with them, no reason to even allow them a hearing. Physical force is not only acceptable, it's the only thing that works.

This wasn't the left Curt grew up with. The left he knew stood for civil rights, non-violence, the scientific method, and equal treatment of all people—arguably much of what made the West the West. So what happened? He walks us through some shifts that have taken place in academia.

Redefinition of Terms. Words for which we had perfectly good, long-running, agreed-upon definitions have been summarily redefined. For example, for years *racism* meant the prejudicial or discriminatory treatment of people based on skin color. Today, in the lexicon of the SJL (Social Justice Left—my acronym, not Curt's), *racism* is being put to use as “prejudice plus power,” or, in its collectivized rendition, *systemic racism*, “a system with disadvantage based on race.”

This is no minor refinement. This brings about a wholesale overhaul of what counts as racism. To explain how, we first need to examine another shift, also brought to us by our universities.

Redefinition of Truth. Social constructivism, or the notion of *socially constructed truth*, is a product of radical skepticism predicated on the belief that there is no enduring, absolute truth about the world. It says that truth varies by culture, identity, or social group. Your thoughts, ideas, and beliefs are not merely *influenced by* your community but are axiomatically, concomitantly a product of it.

And this is where I absolutely love what Curt has done. He doesn't dismiss incoming ideas with any shallow reaction. He

barely even presents arguments to the contrary. Rather, he extends to them the dignity of *being taken seriously*. He thoroughly examines what is being said and meticulously strings out the logic of it, analyzing its tenets all the way down to their philosophical roots. Or lack thereof, as we shall see.

Here's how that went with respect to the

subject of racism. First, we see a montage of clips in which black women talk about racism. One says, “Black people can't be racist.” Another says, “White people are all racist [and are] always gonna be racist. . . . I believe that white people are born into not being human . . . that's what y'all are taught to do—to be demons.”

The first point Curt draws out should be obvious. By their own words, these women are expressly taking skin color into account and prejudging people on that basis. This is the very epitome of racism according to the original definition. Of course, we should make note of that, but SJL activists won't be deterred because they've moved on to their new definition. But Curt's not deterred either.

He goes on to analyze what the SJL as a whole is asserting, taking into account their own definitions and presuppositions. All the derivatives of Marxism interpret social dynamics through the lens of power differentials between people groups. This is the philosophical fount whence all identity politics flows. And so, the charge of *systemic racism* says that the “system” is racist because whites have power and blacks don't. This is why “black people can't be racist.” Remember, to them racism means “prejudice plus power.”

But recall also that to them truth is *socially constructed*. Do you see the problem, here? First of all, if social constructivism is true, then Marxism *itself*, along

At the outset, he thought people mostly wanted the same thing, but just disagreed on how to get there. After careful listening, he reached a different conclusion. We don't all want the same thing. “We actually want different outcomes and obey different rules.” What it came down to was a difference in values.



with all its derivatives, is a social construct. This means that systemic racism, too, is a social construct. And it gets worse. In the very act of asserting that social constructivism is *true*, social constructivists are *presupposing* the existence of absolute truth. "You can't make a truth claim denying the existence of truth," Curt says flatly. "That's a contradiction."

Exactly. The ideological basis of the SJL is, at root, incoherent. This is a big part of what delineates the extreme left from reasonable liberals who still acknowledge there's such a thing as truth.

Chapters one and two also show several examples of SJL closed-mindedness, circular reasoning, and specious manipulation of language such that SJL activists are always "right" and everyone else "wrong." The picture that emerges through it all is a brute-force imposition of ideological conformity.

"In many ways, it's difficult to understand what it is that the left, the anti-West left, is trying to achieve now, other than an extreme version of collective, authoritarian control," says Bruce Parry, Queen's University law professor and *Epoch Times* columnist. "They seem to want to demand fealty to a set of ideas. And those ideas are *theirs*." Again, exactly. This is another trait that separates extreme leftists from their more moderate counterparts.

Twentieth Century Group-Based Politics

Chapter three takes up a third question.

Does identity politics lead to totalitarianism? What happened in the twentieth century? More specifically, *why* did it happen? What did people say their justifications were? Still focusing on the underlying ideas, Curt delivers a philosophical history lesson that shows how class-based determinations

of guilt and innocence did, in fact, lead to mass murder. Most of us know that Communism killed a lot of people. How many know that it did so under the banner of equality and standing up for the oppressed? *Better Left Unsaid* supplies an urgently needed history lesson on this point. (Warning: disturbing imagery.)

Out of the Chaos, Clarity

Chapter four warns of danger ahead if the oppression narrative and group-based politics are not checked. This is certainly apropos, yet Curt ended the project disheartened. At the outset, he thought people mostly wanted the same thing, but just disagreed on how to get there. After careful listening, he reached a different conclusion. We *don't* all want the same thing. "We actually want different outcomes and obey different rules." What it came down to was a difference in *values*. Again, he's exactly right about that, but the realization left him stalled at a dilemma.

"We need myth," he said, looking straight at the camera, by which he meant *myth* in the sense of a transcendent narrative that forms a people's understanding about the world and their place in it. Shared values are necessary for holding a society together. Historically in the West, institutional religion has been the vehicle for maintaining shared values, but as a modern man of science, he doesn't favor a return to that (though he does give a benevolent nod to "Decentralized Religion" as an alternative). So, what to do? As he sees it, this dilemma is the unfortunate but inevitable consequence of the modern science and religion divide.

Now, if you've been reading *Salvo*, you know there is no real divide between science and faith and that his dilemma is perfectly resolvable. Nevertheless, although *Better Left Unsaid* signs off on

that glitch, Curt has done us all a tremendous service by bringing to light crucial truth concerning the social justice left and identity politics. If *Better Left Unsaid* leads to nothing more than well-meaning moderates rejecting the dictates of the SJL in favor of conserving free speech and open debate, Curt's efforts will have been well spent, in my book.

But for Christian apologists, I see at least two additional opportunities this film provides. First, we can all learn from the way Curt genuinely pays attention to what people are saying and then teases out their reasoning. This one discipline goes a long way toward distilling truth from noise.

Second, I think his dilemma is the dilemma of anyone raised on postmodernism yet hungry for transcendent truth. The existential questions he raises veritably beg for reasoned explanations of the Christian faith. Regardless of church shortcomings, and there have been plenty, Christianity is not just a religion. It is a worldview that puts forth testable truth claims about all of reality. When rightly understood and thoughtfully explained, it can not only make sense of all things, from science and origins to sin and morality to redemption and resurrection, but it can do so using reason, logic, and evidence. Paul even gave us a test for falsifiability. If Christ has not been raised, the whole thing is dead. (He didn't quite put it that way, but see 1 Corinthians 15.)

All in all, *Better Left Unsaid* is a great film for parents and youth pastors to watch with their kids and for you and me to see with anyone trying to make sense of the postmodern morass we find ourselves trying to navigate. Take this opportunity to provoke better discussions about politics *and* religion. It may challenge them (and you), but don't let that deter you. Truth will always profit from its collision with falsehood. And so will they. ☺

From the makers of NOT A CLUE

NOT SORRY!

The Cathartic Game of Social Justice Hijinx

FRESH DOUGH

—ACCUSATION—
You didn't put your preferred pronoun in your online bio!
It's not hard . . .

—VERDICT—
INSENSITIVE: NOT CANCELED

CHAMPAIGN ICE

—ACCUSATION—
You mentioned trans ideology without also affirming it in a tweet from 2 years ago!

—VERDICT—
TRANSPHOBIC: CANCELED

POLO TAN



WHITE OUT

It's every one for themselves!

Welcome to the woke-eat-woke world of NOT SORRY! You've all offended evolving woke community standards regardless of which shade of white your game piece is, but can you be the one to navigate the board without being accused and canceled by your ever-woke peers?

Roll the dice to advance your piece or bump your opponent's piece off their space! But watch out—you might get bumped yourself. A bumped player draws an Accusation Card.

Oh no! Game over! Your livelihood is destroyed. No safe spaces or second chances for you! But you may get lucky. Not all Accusation Cards will get you canceled . . . yet.

—ACCUSATION—
You listen to Mozart! The lack of diversity in classical music is troubling to say the least.

—VERDICT—
NEAR-RACIST: NOT CANCELED

Find out just how satisfying it is to purge the world of problematic white people. "NOT SORRY!"



Fact Sheets

Planned Parenthood's Excuse for (Margaret Sanger's Speech to) the Ku Klux Klan

by Howard Isaac Williams

Last fall, in the wake of the renewed national debate on race, black and Latina employees of Planned Parenthood of Greater New York demanded that the abortion organization review its racist history and some of its current practices. The chapter did so, and afterwards decided to delete Margaret Sanger's name from its flagship abortion clinic, and it even went so far as to state that Sanger, Planned Parenthood's founder, was a racist. After articles in *The Hill*, *BuzzFeed News*, and other outlets revealed present-day bigotry in other Planned Parenthood chapters, PP's leaders promised to address the concerns expressed by its black and Latina employees.¹ And just this past April, PP deleted its entire 20-page biographical profile of Sanger from its website.



Margaret Sanger (right)



But was Planned Parenthood's canceling of its founder a sincere attempt to reckon with the abortion industry's history of racial bigotry, or was it merely a metaphorical firewall to deflect attention from the more substantive harm reflected in that troubling history?

The recently deleted profile of Sanger acknowledged that she spoke to a women's auxiliary of the Ku Klux Klan in 1926. Then came this statement:

NOTE: In the 1920's, the KKK was a mainstream movement and was considered a legitimate anti-immigration organization with a wide membership that included many state and local officials. At that time, it defined its enemies as Blacks, Catholics, and Jews. Planned Parenthood today denounces Sanger's address to the Ku Klux Klan.²

In this era, when so many apologies for violations of politically correct taboos are judged insufficient, the hidden-in-plain-sight offenses of PP's "Note" have stood for over four years, apparently unseen by the eyes of even the most woke of leftists.

FUDGING DATES

The fact sheet containing the Note went up in October 2016, when Planned Parenthood was apparently so confident that its endorsed candidate would become America's first woman president that it felt free to describe the KKK, the worst terrorist group in our nation's history, with tepid words.

Did the Note's attempt to apologize for PP's founder somehow end up apologizing for the KKK? Note the absence of *any* words condemning the



A Legitimate Anti-Immigration Organization?

Klan. Nowhere do we see such appropriate words as “terrorists,” “murderers,” or “bigots” applied to it. Instead, according to Planned Parenthood, the Klan that Sanger addressed was “mainstream” and “legitimate”; an “organization” that merely “defined as enemies”—not murdered—blacks, Jews, Catholics, and immigrants.

Of all the excuse-making words, “mainstream” may be the trickiest. PP’s Note echoes the conventional narrative that the Ku Klux Klan was a powerful and popular group in the 1920s. This was true . . . in the *early* 1920s. But in 1925, the KKK’s Grand Dragon of the North was arrested and tried for rape and murder. By the time he was convicted, on November 14 of that year, Klan membership, especially in the northern states, was nosediving. The numerous state and local officials who had previously boasted openly of their Klan membership were now scurrying away like rats off a sinking ship.

So when Sanger visited and spoke to the women’s auxiliary in May 1926, the Klan was past its prime, especially in New Jersey. Indeed, three years earlier, on May 2, 1923, Klan members in Bound Brook, New Jersey, received a taste of their own poison when a mob routed them. Later that summer, other mobs crushed Klan members at nearby Plainfield and Perth Amboy.³ By 1926, national scandals and local defeats had crippled the New Jersey Klan and left it with a much smaller audience to hear Sanger’s message. But apparently not a less appealing audience.

FUDGING LEGITIMACY

Another bizarre excuse in the Note is its description of the KKK as “a legitimate anti-immigration organization.”

Today, many of Planned Parenthood’s political and media allies label even modest border-security measures as xenophobic. But merely calling the KKK “anti-immigration” understates its terrorism and dehumanizes its many victims. The Klan was not so much against immigration policy as it was against immigrant *people*, especially those from southern and eastern Europe, whom it terrorized and murdered. With its almost genteel description of Klan xenophobia, Planned Parenthood implicitly denies the personhood of the KKK’s immigrant victims.

The Note then says that the KKK “defined its enemies as Blacks, Catholics, Jews and others.” The Klan did much worse than “define” blacks, Catholics, Jews, and immigrants as enemies; it terrorized and murdered them, again rendering their victims’ sufferings and personhood unimportant.

But should anyone really be surprised that an organization that explicitly denies the personhood of unborn babies would implicitly deny it to other humans?

The Note concludes with a soggy, “PP today denounces Sanger’s address to the Ku Klux Klan.” How in tune with the rest of its “mainstream” apology.

Still, that self-important yet feckless denunciation prompts a question: What did Sanger say that finally earned a reprimand from her organization so long after she died? What did she say on that May night illumined by burning crosses that—as she later wrote—“accomplished my purpose” and gained her “a dozen invitations to speak to *similar*

In the months since it was forced to deal with the accusations of its black and Latina employees, has Planned Parenthood shown any signs of truly facing up to its racism? Or were changing the name of its New York abortion clinic and scrubbing its website profile of Sanger mere exercises in virtue-signaling?

groups" (emphasis added)? What did she say on a night she described as "mystical" that inspired the Klanswomen to speak with her "on and on" into the night?⁴

Did she promise that her movement would come to focus its efforts on the black community? Did she hint at things so sinister they would eventually lead to charges of racism against Planned Parenthood from the black and Latina women in its employ? Did she even suggest something that, ironically, would lead to abortion advocates' repeatedly and irrationally leveling charges of racism against pro-lifers?

TIP OF AN ICEBERG

Sanger's speech and PP's quasi-apologetic Note are actually just the tip of a white supremacist iceberg that lies beneath the surface of abortion advocacy. Evidence of this can be found throughout the abortion industry and its supporting "culture."

In 2013, when Kermit Gosnell, a black abortionist since pre-Roe days, faced prosecution for infanticide and other crimes committed at his Philadelphia clinic over the course of many years, the pro-choice side abandoned its loyal black servant even before his case went to trial. That same year, when white abortionist Douglas Karpen was investigated for similar crimes in Texas, the abortion industry successfully rallied around him. Gosnell was convicted and is now serving a life sentence plus 30 years for his crimes; a grand jury declined to indict Karpen in 2013, and although the FBI reportedly reopened his investigation in 2018, he has yet to be brought to trial.⁵

And consider what might truly be called cultural appropriation by the white atheist and abortion enthusiast Gloria Steinem with respect to the legacy of the black civil rights heroine Fannie Lou Hamer (1917–1977). Steinem contributed a chapter on Hamer to the 2002 book *Invisible Giants: Fifty Americans Who Shaped the Nation but Missed the History Books*. In her essay, she cynically claims Hamer for the pro-choice side because this cheerful and courageous Christian woman—who, among other things, suffered brutal beatings at the hands of Mississippi sheriff's deputies—complained bitterly about her state-imposed hysterectomy. Steinem mutes the fact that Hamer was angry about losing her right to have children, not abortions.⁶ About abortion itself, the characteristically straightforward Hamer called it "legal murder."⁷

Pro-lifers have often called attention to the disproportionate number of abortions committed on black women. Just last December, black Christian clergy did so in an open letter to Rafael Warnock, then

a Democratic senatorial candidate from Georgia.⁸ Warnock won the seat but has not yet revised his strong support for abortion "rights."

Planned Parenthood also supported the Communist Chinese government's long-standing one-child policy (revised somewhat in recent years), which forced abortion on almost all Chinese women who had a second pregnancy.⁹ Here, Planned Parenthood not only displayed bigotry against the Chinese, but also, ironically, supported the world's most far-reaching anti-choice policy.

In the months since it was forced to deal with the accusations of its black and Latina employees, has Planned Parenthood shown any signs of truly facing up to its racism? Or were changing the name of its New York abortion clinic and scrubbing its website profile of Sanger mere exercises in virtue-signaling? The latter would appear to be the case, as the organization continues to be the leader of an industry that profits off the bodies of women, girls, and pre-born children of all colors. That iceberg which wrecks lives in the present will not be melted by a few virtue signals regarding its past. ☹

Notes

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Being a Person

“Expressive Individualism” Ignores a Full Human Experience

by Heather Zeiger

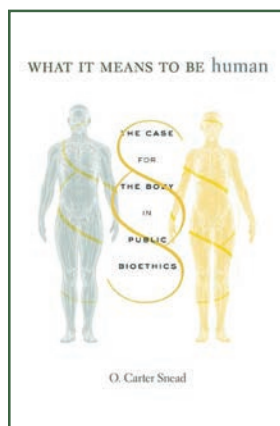
A philosophy major once told me, “All you ethicists really write about is sex and death.” He was joking, but after I thought about it, I decided he was not wrong. Bioethics is concerned with the edges of life—its beginning and end. Even when we talk about technological and pharmaceutical enhancements to our bodies, we’re really talking about the implications of frailty and finitude. Birth and death are the bookends of our experience as embodied human beings. They mark the times when we are completely dependent on others; we bring nothing with us when we enter life and leave all when we depart.

Even though embodiment is an integral part of the human experience, our laws reflect a vision of human flourishing that denigrates the body and elevates the will. The body, and nature for that matter, is to be exploited or refashioned to enable a person to achieve his or her desire, whether that be to adopt a new identity or to stay always young.

This vision of human flourishing changes how we relate to one another. Do you want to be a parent? There are laws (or a lack of laws) that allow you to use any means available, including borrowing another woman’s body, to achieve that goal. Do you want to remain childless whether you become pregnant or not? There are laws that let you achieve that, and few legal or social burdens that stand in your way. Do you want to control when, where, and how you die? More and more jurisdictions are passing laws that will help you end your life on your

terms. Our laws help us to become the author of our life story. The role of our relationships, whether the doctor-patient relationship or the family, is to further our desired narrative.

Bioethicist and political scientist O. Carter Snead’s recent book, *What It Means to Be Human: The Case for the Body in Public Bioethics*, addresses the failure of our laws to account for our lived human experience. He argues that our laws are inadequate because American public bioethics “is grounded in a gravely incomplete and thus false vision of human identity and flourishing.”¹ He looks at our laws on abortion, assisted reproductive technologies, and physician-assisted suicide, and shows how they prioritize “expressive individualism.” According to sociologist Robert Bellah, who coined the phrase, expressive individualism posits self-fulfillment and personal autonomy as the defining characteristics of what it means to be human, while ignoring our shared experiences of vulnerability, mutual dependence, and finitude.



EXPRESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM

Snead draws heavily from the writings of Bellah, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Michael Sandel to help us understand our cultural assumptions regarding the good life. Each of these writers addresses and critiques the implications of individualism in our modern world. They build on the work of Alexis de Tocqueville, who, after visiting America in the nineteenth century, used the



term “individualism” to describe the way he saw Americans relating to their society.

Based on answers people gave when they were asked what they valued most in life, Bellah concluded that twentieth-century Americans subscribed to the notion that each person has “a unique core of feeling and intuition” that needs to be expressed.² He came up with the term “expressive individualism” to denote this kind of individualism.

Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, building on this analysis, says the goals of expressive individualism (which he calls “Romantic expressivism”) are self-expression, self-realization, self-fulfillment, and discovering authenticity.³ In other words, the key to happiness is the freedom to construct the identity you want to have and become the person you want to be based on a morality you find within yourself. You are free to break any ties you have had to a particular community, past or present, and you can choose your own preferred social and moral obligations, roles, and values. The political philosopher Michael Sandel describes a person like that as the “unencumbered self.”⁴

You can see how the implications of expressive individualism play out today. If I self-identify as a “bisexual trans man,” then I should be free to pursue that identity without facing any legal, societal, or moral encumbrances. My employer can’t enforce a dress code that prevents me from expressing this identity, and the law cannot hinder me from using men’s facilities or from marrying whomever I wish. Public bioethics must affirm that I can do whatever I want with my body.

In principle, being free to pursue one’s goals, to make choices about one’s future, and to control what is done to and with one’s body is not a bad thing. Autonomy is good—when it is tied to its moral roots in human dignity. Most of our laws on informed consent and human-subject research are predicated on the dignity of the individual. But problems occur when we take away those moral roots and replace them with a self-centered vision of ourselves as the arbiters of truth.

PERSONHOOD THEORY

If self-fulfillment is the highest good, then what do we do with people who are dependent on others, such as infants, the disabled, or the elderly? This is where personhood theory comes in. Personhood theory says that not all human beings are persons, and that only those who are deemed to be persons have legal rights and protections. Those not so deemed may be human, but they have few, if any, rights.



Where is “personhood” on the scale of disability?

What, then, constitutes a person? Different people draw the line in different places. Some say it’s the ability to reason; others, that it’s the ability to have meaningful interactions with others. Perhaps some would even say, as in Philip K. Dick’s short story “Pre-Persons,” that it’s the ability to do algebra. The lines tend to become arbitrary.

As for who has the authority to draw the line anywhere, that question remains unaddressed.

WHAT THE LAW ALLOWS

To help us understand the priority placed on expressive individualism in public bioethics in America, let’s take the example of a fictional girl named Emily. Emily is a college student whose supportive parents always told her she could be anything she wanted to be when she grew up. After living through the Covid-19 pandemic and helping people in low-income countries, Emily decides she wants to become an infectious disease expert. She works hard to get into an elite program at a top-tier university and is accepted by the school of her choice. But during her freshman year, Emily gets pregnant. Having a baby, she is convinced, would completely derail her plans of becoming a doctor and helping other people. What do our laws allow Emily to do?

Thanks to the Supreme Court’s decisions in *Roe v. Wade*, *Doe v. Bolton*, and *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, Emily can choose to have an abortion. Her state may impose certain restrictions, such as not permitting abortion after the second trimester or after viability, but if she is willing to travel, she can find a state where abortion is legal right up until the moment of birth. At any rate, Emily has an abortion and continues her studies.

Years pass. Emily is now in her late thirties and has been a successful infectious disease expert for more than a decade. She is also engaged, and she



and her fiancé would like to have a child, but there is a genetic disease that runs in the men in her family and Emily wants to make sure her child will not have it. So she wants to have a girl, and would also like to make sure that her daughter is smart, so that she will have every chance to succeed in life.

What do our laws allow Emily to do here?

The United States is often called the “Wild West” of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) because, compared to other countries, it places few restrictions on their use—not even a medical reason is required. If an individual or a couple chooses to use IVF, they can select the sex of the embryo to be implanted. Also, though the science behind it is spurious, genome-wide association studies can be used to screen embryos for certain desirable traits, including intelligence. Indeed, there are very few limits on the reproductive technologies people can use to get the child they want—as long as they have the requisite financial resources.

So Emily and her fiancé use ART to have a baby girl, and later, feeling bolder, they also have a boy. Both children are healthy, and their parents have meanwhile gotten married.

A couple of decades pass, after which, their children grown and successful careers behind them, Emily and her husband decide to spend their retirement traveling. But before they embark on their first trip, Emily suffers a stroke caused by a brain tumor. She survives, but doctors tell her that the prognosis for a full recovery is not good; she will likely suffer permanent cognitive and physical disabilities. Emily is crushed. This is not the life she wanted for herself, nor does she want to be a burden on her husband and two children. She would rather end her life on her own terms. Now what do our laws allow her to do?

A real-life scenario like this was played out in 2014 in the case of Brittany Maynard, a young California woman who was diagnosed with brain cancer and wanted to end her life before becoming incapacitated. At the time, physician-assisted suicide was not legal in California, so, amid much publicity, Maynard moved to Oregon expressly to take advantage of that state’s permissive law. On November 1, 2014, she gathered her loved ones around her and then ingested lethal drugs prescribed by a physician. Two years later, California legalized physician-assisted

suicide, and today, six other states plus the District of Columbia permit it as well.

Our fictional Emily decided to follow in Maynard’s footsteps.

WHAT WE WERE MADE FOR

In sum, at several crucial stages of her life, Emily regarded her body as being in the way of the life she wished to construct for herself. Our laws permitted her to have an abortion, to use ART to have children, and to obtain medical help in killing herself, thereby supporting her desire to arrange her life on her terms, but they did not—and do not—address what it means to be embodied. As Snead points out, embodiment means that, throughout life, we exist on a “scale of disability” that changes with age, health, and circumstances.⁵ But our laws do not address our finitude, vulnerability, and need for others.

An ethic of expressive individualism claims that it is licit, even proper, for people to treat each other as instruments for their own self-fulfillment. But this is not what we were made for. Snead says that a fuller anthropology looks outward rather than inward, encouraging people to identify with the vulnerable, disabled, elderly, and dying. We were made for love and authentic friendship. When we rightly relate to one another as embodied beings, we learn to respond to life with gratitude, which we then live out in our compassionate care for each other at all stages of life. ☺

If self-fulfillment is the highest good, then what do we do with people who are dependent on others, such as infants, the disabled, or the elderly? This is where personhood theory comes in.

Notes

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Category Errors

While Megastores Fuss About the Toy Aisles, Kids Remain Confused

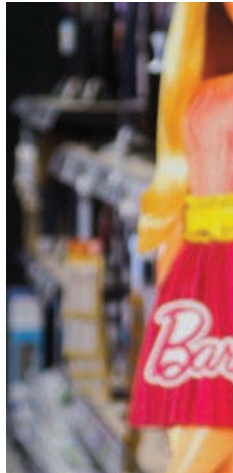
by Nicole M. King

A bill recently introduced into the California legislature would prohibit large department stores from dividing toys and some other childcare items into “boys” and “girls” sections.¹

California is hardly the first state to consider such a measure. Back in 2015, Target infamously “de-gendered” its toy section, so that confused and befuddled parents can wander between the doll aisle and the Hot Wheels aisle, wondering where the politically correct place would be to find Play-Doh and the newly rebranded “Potato Head” (the “Mr.” was recently dropped as too polarizing). As a 2015 *New York Times* piece put it when analyzing Target’s move, “a stroll through the toy section at a Target or a Toys ‘R’ Us is still a gender-specific experience”—you’ll find a pink Barbie aisle next to some glittered My Little Pony toys, in between the aisles of robot dinosaurs and Nerf guns.²



The larger toy manufacturers have also tried to break out of some of the old categories. Mattel recently announced its release of fifteen new Ken dolls meant to represent a wider swath of American male-dom, including “man-bun” Ken and what many have dubbed “Dad-bod” Ken.³ Lego has introduced more girl-specific building sets.



REAL CONFUSION

These efforts all point to some very real cultural confusion over how parents should raise their children to handle their own biological sex. Of course, for the modern leftist, “sex” is irrelevant. Boys don’t really prefer construction toys, and girls don’t really prefer dolls. Those are simply the gendered toy stereotypes that backward parents have been perpetuating for centuries. And yet, the evidence does point to some seemingly natural preferences in children, even from infancy.

One study found that 12-month-old baby boys tended to gaze longer at images of moving cars, while 12-month-old baby girls looked longer at moving faces. Other research found that 3–5-year-old boys were more likely to request typically male toys, while girls didn’t show a similar gendered preference until they were 5 years old. Studies of primates (who would theoretically be free of cultural influences on toy preferences) found that male monkeys were more likely to pick up toy cars, while female monkeys were more likely to pick up dolls.⁴

Some toy preferences may, then, be innate. Yet, as noted in the *New York Times* piece, a stroll through most toy sections will show some wildly “gendered” toys—but these are geared toward the most superficial aspects of gender, such as fighting (for boys) or appearance (for girls). Judith Elaine Blakemore of Indiana University claims to have found that such “strongly masculine” or “strongly feminine” toys tend to be the least effective at improving children’s cognitive, artistic, physical, or other skills.⁵

Meanwhile, Jeffrey Trawick-Smith, professor of Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University, has found in his research that the best toys for children’s development tend to be rather basic ones.⁶ Think hardwood blocks, wooden cars



and road signs, and simple construction toys. Such toys, he says, “are relatively open-ended, so children can use them in multiple ways.”

In other words, the best toys for kids are the ones that encourage them to use their imaginations. And yes, boys may in fact innately prefer hammers and trucks, while girls may innately prefer dolls and toy kitchens. As Anthony Esolen writes in *Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child*, “Give [children] a room full of hammers, boards, nails, and saws, and the girls will make something nice to go on a wall, and the boys will build a battering ram to knock down the wall.”

Our culture has been trying for decades to do away with such natural differences, but in a rather confused way. We give our girls hot-pink purses and plastic credit cards, then tell them that womanhood means whatever they want it to mean, but stay-at-home mothers are societal parasites. We let boys play single-shooter videogames and give them muscled-up superhero toys with machine guns, yet tell them to stifle their natural sense of justice and refrain from punching the bully in the face. Meanwhile, we keep rearranging the toy aisle, praise Mattel for more “representative” Barbie dolls, and now, hand out synthetic hormones by the bucketload to kids who don’t know if they’re boys, girls, or something else entirely.

WHAT BOYS & GIRLS NEED

But biological sex is too strong a force to smash, though it can certainly be beaten down. Even decades after the sexual revolution, professional women still prefer part-time or flexible working hours, particularly during their childbearing years.⁷ But men, penalized for being aggressive, assertive, or trying to be the household breadwinner, have started to give up. The result? A recent analysis from the

Journal of Marriage and Family shows that there has in fact been a decline in the number of “marriageable” men—men with career prospects, incomes, or educational levels that meet or exceed women’s.⁸

Girls and boys need to be allowed the confidence of knowing their biological sex, and the freedom to figure out their own talents, abilities, and desires within that realm. They need more open-ended toys that foster imaginary play, and they need to be allowed their natural toy preferences, however those manifest themselves. What they don’t need are junky gender-stereotyped toys telling them that male means fighting, female means shopping, and “gender-neutral” means man-bun Ken. ☹

Notes

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Meanwhile, we keep rearranging the toy aisle, praise Mattel for more “representative” Barbie dolls, and now, hand out synthetic hormones by the bucketload to kids who don’t know if they’re boys, girls, or something else entirely.

CANCELING WESTERN CIVILIZATION

Woke Fundamentalism's Iconoclasm Is Just as Destructive as ISIS's *by Robin Phillips*

In the spring of 2015, as ISIS forces made their way to the historic Syrian city of Palmyra, town officials became concerned for the safety of their historic treasures, which included priceless statuary and other artifacts from antiquity. Knowing that ISIS militants disdain the heritage of the past, and consider statues a form of idolatry, city officials sought to save their treasures from pillage by hiding them outside the city.

Even though ISIS jihadists believe artworks to be idolatrous, they are not above selling them on the black market to turn a quick profit. That is exactly what they intended to do with Palmyra's treasures. So when they arrived and found the museums empty, they abducted Khaled al-Asaad, an 82-year-old archeologist, historian, and museum curator who had served for more than fifty years as head of antiquities in Palmyra. For a month, they interrogated and tortured al-Asaad, hoping to make him reveal the hiding place of the antiquities. But the 82-year-old scholar withstood them. Finally, when the militants realized they could not break him, they cut off

al-Asaad's head and hung his mutilated body on a column in a main square. They also placed a board in front of his body declaring that he had served as "the director of idolatry" and had represented Syria at "infidel conferences."

What happened in Palmyra was not an isolated incident, except perhaps with regard to the fortitude with which the jihadists were resisted. At other historic sites, ISIS militants destroyed precious art with frenzy, sometimes even using power equipment to demolish cultural artifacts.

The Crusade Against Cultural Memory

ISIS exemplifies a radical form of cancel culture that seeks to eradicate all memory of anything beyond its movement. Its militants have mobilized mass hysteria to destroy not only physical artworks, but also the institutions that support the liberal arts.

Such hatred of art is not limited to Islam. In the 1650s, after Oliver Cromwell took control of Great Britain as Lord Protector, his men roamed the land with long poles, which they used to shatter stained-glass art in the high windows of ancient cathedrals. Cromwell, too, sought to eradicate much of the past, particularly where cultural memory had found expression in art and Christian holidays. Under the Protectorate he set up, the liberal arts

Regardless of the specifics of their worldviews, fundamentalist movements all seek to cancel the past by erasing cultural memory and by attacking the forms and institutions through which that memory is carried.

HEADQUARTERS



were carefully regulated, and the theater was banned altogether.

Modern revolutionary movements have exhibited the same tendency. From the French Revolution through to the various Communist revolutions of the twentieth century, a recurring feature has been the attempt to purify society from past traditions and to build a new society from scratch. Using oversimplified ideologies and sloganeering, these movements whipped up the masses into a frenzy, mobilizing them to the mission of overthrowing existing structures and canceling cultural memory.

Fundamentalism can be religious or anti-religious. ISIS fundamentalists are religious (but anti-Christian), while Communist fundamentalists were virulently anti-religion. Regardless of the specifics of their worldviews, fundamentalist movements all seek to cancel the past by erasing cultural memory and by attacking the forms and institutions through which that memory is carried.

A Rising New Fundamentalist Threat

In late 2016 and early 2017, the Syrian Army recaptured the city of Palmyra, with help from the United States and Russia. Finding that ISIS forces had destroyed historic buildings, tombs, and

PHOTO When Syrian troops backed by Russian forces recaptured Palmyra on March 27, 2016, they found that many of the city's priceless artifacts had been stolen or destroyed by ISIS jihadists.

temples, the authorities began a massive restoration effort.

Ironically, even as American forces were fighting against fundamentalism in the Middle East, a new form of it was rising within the United States itself. This new form of fundamentalism is subtle, disguising its agenda in the language of liberalism even as it seeks to destroy the liberal arts.

The new fundamentalism goes by various names, including wokeness, radical liberalism, critical theory, and progressivism. In this article we will simply refer to it as "Woke Fundamentalism," or Wokeism for short.

Wokeism represents our own version of what happened in



PHOTO Toppled monument of Abraham Lincoln, Portland, Oregon



Palmyra, complete with high-profile destruction of statuary. Like ISIS, the Woke target zones of cultural significance, such as universities and historic sites. And while they do not behead people, they whip up mass hysteria to try to take down entire disciplines and to ruin the careers of people deemed insufficiently woke. Above all, Woke Fundamentalism is a virulent version of cancel culture, which aims to send Western civilization down the memory hole.

Drawn from the Communist Playbook

Last October, when woke protestors tore down statues of Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt in Portland, Oregon, their destructive mission was obvious. What is less obvious is the more subtle way Wokeism has been attacking the liberal arts by undermining the notion that the arts have intrinsic value. The Woke follow Karl Marx, who taught that the liberal arts have merely extrinsic value as instruments that can be used to achieve various pragmatic goals.

Marxists sought, and seek, to cancel the liberal arts by redefining them in purely instrumental terms. A hallmark of twentieth-century experiments in Marxism was the effort to channel man's aesthetic faculties to purely *useful* ends, and to insist that works of imagination and beauty should be created and/or used only as tools to serve the goals of the state. The Soviets sanctioned a new type of art known as "socialist realism," which regulated expression, glorified technology, and reduced art to a purely didactic function. The Marxist philosopher and revolutionary Georgi Plekhanov set the tone for the new mood when he declared that the value of art lay in its social usefulness: "There can be no doubt that art acquires a social significance only insofar as it depicts, evokes, or conveys actions, emotions, and events that are of significance to society."

Woke Fundamentalism has been drawing from the Communist playbook by treating the liberal arts as if their value is merely instrumental in advancing social-justice agendas. Among the

Woke, the great literary, visual, and musical artworks of our tradition are valued purely for their didactic function in advancing a narrow range of political concerns, including feminism, critical race theory, post-colonialism, queer theory, and so on. By treating these disciplines in this way, the Woke leave the disciplines of higher learning in place even as they pragmatize and polemicize them, hollowing out their content so that these disciplines become little more than weapons in the hands of social justice warriors. Meanwhile, scholars who insist on the older view, that the liberal arts are ends rather than simply means, risk having their careers destroyed and their reputations ruined.

Earlier this year, at the annual meeting of the Society for Classical Studies, we got a sense of how tense this conflict has become. In an address to a panel of classicists, Dr. Mary Williams argued that the classics have more than instrumental

Woke iconoclasm and anti-intellectualism are actually more sinister than book-burning and statue-crushing, for they allow institutions of higher learning to continue operating even as they are being subverted.

value, saying, "Maybe we should start defending our discipline in and of itself, and saying it's Western civilization, it matters." She was roundly rebuked for these and other comments before being kicked out of the meeting.

The Saga of Dan-el Peralta

Dr. Williams's main critic was Dan-el Padilla Peralta, an associate professor of classics at Princeton University. Peralta serves as an interesting case study in how the Woke radicalize academics by attacking the very thing that makes them good scholars in the first place, namely, love for their subjects.

In February the *New York Times* ran a glowing profile on Peralta, whose career emerged out of a youthful love for Greece and Rome and a desire to be transformed by the classics. At first he

studied the classics simply because he loved the subject and believed the discipline had value in and of itself. But in college, when he announced his decision to major in the classics, he received push-back from some of his closest friends. You see, Peralta is black, and his friends wanted to know how his study of the classics would help the cause of social justice. If the classics could not help with an activist agenda, were they a worthy pursuit for a black man?

Peralta at first responded to these concerns by arguing that the classics were intrinsically valuable, regardless of their political utility. But then his perspective began to shift. The *Times* profile reports that he became increasingly troubled by the perceived lack of practical utility in the classics, until he finally abandoned the position that the literature of Greece and Rome has inherent value.

He found he wasn't completely satisfied by his own arguments. The question of classics' utility was not a trivial one. How could he take his education in Latin and Greek and make it into something liberatory? "That became the most urgent question that guided me through my undergraduate years and beyond," Padilla said.¹

After coming to these realizations, Peralta tried to unlearn much of his earlier education. "I had to actively engage in the decolonization of my mind," he said.

Now that Peralta believes the classics possess a merely instrumental value within the context of activism, what type of scholarship is he engaging in? Among other things, he is now trying to bring attention to the problem of "whiteness" in the classics. Greek and Roman language and literature are intrinsically bound up with white supremacy, he teaches. This is part of his larger agenda of woke activism, and his reduction of classical scholarship to a tool for political and social ends.

Peralta is only one academic, but he represents a consensus among the Woke



PHOTO Black Lives Matter Protest in Parliament Square, London, June 6, 2020

in academia that their various disciplines—from classics to history to art to literature—should be pragmatized and politicized. In these efforts, the richness and complexity of these disciplines are being reduced to a handful of simple formulae about race or gender.

Hollowed Out from Within

The reduction of the liberal arts into tools for social and political utility is just as destructive as ISIS's rampage through historical sites. In fact, woke iconoclasm and anti-intellectualism are actually *more* sinister than book-burning and statue-crushing, for they allow institutions of higher learning to continue operating even as they are being subverted.

The physical destruction of artworks and books will not be resisted if people become convinced that such things have no value anyway. And that is exactly what the Woke seek to do as they propagandize university students with the notion that the liberal arts should be valued only as means to ends. When the study of Western civilization—together with its art, literature, and music—becomes simply another tool for woke activism, then even if these disciplines remain formally in place, they have effectively been cancelled.

In the battle to preserve the riches of our civilization, we need more people like Khaled al-Asaad, who courageously stood against the despoilers to defend his cultural heritage. ☹

Note

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Finding a Different Path

New Laws Are Making It Harder to Get Help Walking Away from LGBTQ-ism

by John D. Martin



Across the West, and indeed, across the globe, the wrangling of legislative bodies over the measures to be taken in response to the spread of Covid-19 has kept public attention turned away from other important legislative proposals that by their nature are certain to have deep social impact. In Germany, where I live, one such proposal, which has since been passed into law by the Bundestag (the German parliament) was a ban on the provision of conversion therapy for minors experiencing unwanted same-sex attraction, as well as for adults seeking treatment for unwanted same-sex attraction, if “their consent is based on a deficiency of volitional capacity (e.g., coercion, threat, deception, error) and if the party providing treatment does not explain the harmful nature of the treatment to them” (my translation).

So much for respecting an individual's right to "bodily autonomy" and the "free expression of one's sexual orientation and gender identity." No such rights are to be respected when they are exercised in contradiction to the philosophy underlying LGBTQ activism.



The "harmful nature" of such treatment is, of course, a matter of dispute, making the very wording of the law an exercise in question-begging. But there is more. On the Bundestag's website one can find a summary statement of the law, which declares that "advertising, offering, or arranging such treatments" is also prohibited. The language leaves unclear whether "advertising, offering, or arranging" conversion therapy of *any* kind is prohibited, or just the kind based on a "deficiency of volitional capacity."

The summary statement aside, however, the law itself clearly bans conversion therapy of all kinds. It prescribes a year in prison as the penalty for violations of the ban itself, and fines of up to 30,000 Euros for violations of the prohibition against advertising, offering, or arranging such therapy.

The ban applies to all persons, not just to those acting in a professional capacity. Parents or legal guardians who "grossly violate their obligations of care and guardianship" by "subjecting" minors to conversion therapy could also be sent to prison. Interestingly, parents who assist with treatment to help a minor achieve his or her "subjectively perceived sexual identity" will not be subject to legal action. But any attempt by parents, legal guardians, pastors, priests, or psychological counsellors to influence a person's subjective notions of sexual orientation or sexual identity is punishable under the law in the Federal Republic of Germany as of May 2020.

Justification by Lies

As icing on the tendentious cake, and just in case anyone should miss the message conveyed by the law's underlying assumptions, the Bundestag's summary of the law provides a justification for it: "In Germany there are still organizations who hold and promote the conviction that non-heterosexual orientations (e.g., homosexuality or bisexuality) or variant gender identities (e.g., transgender identity) constitute a 'disease' requiring treatment." The summary then explains to the eager public the utterly unproven "dangers of conversion therapy" as if they were established scientific facts, adducing as evidence the opinions of the World Health

Organization, the World Medical Association, and the German Congress of Physicians.

In July 2020, Victor Madrigal-Borloz, an "independent expert" on LGBT issues (for which one should read "utterly partisan activist"), presented a report to the UN Human Rights Council recommending a global ban on conversion therapy. He strongly condemned such therapy, saying: "Such practices constitute an egregious violation of rights to bodily autonomy, health, and free expression of one's sexual orientation and gender identity. Ultimately, when conducted forcibly, they also represent a breach to the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment."

In his report, Madrigal-Borloz cited the most extreme cases of sexual and physical abuse of LGBT individuals that he could find. He deftly used these cases—which took place in third-world countries with questionable human rights records—to create a damning narrative, which he then, in a deceptive fashion typical of LGBTQ advocates, presented as typical in Western nations such as Germany and the United States. He also implied that practitioners of conversion therapy consider such abuse essential for success.

A similar strategy was used successfully in 2012 to get the New Jersey legislature to pass a law banning conversion therapy in that state. Horrific witness testimony in support of the ban turned out to be based, not on the witness's personal experience, but on a fictional pro-LGBT movie about attempts to cure a high-school girl of her lesbianism, as well as on urban myths concerning the existence of a "conversion camp" in Ohio called New Directions.¹ In other words, New Jersey lawmakers banned conversion therapy on the basis of highly dramatic but thoroughly false testimony—well, on that along with scientifically questionable, tendentiously interpreted studies.²

Interestingly enough, the supposed risks of undergoing conversion therapy almost precisely overlap those associated with the homosexual lifestyle: increased risk of depression, loss of sex drive, and risk of suicide. Yet people who share the same distorted views as the medical authorities listed above refuse to consider that there *are* any risks associated with homosexuality. In fact, they have successfully lobbied Amazon to ban books that present an honest assessment of the psychological and emotional problems that often accompany homosexual behavior.³ These bans are also exercises in question begging, being based on the assumption that there is never, ever any harm inherent in homosexuality and that no attempt to help those who subjectively experience their same-sex attraction as unwanted can ever be legitimate.

Stan's Case

So much for respecting an individual's right to "bodily autonomy" and the "free expression of one's sexual orientation and gender identity." No such rights are to be respected when they are exercised in contradiction to the philosophy underlying LGBTQ activism. The hypocrisy of both the international medical establishment and of German (and American) lawmakers runs deep here. The principle of "sexual self-determination" they claim to be defending must, if it is to be taken seriously as a guiding ethical principle, also admit to the validity of the views and experiences of those who reject homosexual impulses in themselves and want to be freed from them. That, too, would fall under "sexual self-determination" and "personal autonomy."

I can elucidate this with the hypothetical case of a young man we'll call "Stan." Stan's parents are from Poland, but he grew up in Chicago and was raised Roman Catholic. By his own account, Stan hated every minute of his Catholic upbringing. As a teenager, he expressed his resentment of all things Catholic by purchasing and practically memorizing every new religion-bashing book from the New Atheist crowd he could find, especially ones by authors who trashed the Catholic Church.

Stan continued this anti-Catholic crusade well into college—and yet he found over the years that he increasingly felt an unrelenting, almost irresistible attraction to the very things he claimed to hate most: religion in general and Catholicism in particular. He would attend campus debates pitting Catholic or other Christian apologists against noted atheists just to heckle the religious speakers, but he would also, as covertly as possible, sneak into Mass at the local cathedral. And in the quiet of his apartment, when he was sure no one but his cat could

hear him, he would say the rosary. He loathed himself after every encounter with church and prayer, yet, deep inside, he feared they might be real encounters with the God he was sure did not exist.

Stan hates himself for having these religious feelings, which are implacable and in direct conflict with his declared identity as a person of non-faith. Then, one day on NPR, he hears an interview with a psychotherapist who is advocating a new type of therapy for persons in exactly his situation: those plagued by unwanted but seemingly irresistible religious impulses. It's called "de-conversion therapy." And Stan wants it desperately.

But the L(utheran) G(ideon) B(aptist) T(homist) Q(uaker) lobby opposes de-conversion therapy on the grounds that the religious lifestyle has proven health benefits, not least in the area of fulfilled sexuality, and that the health risks of the atheist lifestyle, which include increased risks of depression and suicide, are well-established by science. For these reasons, they insist that no medical professional should be allowed to counsel poor Stan against his religious feelings. Or even advertise such services. On pain of imprisonment.

Fair Application of Principle

If real LGBTQ activists genuinely sought to promote justice and respect for personal autonomy, they would no more demand a ban on conversion therapy than our hypothetical activists would demand a ban on de-conversion therapy for people like Stan. If the principles of self-determination and personal autonomy matter at all, they have to be allowed to work in either direction, that is, to also favor those seeking conversion therapy (also known as "reparative therapy" or "sexual orientation change efforts") to restore normal sexual impulses in themselves. To borrow a slogan from another moral-political context, "my body, my choice" would seem to apply.

But that is exactly the option that is being foreclosed. As Uwe Heimowski and Reinhardt Schink, writing in *Pro Medienmagazin* in June 2020, put it:

On the other hand, we fear that pastoral and therapeutic counselling of people who are on the search for their sexual identity would fall under this prohibition. The right to sexual self-determination must be guided by the wish of the individual who lives in conflict with his experienced homosexual feelings and impulses, and must allow for a decision to live as heterosexual. Therapeutic support of this desire should not be placed under a general prohibition and criminalized. (my translation)



Right now, German pastors, psychologists, and Christian counsellors find themselves under threat of arrest, imprisonment, and fines for any activity they would undertake in that direction. So do parents. And spouses.

This is exactly right. If the principles of self-determination and individual autonomy are valid and can rightly be used as guides for public policy, then they must apply to those wishing to be-

come ex-homosexuals. The total disregard for these persons' rights reveals the true totalitarian character behind the push for bans on conversion therapy.

Similarly, if concern for the mental and emotional well-being of adolescents is truly the motivating force behind the international push to ban conversion therapy for minors, then there should be a concomitant push to foster religious commitment and family involvement, since the same studies that point to "an unsupportive environment" as a risk factor for suicide among LGBT adolescents also point to religion and strong family bonds as protective factors against teen suicide.⁴

Little to Do with Science

That science has little to do with the global drive to criminalize therapeutic approaches to eliminating unwanted same-sex attraction in persons of any age was addressed in February 2020 by Randall Otto in *The Public Discourse*. In his response to an editorial in *Scientific American* that called for a federal ban on conversion therapy, Otto laid out the issues clearly:

Since the editors at *Scientific American* seem to be very concerned with preventing suicide among teens, one would imagine that they would give significant attention to how best to help young people who experience gender dysphoria. Yet the *Scientific American* website shows little caution regarding the questionable validity of gender affirmation and of social or medical transitioning as treatments for gender-dysphoric children and teens. Instead, its articles strongly affirm both: see for instance "Sex as a Spectrum" and "How to Meet the Needs of Transgender Kids."

Why would *Scientific American* urge a ban on therapies that may free some from a lifestyle that is associated with greater depression and suicide, and yet never question "treatments" for gender dysphoria that lead to increased confusion, depression, and suicidal tendencies?⁵

The answer to Otto's rhetorical question is clear: the editors of that once-august journal have traded science for social engineering aimed at promoting a distorted view of human sexuality. In the legislative push to force acceptance of LGBTQ lifestyles as normative and to punish attempts to eliminate unwanted same-sex attraction, the health and rights of those seeking relief from that unwanted attraction⁶ are being trampled.

In Germany, the ban on conversion therapy is now law, as it is in twenty U.S. states, three Canadian provinces, and several other nations. That Germany, the most powerful nation in continental Western Europe, has joined these other polities in disavowing the autonomy and self-determination of its citizens who seek freedom from same-sex attraction bodes ill for future resistance to these bans. Right now, German pastors, psychologists, and Christian counsellors find themselves under threat of arrest, imprisonment, and fines for any activity they would undertake in that direction. So do parents. And spouses. The cradle of the Reformation, once regarded by many as the birthplace of the modern legal principle of freedom of conscience, has now joined the ranks of willing executors of this same principle. ☹

Notes

1. <https://townhall.com/columnists/michaelbrown/2013/03/25/did-a-gay-activist-lie-to-the-new-jersey-senate-n1548304>.
2. firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2013/09/why-science-doesnt-support-orientation-change-bans.
3. theamericanconservative.com/dreher/amazon-com-homintern-joseph-goebbels-joseph-nicolosi-reparative-therapy.
4. <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/1/e20161420>.
5. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/02/60178>.
6. <https://changedmovement.com>.



The Odds & the Ends

The Chances of Our Three-Tiered Reality
Being a Meaningless Accident Are Nil

by Ken Pedersen

Atheists believe that the universe and everything in it is a meaningless accident. For hundreds of years, they have maintained that science supports their belief in an accidental universe. This is false.

In the last 75 years, modern science has discovered the design of reality and has shown that it is mathematically impossible that this complex, multi-layered design could have emerged from a series of random accidents.

Just a few decades ago, humanity had not discovered computers and did not appreciate the power of digital information processing. Now science has discovered that three remarkably sophisticated digital processing systems form the structure of, first, the physical dimension of reality; second, of all life; and finally, of the mental dimension of reality. Consider what we have learned.

Digital Processing System #1

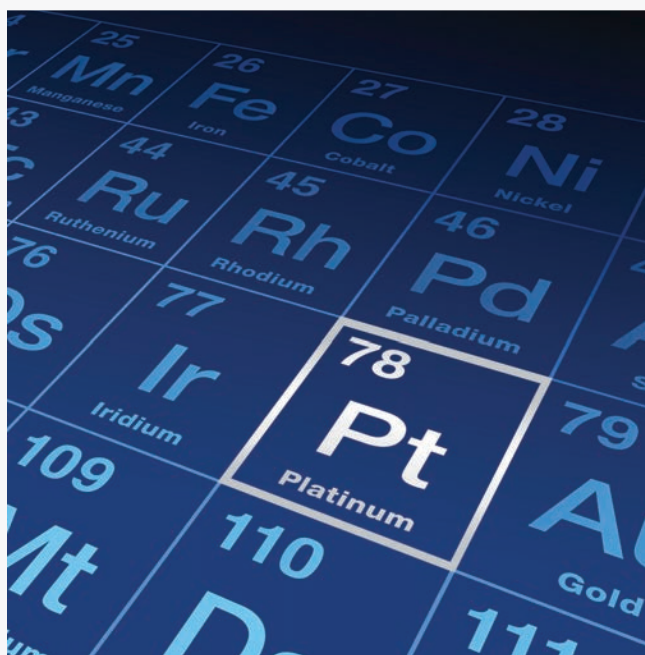
Physical Reality

The essence of physical reality is three quantum fields: the electron, the up quark, and the down quark. Amazingly, these quantum fields are immaterial tiny clouds of pure energy that encode digital information scientists call their quantum state. The quantum fields act as digital processors that enforce a strict set of rules that control how they will manage the value of their quantum state as they flow through time.¹

The quantum computing that controls the behavior of these elemental quantum fields results in the emergence of just a few very special stable patterns of energy and information: protons, neutrons, and the atoms they can create. These larger patterns of quantum fields are all new, more complex, digital processing systems that create and enforce new, more complex layers of rules.

For instance, atoms act as tiny digital computers, constantly monitoring and controlling what discrete energy levels they will allow their electrons to have. Different atoms on the periodic table have different numbers of electrons, and that creates a different set of rules defining how each of the 92 atomic elements can behave.

The digital processing of this atomic alphabet results in the emergence of different types of molecules, which are all unique spatial combinations of atoms. Molecules are effectively complex parallel processors, each enforcing a unique set of rules (chemical properties) entirely determined by the composite rule set created by their spatial array of these tiny atomic computers.



Hydrogen clouds, galaxies, stars, radiant energy, stardust, molecules, planets—everything in physical reality emerges from all of this digital processing at the quantum field, atomic, and molecular levels. It is a magnificently complex and mysterious processing system, with each layer precisely anticipating the information required by the next layer of the design. As discussed in the book *A Fortunate Universe*,² these rules and values had to be fine-tuned precisely as they are for this system to enable the emergence of Earth and all of its wondrous possibilities.

Digital Processing System #2

DNA & Life

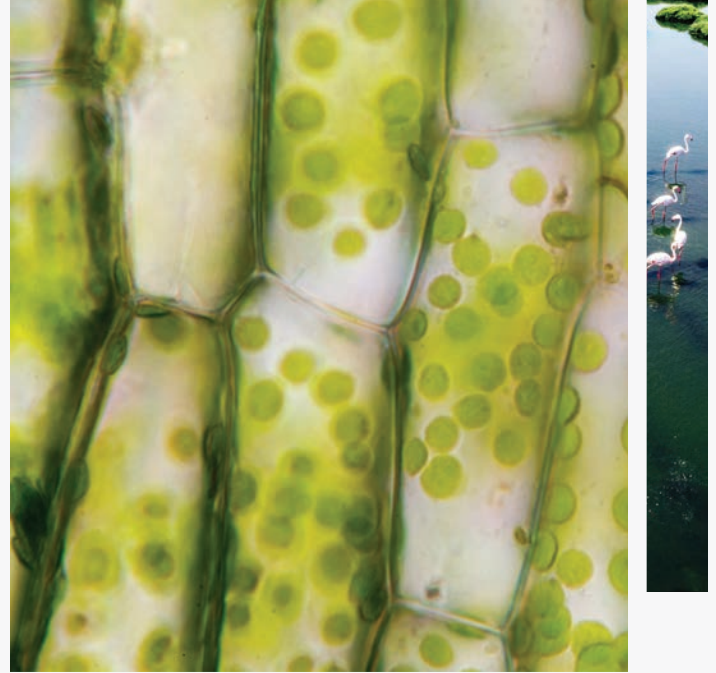
Science has discovered that the foundational unit of all life, a living cell, is a highly complex digital processing system. Cells are tiny robotic-like communities controlled by the digital program stored within their DNA molecule.

The DNA program starts with the capability to control the remarkable complexity of a single cell, creating and controlling protein workers in automated factories assembling millions of parts per second. Somewhere within its 6.2 billion bits' worth of digital code, DNA stores the design of your entire body: every cell, every capillary, every organ, your brain, your senses, your physical and mental capabilities.

It has recently been discovered that over 80 percent of the DNA code is being used to produce RNA.³ Scientists are beginning to explore the remarkable complexity and sophistication of the resulting immense program stored in human DNA. This "software sophistication" starts with the fact that it takes several totally different sections of code, cooperating in a mysterious but elegant manner, to achieve the specific features and processes that create you.

The DNA program is also a marvelously adaptive program, which expresses and suppresses sections of code and their actions, depending upon the situation—the type of cell, the current state of that cell, and the environment. This results in entire sections of code being used only on a very selective basis. The intelligence to do the selecting is somehow written into the DNA program itself.

The computer system that reads and acts upon this huge adaptive program has to be contained within the structure of the cell. However, there are hundreds of different types of cells in your body, and the physical and chemical conditions within any one cell constantly vary with time. Consequently, your body has hundreds of different types of time-varying organic computer systems reading and acting upon the digital program stored in your



DNA, and you have over 32 trillion cells constantly performing this processing.

It is a giant step in digital processing capability to go from the rigid rules controlling the quantum fields, atoms, and molecules of System #1 to the remarkably complex adaptive program stored within your DNA and the myriad of different time-varying organic computer systems reading that code.

Digital Processing System #3

The Mental Dimension

The mental dimension mysteriously emerges from the digital processing of a network of over 86 billion neurons within your brain. Each neuron is a digital processing device that can turn on or off about two hundred times per second, depending upon the sum of its received inputs. Consequently, the information-handling capability of your brain emerges from vast interconnected networks of these digital processing neurons.

Your senses take information from the physical world and translate it into a code that nerves carry to the brain. Then digital networks in your brain process this code and somehow translate it into your experiencing the physical world in full color, with surround-sound, tastes, fragrances, and pain or pleasure.

Your memory prioritizes these experiences and "decides" which ones to "remember"; these are encoded into structural changes in selected neuron networks. Based upon studies of how digital neural networks "learn," it is thought that further structural changes in the wiring of our neural networks allow us to learn from our memories.

However, we have no analogies for how these digital processing networks might cause the emergence of curiosity or imagination or creativity or free will or emotions. At this point, all we have is

speculations. However, all of these mental superpowers must emerge from the activity of this vast digital processing network.

To glimpse the complexity of this processing network within your brain, assume we could “inflate” the elemental quantum fields (electrons and quarks) to the size of marbles. On this scale, atoms would be hundreds of miles in diameter, with only a handful of these “marbles” inside each of them. Neurons would be tens of thousands of miles long, each with hundreds or even thousands of interconnections. Your brain would be 15 million times larger than our solar system out to Pluto. Each of its trillion-trillion-trillion quantum fields (the “marbles” in your brain) could be making digital decisions more than a trillion-trillion-trillion times per second.

All of this quantum processing supports the emergence of all of the higher-order digital processing being executed by this vast network of neurons. Then, of course, the miracle happens: consciousness and the whole mental dimension emerges into reality within your brain.

The information processing of the mental capabilities that emerge from system #3 is a giant step in information-handling complexity over the adaptive coding instructions of the DNA-stored program of system #2.

Reality would be a dark, silent, unappreciated waste of energy and information without a mental dimension. Try to imagine a meaningful purpose for any design of reality that did not culminate in a mental dimension. For that matter, try to imagine a meaningful design of reality that did not include free will or emotions. A network of intelligent, emotional minds, each capable of writing and living its own story is the ideal cherry on top of this reality sundae. It is the only goal that could result in this total design being meaningful.

Most scientists believe that consciousness, your mind, and the entire mental dimension somehow emerge from all the digital processing that goes on within system #3. Yet despite all we have learned, we still have no idea of how consciousness emerges or even exactly what it is.

The Probability of Accident versus Design

I am a system engineer. System engineers start with an objective, a goal, and then use the rules of physical reality to build layers of technology—components, subsystems, and software—that they then assemble into a final system designed to achieve that original goal.

Any system engineering analysis of how the mental dimension stands upon all the layers of digital processing below it and results in the emergence of the most complex information-processing layer of the design would have to conclude that the mental dimension is the goal, the purpose, of the entire design.

Now, how and why do these three digital processing systems exist and constantly execute these layers of interlocking rules? It is one thing for atheists and scientific materialists to claim that all of reality is caused by a series of random accidents. However, if we wish to honor the scientific method, we must examine the mathematics of what random accidents can and cannot do.⁴

Ignore for a moment the big mysteries, such as: Why do energy and information exist and take the form of interacting quantum fields? What is this force we call life? And what is this magical thing we experience as consciousness? Assume that energy, information, life, and consciousness are all given, and all we need to do is to mathematically model and examine the complexity of each of the three digital processing systems that science has discovered so as to evaluate the probability that they (and thus, reality) could have resulted from a series of random accidents.

The Probability of System #1

Physical Reality

Quantum fields, relativity, radiant energy, an immortal energy force guided by intricate layers of information processing rules—physical reality is bizarre, beautiful, amazingly complex, and elegantly designed. But most scientists simply overlook the immense complexity, bizarre beauty, and total impossibility of random accidents resulting in our physical universe, so let’s move on to examine the probabilities of the DNA program emerging by accident.



The Probability of System #2

DNA Processing

Many scientists have studied the probability of random accidents writing our DNA program. Douglas Axe⁵ and others have shown that it is mathematically impossible that, within the time and opportunity constraints of life on Earth, random accidents could have stumbled upon the DNA code required to design even a few of the thousands of different proteins in our bodies. And finding the protein codes is a very small part of creating the entire DNA program.

The Probability of System #3

The Mental Dimension

Your brain is quite possibly the most complex design in the universe, and your mind the most sophisticated information-handling system in the universe. As a system engineer who has participated in the design of some of our most sophisticated information-processing systems, I firmly believe that the probability of accidentally wiring the over 90,000,000,000 neurons in your brain and nervous system and then accidentally causing electrons and quarks to form intelligent minds with free will, imagination, emotions, and all the other mental powers we are blessed with is zero. And it could not be just an accident that these resulting capabilities are the only capabilities that could result in the entire multilayered design of reality having a meaningful purpose.

Evidence & Mathematics Versus an Imagined Multiverse

A system engineer has to honor what the mathematics of information theory and probability theory have to say about what random accidents can do. Any serious mathematical analysis of the three extremely complex digital processing systems that form reality quickly leads to the conclusion that it is absurd to believe that it all could have been caused by random accidents. These three interconnected systems must be the result of an intentional design, and because of their amazing complexity and the intricate beauty of how they interact to achieve their goal, it has to be a very intelligent, intentional design.⁴

This amazing scientific fact is not a secret. Many atheists who understand probability theory and system engineering have reached the same conclusion. Others stubbornly hold fast to their atheism by throwing all the scientific evidence and math-

ematical analysis under the bus and blindly claiming that everything has to happen somewhere, in some imagined multiverse.



The Grand Overarching Digital Design

For the last 80 years, physicists have been on a quest to find a mathematical system that would unify the rules of quantum mechanics and relativity in hope of discovering the Grand Unified Theory that would explain the essence of reality.

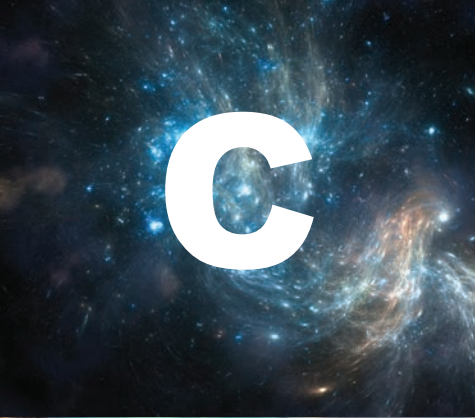
While such a unifying equation would truly be a grand achievement, I don't believe it could capture the essence of reality. That is because scientists have already revealed the essence of reality to be the immortal force—i.e., energy—and the finely tuned, interlocking layers of information-processing rules it is compelled to obey in the three interconnected digital processing systems I have described.

Today, the Grand Question is not how to make quantum mechanics and relativity compatible. Rather, the Grand Questions are: Where did all of these layers of information-processing rules come from? Why does the immortal force—energy—exist and dance to those rules? And why do all the layers of rules fit together so perfectly to guide the flow of energy and information from networks of quantum fields to the emergence of life and then on to the creation of consciousness and networks of intelligent, emotional minds?

To date, scientists have not found the Grand Unified Theory; instead, they have discovered the Grand Overarching Digital Design of energy and information that creates the structure and heartbeat of reality. The question now is: What impact should the scientific discovery of these unbelievably complex, cooperating information-processing systems have on the worldview of a rational person in the 21st century? What impact should it have on you and your view of life? As for me and many others, we *used to be* atheists. ☉

Notes

1. Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe* (Vintage, 2000).
2. Luke Barnes, *A Fortunate Universe* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).
3. Jonathan Wells, *Zombie Science* (Discovery Institute Press, 2017).
4. Ken Pedersen, *Modern Science Proves Intelligent Design* (Archway Publishing, 2019).
5. Douglas Axe, *Undeniable* (HarperOne, 2016).



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We find that we live in an insignificant universe, in a humdrum galaxy, lost in a cosmic foam, tucked away in some forgotten corner of a multiverse, in which there are far more universes than people.

—Science popularizer Tyson Karls

CHAOS

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Why the name change? What was wrong with *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey*?

The word *cosmos* implies that the galaxies or universes can be regarded as an orderly, harmonious system.

Since random accidents can only *appear* orderly and harmonious, we conclude that the application of this term will mislead the public imagination toward design, or worse yet, creation—thus leading individuals to adopt regressive voting habits.

No Place Like Home?

***Are There Planets More
Habitable Than Earth?***

by Hugh Ross

With all the problems humans face managing Earth's resources for the benefit of all, many people wonder about the feasibility of abandoning Earth and moving to a superior home. Are there, as some researchers suggest, planets better suited for habitability than Earth? Three astronomers at the University of Washington think so. They have published a paper listing 24 candidates as possibilities for "superhabitable" planets.¹ Naturally, their paper has caused quite a stir, especially on the internet.

Superhabitability Criteria

The three astronomers argue that if certain characteristics of the Sun-Earth-Moon system were altered, our planet would be even more suitable for us humans and our living companions than it already is. The search for such a residence would focus on the following combination of features:

• Smaller Sun

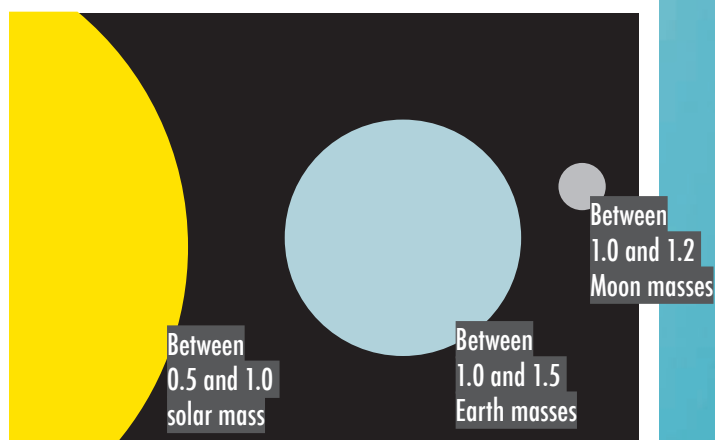
The rate at which a star burns through its nuclear fuel is proportional to its mass. Therefore, the research team speculated, life would be better off on a planet orbiting a star less massive than the Sun. Such a star would spend more of its history in a temperature range that's appropriate for the needs of life on a nearby planet. The star must not be too small, however, given that stars with less than half the Earth's mass frequently emit deadly superflares.

So the team concluded that superhabitable planets would orbit stars between 0.5 and 1.0 solar mass, stars more than one billion years old, and stars that are well into their more stable burning cycle.

• Larger Planet

Biomass and biodiversity are constrained, obviously, by the amount of habitable surface area. Thus, the team concluded that life would be better off on a planet that is larger than Earth. They also argued that a more massive planet would possess a thicker atmosphere, which would enable more flying species to exist. Research shows, however, that planets 50 percent more massive than Earth possess ultra-thick atmospheres, such as Neptune's, with the wrong composition to meet living creatures' respiratory needs.

So the team concluded that superhabitable planets would be about 10 percent larger than Earth, with masses measuring between 1.0 and 1.5 Earth masses.



• Greater Tidal Forces

The Moon exerts tidal forces on Earth that create diverse habitats along the seashores of continents and islands. On this basis, the trio suggested that life on a planet could benefit from stronger tidal forces than those the Moon currently exerts on Earth

• Other Characteristics

In addition to these three primary superhabitability features, the astronomers suggested that life would benefit from the following alterations: (1) more, or all, of the planet's surface should

be as moist and warm as the Amazon jungle; (2) the planet's atmospheric oxygen level should be a few percent higher, and (3) the planet's land-masses should be broken up into smaller continents and islands, with large areas of shallow seas between them. The astronomers also noted the crucial requirements of a strong, sustained (for several billion years) magnetic field to shield the planet from cosmic radiation, as well as strong (but not too strong) and enduring plate tectonic activity.

Prospective Planetary Candidates

As of October 7, 2020, the Exoplanet Catalog listed 4,357 extrasolar planets observationally confirmed to exist.² From an analysis of this catalog, as well as catalogs of unconfirmed extrasolar (possible) planets, the team produced a list of 24 planetary candidates. Exercising considerable caution (given the large probable errors in the measurements of these

exoplanets' characteristics), the researchers referred to these planets as "possible candidates" only. More importantly, only two of the 24 planets—Kepler 1126b and Kepler 69c—have been statistically confirmed to exist.

Here's what we know about these two planets' characteristics:



Kepler 1126b

This planet's host star has a mass equal to 0.92 solar masses, within the desired range. But the planet itself has an orbital period of just 108.6 days. This orbital period implies a proximity to the host star that would make tidal locking unavoidable. Moreover, the planet's diameter is 69 percent larger than Earth's, and its mass is estimated to equal 3.64 Earth masses.³ According to these details, while the host star of Kepler 1126b meets the hoped-for criteria, the planet itself departs from them. As an additional challenge, its lack of gas giant companions means that Kepler 1126b is likely subject to intense bombardment by asteroids and comets.

Kepler 69c

This planet's host star has an appropriate mass (0.81 solar masses), but it lacks other essentials. For one thing, it is only about 400 million years old. It is also significantly less rich than the Sun in elements heavier than helium. The planet itself has a diameter equal to 1.69 Earth diameters, and an estimated mass equal to 6 Earth masses. Its orbital period is 242.5 days, and its orbital eccentricity level is 0.14. At this eccentricity level, its proximity to its host star is highly variable and, thus, so is its degree of incident radiation. So, in the case of Kepler 69c, both the planet and its host star fail to meet the super-habitability criteria.

Questionable Criteria for Candidacy

For Stars:

Research does indicate that a star *more* massive than the Sun consumes its nuclear fuel too quickly to allow for any microbial life on a nearby planet being able to prepare the planet's surface for more advanced life. However, stars that are either slightly more massive or slightly less massive than the Sun will never possess a time window of sufficient duration to meet the needs of advanced life, including a period of extreme luminosity (brightness), stability, and very limited flaring activity. Where a star lacks sufficiently stable brightness (a contributor to appropriate surface temperature) and produces overly abundant flaring activity (a contributor to deadly or disruptive radiation bursts), the development on an orbiting planet of conditions approximating those needed for a balanced ecosystem, or conducive to civilization, would likely be impossible.⁴

Note that a star's luminosity falls exponentially (by about the fourth power) in relation to its mass.

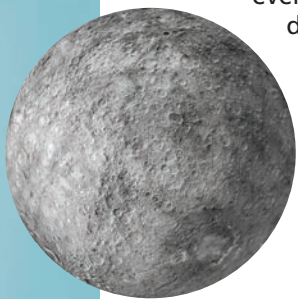
So a planet orbiting a star less massive than the Sun must be closer to its host star to enjoy sufficient luminosity for life. But this lesser distance also means that the planet will be subject to more intense radiation from the star's flares, radiation harmful to life.

Much more problematic, however, would be the planet's subjection to its star's much stronger tidal forces. These tidal forces rise exponentially (by the fourth power) as the distance between the star and the planet decreases. Thus, a star need be only slightly less massive than the Sun before its tidal force on a candidate planet would slow that planet's rotation period to a level too low for life's survival. (Slower rotation means greater temperature extremes between day and night.) As it is, Earth is at the minimum distance from the Sun to avoid such a catastrophe. Venus, with a rotation period of 243 days, is not.

For Moons:

A moon more massive than our Moon would seem likely to generate stronger tides, thus providing more habitable space for certain marine animals. However, a more massive Moon would also slow the rotation period of its host planet. And a slower rotation rate would eliminate other habitable space. Indeed, if it were much slower, it would eliminate *all* habitable space. If Earth's Moon were

even two percent more massive, it would destabilize the tilt of Earth's rotation axis such that, instead of tilting back and forth by only two degrees, our planet's rotation axis would tilt back and forth by tens of degrees.⁵ Such violent movement would generate climatic alterations catastrophic to life.



Earth's Extraordinary Habitability

In addition to offering the appropriate size, tides, atmosphere, and orbital characteristics, Earth may be considered extraordinarily suitable for life in other ways. For example, several of its exceptional interior features keep Earth's internal heat flow at an extremely high level,⁶ allowing for the long-term plate tectonic activity that built continents and continues to recycle nutrients.

For such activity to be possible, a thin, low-viscosity, semi-molten asthenosphere layer must reside at a fine-tuned depth below the planet's crust of rigid solid plates. The existence of such an asthenosphere requires a specific quantity of water to be moving in a continuous flow from the planet's surface into the mantle, where it serves as a lubricant. Moreover, for this recycling system to work, there must be a certain (high) abundance of available aluminum.⁷ And, as it turns out, Earth's crust has 31.9 times as much aluminum, and its mantle 8.3 times as much aluminum, as the average rocky body in the universe.

Even if another planet somehow matched Earth's internal heat flow, aluminum abundance,

For Planets:

As with the Moon, increasing a planet's own mass would not lead to improved habitability. A more massive planet will accrete a much thicker atmosphere. Even Earth, as massive as it is now, had an original atmosphere and hydrosphere that were about 200 times thicker than they are today. It took an extremely rare and highly fine-tuned event—proto-Earth's collision with a planet 11–15 percent as massive as Earth is today—to reduce Earth's atmosphere and hydrosphere down to their current thinness. (This same collision formed our Moon.)

A *slightly* thicker atmosphere might make it easier for certain animals to fly, but the thicker the atmosphere, the more energy is required for animals to breathe. Lungs fail to function altogether when the atmospheric pressure increases by three times its current level.

and fine-tuned water subduction, its asthenosphere would have to reside at a just-right depth, and its depth would depend on the mass of the planet. For planets larger than Earth, the asthenosphere would be at too great a depth to facilitate the necessary movement; for planets smaller than Earth, the asthenosphere would be at too shallow a level.

The three astronomers' research paper on alternative planetary habitats—superhabitable ones, at that—understandably generated internet buzz, but more importantly, it brought attention to the very real constraints on a planet's habitability. Thus, it can help us appreciate the exceptional characteristics of our home—a planet like no other, orbiting a star like no other, and orbited by a moon like no other. ☺



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Don't Ask

Common Descent or Common Design?

by Jonathan Witt

Kids often look like their parents. That isn't surprising. They're closely related. Evolutionists expand this logic, pointing to similarities across species, classes, and phyla to argue that we are all descended from a common ancestor, the seed of Darwin's great tree of life. DNA, for example, crops up everywhere in the living world. Why? According to evolutionists, it's because we are all descended from one or a few single-celled organisms that contained DNA. And by evolved, they mean evolved blindly—without intelligent guidance.



More than a few times I have encountered this common features/common ancestor conclusion presented as if it were self-evident truth. But it actually involves a basic confusion.

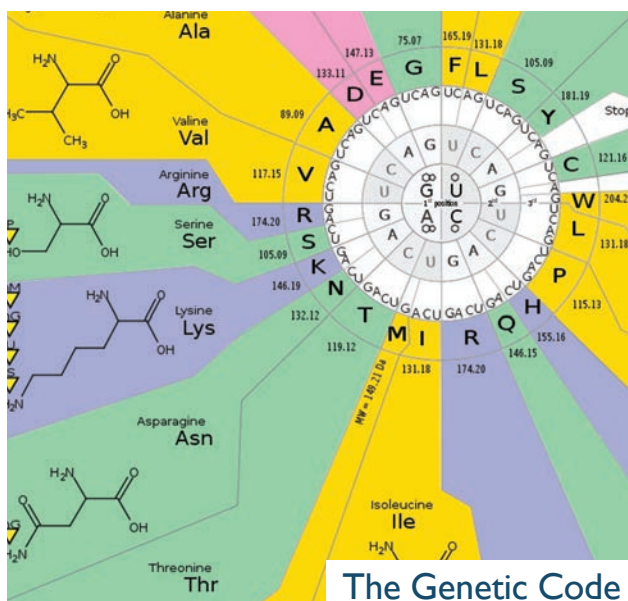
To say that similarities prove common descent ignores a logical possibility: that common features may instead

be due to a common design strategy. Think of cars. A Tesla and a Cadillac share many features—four wheels, synthetic rubber tires, brakes, two axles, windshield wipers, headlights. But of course, none of that means that Teslas blindly evolved from Cadillacs, or vice versa. Designers re-use design features proven to work for specific engineering needs, even while they innovate in alternative directions, as Tesla CEO and engineer Elon Musk has with his electric cars.

We see this pattern even across disparate technology platforms. In one case, the wheel is used and adapted for a water mill. In another case, for a gear in a watch. In another case, for a bicycle. In still another case, for a pizza cutter. In yet another, for a truck. And in another, for a self-balancing scooter (aka “hoverboard”).

So, what about with living things? Might a designer of life have used and reused various good design concepts in widely different biological contexts? The only way to jump straight from biological similarities to common descent via blind evolution is to rule out the design hypothesis from the start—to treat it as the idea that must not be considered, the thought that must not be thought. But if we are seeking the truth about the history of life on Earth, we shouldn't let ourselves be bullied into ignoring one option and accepting the other as unquestionable dogma.

To rule out the design hypothesis from the start is to commit the fallacy known as begging the question. For some, it's just an honest mistake, such that if you point it out, the person will realize the logical error and stop making it. For others, it's a tactic to shut down debate and protect modern evolutionary theory from critique.



OFF LIMITS

For those confronted with the logical error, one countermove is to say that the design hypothesis “isn’t science”—as if there is a single, inarguable definition of science. Actually, what’s called the demarcation question in science—the line between what is and isn’t science—is a complex and hotly debated issue among the experts on the question, namely, philosophers of science. Different fields of science offer overlapping and sometimes contradictory definitions of what constitutes science.

For instance, some definitions rule out any hypothesis that invokes unobservable entities. But that would rule out a great deal of what’s going on in quantum physics, which has made all kinds of interesting breakthroughs. Other scientists insist that repeatable experiments done in laboratory conditions constitute the heart and soul of science, and that without such experiments, you don’t have science. But this definition rules out all historical sciences—from cosmology to archeology to forensics to evolutionary biology, since the historical sciences all make claims about unrepeatable events in the past.

Stephen Meyer, who received his Ph.D. in the history and philosophy of science from the University of Cambridge (and directs the center where I serve as a senior fellow), argues that modern evolutionary theory and intelligent design are “methodologically equivalent.”¹ Both are trying to answer the same questions about past events. Both employ what’s known as *inference to the best explanation*.

The one difference between them methodologically is that modern Darwinism appeals to a question-begging rule, according to which origins biologists

must consider only material causes—never intelligent causes. But, Meyer notes, the very point at issue is blind evolution versus intelligent design, so this extra rule, known as methodological materialism, amounts to a refusal to engage the evidence and arguments of the opposing position.

Such a move should not impress anyone, regardless of the sophisticated-sounding terminology used to describe it. Ruling out the design hypothesis by saying it “isn’t science” just dresses up the question-begging in a lab coat. It’s still question-begging. And it doesn’t shed any fresh light on how new plant and animal forms arose in the history of life. Science should be about truth-seeking and evidence, not rigged games.

What does the evidence suggest is the best explanation for the origin of new plants and animals in the history of life? Some form of blind evolution? Or does important evidence in nature strongly suggest that intelligent design was involved? And what new findings might count in favor of one option over the other? Those are the kind of questions characteristic of an unfettered, truth-seeking scientific culture.

Our DNA codes for things like blood and bone and muscle, for arms and legs, fingers and toes, eyes and ears, mouth and nose. These are all things chimps and humans both have. Should we be shocked that the designer stuck with a superb software system when it came time to design human beings?

WHAT STORY DOES DNA TELL?

Return to the example of DNA. We find it in everything from bacteria to Beethoven. DNA is digital information that codes for biological machinery and form. We are told that chimpanzee DNA and human DNA are 98 percent similar, supposedly just what we should expect if humans evolved from a chimp-like ancestor. But that percentage figure drops if you compare bigger units of DNA. And since DNA codes for function, we should expect chimps and humans to share a lot of similar DNA software.

Even prominent evolutionist Francis Collins conceded this point in his book *The Language of God*.² After all, our DNA codes for things like blood and bone and muscle, for arms and legs, fingers and toes, eyes and ears, mouth and nose. These are all things chimps and humans both have. Should we be shocked that the designer stuck with a superb software system when it came time to design human beings? No, and all the more so since there are major functional advantages to having a biosphere with a shared system of biological information across kingdoms, phyla, and families.

But Collins and others say other genetic evidence does cinch the case for common descent. One example they give is what is colloquially referred to as *junk DNA*—stretches of DNA that don't code for proteins. But today the whole idea of junk DNA is in retreat as geneticists discover more and more uses for the stuff. Collins himself now admits the whole business of junk DNA was badly oversold. As journalist Marvin Olasky reported in *World* magazine:

Speaking at the J. P. Morgan Healthcare Conference in San Francisco, Collins threw in the towel: "In terms of junk DNA, we don't use that term anymore because I think it was pretty much a case of hubris to imagine that

we could dispense with any part of the genome, as if we knew enough to say it wasn't functional. . . . Most of the genome that we used to think was there for spacer turns out to be doing stuff."³

Neo-Darwinism led evolutionists to assume that most of our DNA would prove to be junk left over from evolution's trial-and-error process. In contrast, intelligent design theorists predicted that "junk DNA" would prove to have function. The common-descent hypothesis led to a failed prediction. The common-design hypothesis made no such prediction.

Collins advanced a second line of evidence that chimps and humans share a common ancestor, evidence that also has run into trouble. Collins writes that human chromosome 2 is the result of the fusion of two chromosomes similar to those found in chimps. He notes that chimps and other great apes have 24 pairs of chromosomes, whereas humans have just 23. Collins says that if we assume common ape/human ancestry and a fusion event for chromosome 2 in humans, it nicely explains why we have one fewer pair of chromosomes than apes do—something "very difficult to understand . . . without postulating a common ancestor" between humans and apes.⁴



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But there are two problems here. First, if there was a fusion event, it doesn't necessarily point to shared ancestry with chimps. Casey Luskin summarizes the matter well in *Science and Human Origins*. "At most, the chromosomal fusion evidence strengthens something we already knew—that chimps and humans have high genetic similarity," he writes. "Such functional similarities may just as easily be the result of functional requirements implemented via common design."⁵

Second, and as Luskin also explains, it turns out that it's not even clear that chromosome 2 is the result of a fusion event between what used to be two separate chromosomes. As a paper in *Genome Research* reported, the sequence of DNA in question is shorter than expected if it were the result of a fusion event, and the sequence has diverged "from the prototypic telomeric repeats" far more than expected.⁶ The authors of the paper then offer some possible explanations for the unexpected finding, none of which involve consideration of the possibility that humans are intelligently designed and not the result of blind evolution from ape-like ancestors. The design hypothesis, remember, is the thought that must not be thought.

EVOLUTIONARY TREES SPRINGING UP LIKE DANDELIONS

If we step back from chromosome 2 in humans and look at genetic evidence more broadly, we find a bigger problem with the idea of the macroevolution of all life from a common ancestor. Finnish bioengineer Matti Leisola and I highlight that problem in our book *Heretic: One Scientist's Journey from Darwin to Design*:

In 1965 one of the most important scientists of the last century, Linus Pauling, and biologist Emil Zuckerkandl, considered by some as the father of molecular biology, suggested a way that macroevolution could be tested and proved: If the comparison of anatomical and DNA sequences led to the same family tree of organisms, this would be strong evidence for macroevolution.⁷ According to them, only evolution would explain the convergence of these two independent chains of evidence. By implication, the opposite finding would count against macroevolution.

So what were the results? Over the past twenty-eight years, experimental evidence has revealed that family trees based on anatomical features contradict family trees

based on molecular similarities, and at many points. They do not converge. Just as troubling for the idea of macroevolution, family trees based on different molecules yield conflicting and contradictory family trees. As a 2012 paper published in *Biological Reviews of the Cambridge Philosophical Society* reported, "Incongruence between phylogenies derived from morphological *versus* molecular analyses, and between trees based on different subsets of molecular sequences has become pervasive as datasets have expanded rapidly in both characters and species" (emphasis in original).⁸

Another paper, published the following year in the journal *Nature*, highlighted the extent of the problem.⁹ The authors compared 1,070 genes in twenty different yeasts and got 1,070 different trees.¹⁰

These results are unexpected, even bizarre, on the assumption that all life evolved from a single common ancestor through a long series of small, random genetic mutations over millions of years. But if Darwinian evolution only explains modest differences among closely related species, and if the various similarities and differences across plants and animals of widely varying types are primarily due to an intelligent designer reusing genetic information for common purposes and fresh DNA sequences for innovations, the persistent failure of a single tree of life to emerge makes perfect sense: there is no evolutionary tree of life, because common descent isn't the case. A common designer is. ☉

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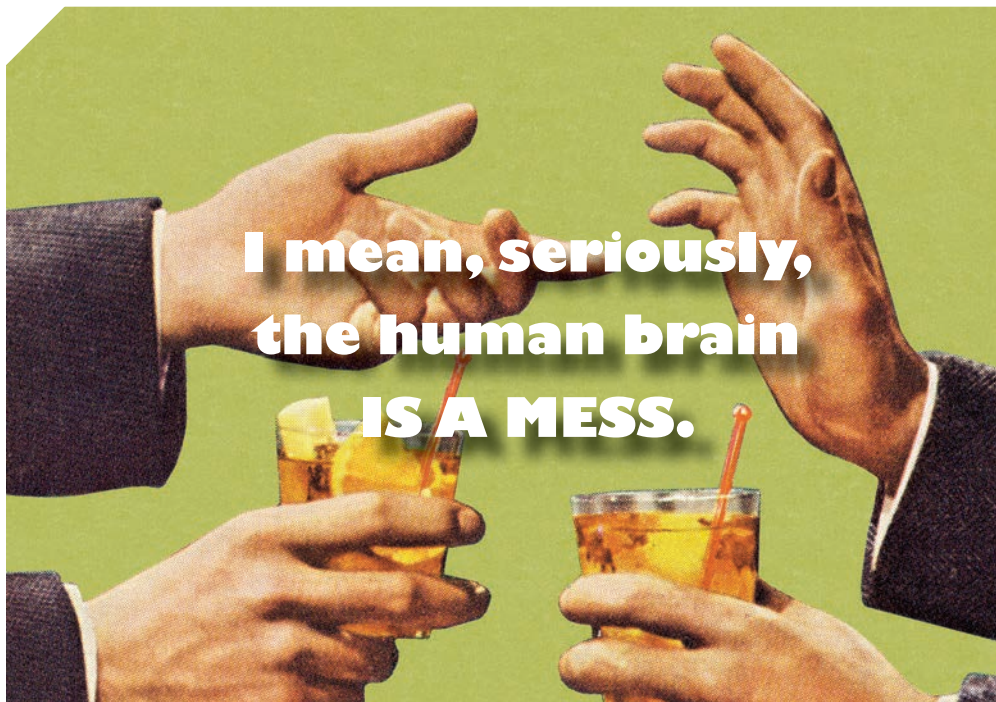


A Cocktail Party Challenge

Defending the Existence of the Mind Among Naturalist Atheists

by Denyse O'Leary

Most of the university cocktail set is quite sure that the mind is simply what the brain does. To doubt that, in their view, is to part company with science. And yet the evidence points in the opposite direction. If you are stuck with them, here are some snatches of their usual brilliance, along with suggested replies and their sources.



ARGUMENTS . . . *from Evolution*

Claim: We are just animals, so, as we might expect, the human brain is not really unique. The human, mouse, and fly brains all use the same basic mechanisms!¹

Response: That's the remarkable part. What we do with our brains sets us apart. And greater size doesn't really account for that. Lemurs, whose brains are only 1/200th the size of chimps' brains, did as well as chimps on a primate intelligence test.²

Claim: We now know how the human mind evolved. Quite simply, it evolved to help our ancestors hunt more efficiently in groups.

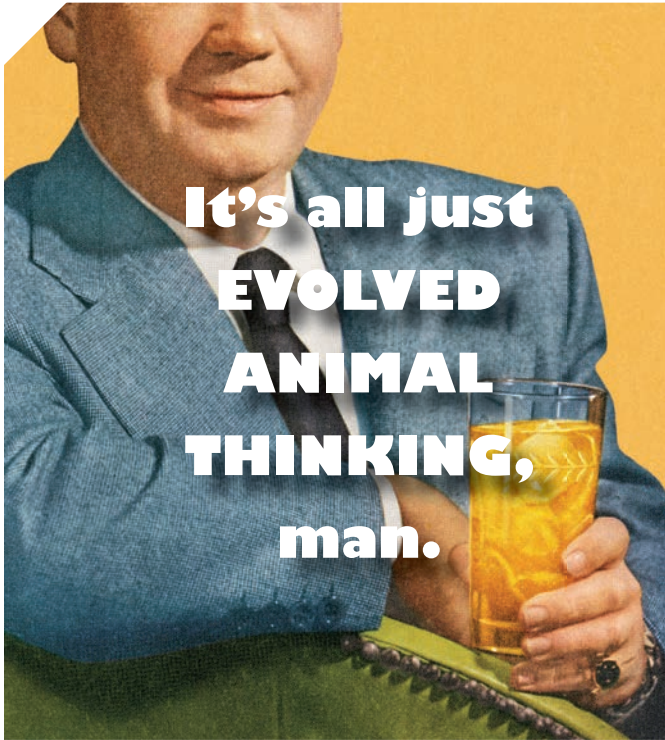
Response: Wolves hunt efficiently in groups without anything like human consciousness. Microorganisms hunt efficiently without any brain at all. A human mind allows us to do many remarkable things, but it is not needed for basic survival.³ That's one reason why human consciousness is called a Hard Problem.⁴

Claim: The human brain is a mess, the haphazard outcome of millions of years of evolution, not of some sort of divine design.

Response: Actually, neuroscientists were recently surprised to discover that the white matter (connectome) in human brains is quite orderly, hardly a haphazard accumulation at all.⁵

Claim: Okay, perhaps the mind just emerged, slowly over eons, from the brain.

Response: The mind cannot just "emerge from" the brain if the two have no qualities in common—the one is immaterial, the other material. Pretty big gap.⁶



ARGUMENTS ... *from Neuroscience*

Claim: Brain damage shows that the mind is really just the brain. Damage the brain and the mind goes . . . poof!

Response: That might be a good argument if things always happened that way. But a common treatment for severe epilepsy is to split the brain in half. The patient usually suffers only minor disabilities.⁷ Some people think and speak with only half a brain.⁸

Modern neuroscience is also shedding light on the minds of people in a so-called persistent vegetative state (PVS). The preferred new term is "disorders of consciousness." For example, in one study, "Remarkably, five patients were able to willfully modulate their brain activity, suggesting that, though unable to express any outward signs of consciousness at the bedside, they could understand and follow the researchers' instructions."⁹ Generally speaking, people in a coma can hear and understand us.¹⁰

Brain damage is a serious business, but it hardly shows that the mind is not real. Modern neuroscience enables us to identify many instances of humans struggling to express themselves using the available resources. That's sometimes called neuroplasticity.¹¹

Claim: More sophisticated brain scans will show, via the consensus of hundreds of studies, that there really isn't any mind, just a brain.

Response: The present state of the field doesn't offer that kind of hope. In a recent study including 70 research groups, sharp limitations in the value of brain imaging (fMRI) in understanding the mind were identified.¹² There is poor correlation between different scans of even the same person's brain.¹³ Sure, the technology will likely improve, but neuroplasticity and constant activity may mean that this problem persists.

Claim: But we're zeroing in now on exactly how the brain functions. There's nothing mysterious about it. It's just evolved animal thinking, not some "mind."

Response: Even basic facts about how the brain operates are hotly contested. One basic assumption has been that the brain operates like a series of switches. But we now find, for example, that most parts of the brain are involved in processing signals arising from touch. We know that human thinking is different from animal thinking by its results. But just how it comes to be different has not been found in the brain and is still mysterious.¹⁴

Claim: In the end, despite all this, don't most professional neuroscientists say that the mind is just the brain?

Response: Many scientists believe that, not because of evidence, but because they are materialists. Thought through carefully, the idea doesn't even make sense, as neurosurgeon Michael Egnor points out: "How do we believe that there are no beliefs? If eliminative materialism is true, then their own belief in eliminative materialism isn't a belief. It's a physical state, a certain concentration of neurochemicals that we (the uninitiated) foolishly call a belief."¹⁵ In fact, the mind's reality is consistent with neuroscience.¹⁶ It's not popular with many neuroscientists, but that is a different matter.

Claim: But surely no *well-known* neuroscientist doubts the consensus that the mind is just the brain!

Response: The great mid-twentieth century neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield offered three lines of reasoning for such doubts, based on brain surgeries he performed on over a thousand patients.¹⁷ Other neuroscience pioneers have arrived at the position that the mind is more than the brain through their research. They include Nobelist Roger Sperry (split brain) and Benjamin Libet (free will).¹⁸

ARGUMENTS ... *from the Inevitable Triumph of Technology*

Claim: Aren't computer programs being developed that think just like people?

Response: No. There are a number of reasons why computer programs can't and won't ever think just like people. Quite apart from the mind, the brain is not at all like a computer.¹⁹ Neuroscientist Yuri Danilov notes that seeing the brain as a computer is an easy misconception rather than an informative image: "But as soon as you assume that each neuron is a microprocessor, you assume that there is a programmer. There is no programmer in the brain; there are no algorithms in the brain." And the brain is not billions of little computers either.²⁰

Despite that, much popular literature leaves the impression that living organisms are machines or even billions of machines linked together. A clever programmer can certainly develop a computer routine that sounds lifelike (see, for example, Sophia the Robot). But human ingenuity doesn't give the robot a mind.²¹

Claim: But just you wait! Once robots gain consciousness, people will see that the so-called mind is just a biological mechanism, the way robots are metal, plastic, and silicon mechanisms.

Response: Because researchers are not even sure what human consciousness *is*, no way has been found to give an actual mind to robots. Contrary claims for, say, Sophia the Robot are mere hype, swallowed by uncritical media.²²

Claim: All very well, but give science time and we will solve the brain and dispense with the mind!

Response: We will never "solve" the brain. Science historian Matthew Cobb offers a look at some of the difficulties we face in *The Idea of the Brain* (2020). The future he envisions resembles our understanding of human history more than our understanding of a math problem. It's something we can try to understand better, but it's not something we can just solve.²³



ARGUMENTS ... *from Philosophy*

Claim: If the mind were real, we could control inanimate objects by thoughts alone.

Response: Then the mind surely is real because we can do that now. Neurons can work with electrical signals from electronics. That's good news for amputees and blind people.²⁴ We are seeing encouraging results with a prosthetic hand controlled by thoughts, a mind-controlled robot arm that needs no brain implant,²⁵ and a device that feeds images from a camera directly into the brain via electrodes, allowing study participants with damaged nerves to experience some vision.²⁶ It's early days yet, but in principle, the will of the study participant, communicated through nerves to electronics, can cause a prosthesis to move.

Claim: If the mind weren't just an illusion created by the brain, it would have more control over the body itself.

Response: Then the mind must be real. The mind can exert control over the body, if trained to do so. Tibetan monks can change their metabolism through disciplined meditation. Far from disproving that, science has documented it and neuroscience has confirmed it. Mind you, the monks practice—a lot. Most people don't. That fact better accounts for failure than the idea that the mind is just an illusion created by the brain.²⁷

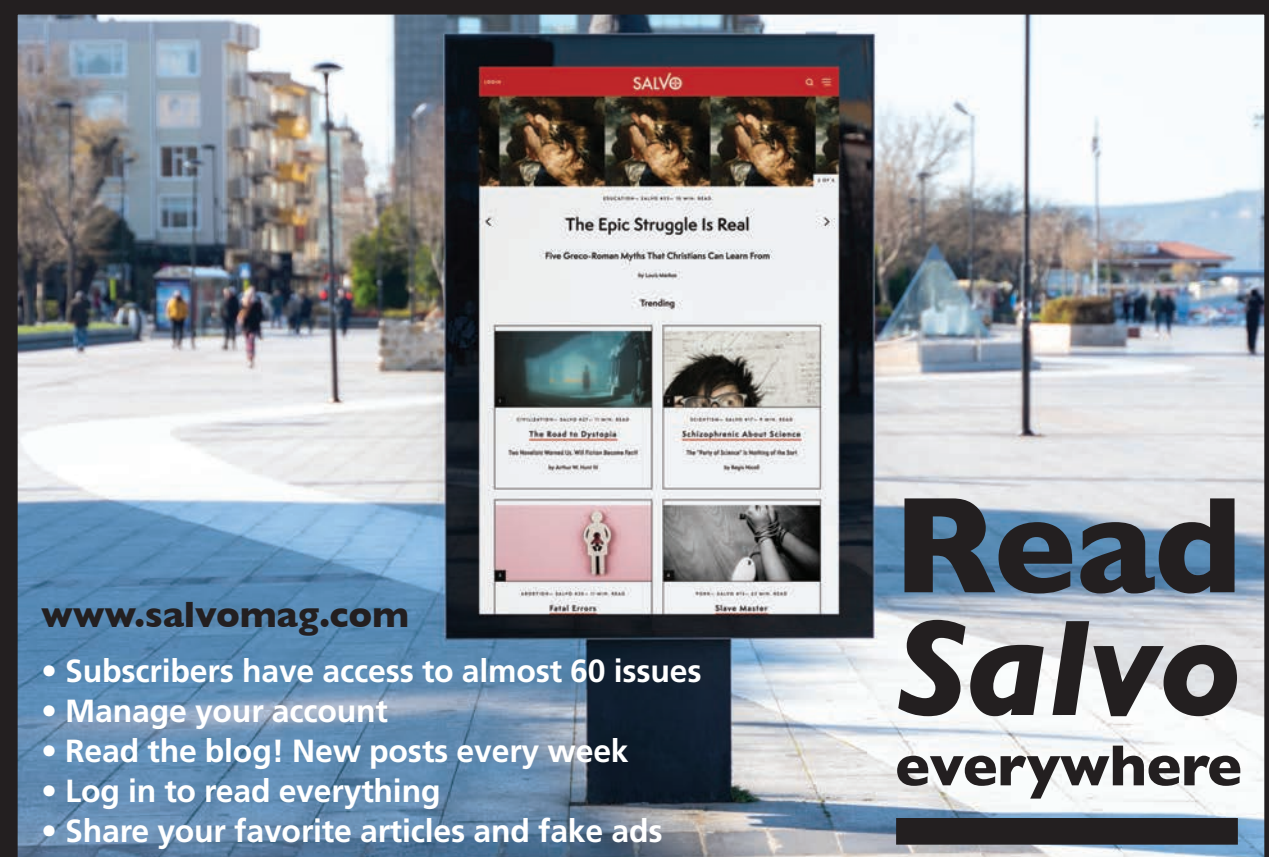
AN ALTERNATIVE

Of course, one alternative to all this is simply to avoid cocktail parties attended by philosophical atheists. Psychologically, that might be better in many cases. These suggestions are intended as a help when you really must go and end up having to say something. ☺

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Preston Sturges's *Sullivan's Travels*

by Anthony Esolen

"There's a lot to be said for making people laugh," says the famous movie director, whose specialty has been such deep intellectual fare as *Hey Hey in the Hayloft* and *Ants in Your Plants of 1939*. He's going to be married soon, and we might say that he has been blessed as the Ancient Mariner never was. A happier and a wiser man he rose the morrow morn, and after a stay as a member in a chain gang in the swamps of the deep South, to boot. "Did you know that that's all some people have?" he says. "It isn't much, but it's better than nothing in this cockeyed caravan. Boy!"



Those are the last words in *Sullivan's Travels* (1941), what I think is the best screwball comedy from the greatest master of the kind, Preston Sturges. It is a delightful tale, all the more comic for treading near the edge of tragedy, as it shows us, especially in one long sequence without a spoken word, that many an American still was homeless and penniless in the wake of the Great Depression.

John L. Sullivan, played by the clean-cut, tall, and boyishly all-American Joel McCrea, is a director with a nagging conscience. His ambition is to make a movie that speaks to the real suffering of the poor, a documentary, something serious, something relevant to the times, showing labor and capital at each

other's throats so that both die at once. It is to be called *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*—and yes, the Coen brothers were thinking of this film when they made their own Odyssey-romp by that name (2000).

NOT AN INTERESTING SUBJECT

Sully's friends and his boss at the studio don't want him to do it. Why give up such success? And what does he know about suffering, after all? He's a boarding-school and college boy; let him stay with what he knows. But that very demand prompts him to try to learn





Sullivan's Travels (1941)

about what he has never experienced. He decides to dress as a tramp and ride the rails, wandering about the country, seeking out the poor. Sturges here treads carefully and deftly between sympathy for what Sullivan feels and a gentle but persistent criticism. For Sullivan may be playing the fool, sentimentalizing the poor and setting himself up to get perhaps more poverty than he bargained for.

His own valet (played with a fine British deadpan by Robert Greig, a Jeeves to Sully's Bertie Wooster) is appalled to find him in tattered clothes. "Fancy dress, I take it?" says the valet, shaking his head. "I have never been sympathetic to the caricaturing of the poor and needy, sir."

Sullivan stands his ground, saying that he is serious, and that he wants to make a picture about them. But the valet demurs. "The subject is not an interesting one," says he, but not because he has made no study of it himself. On the contrary.

"You see, sir, rich people and theorists, who are usually rich people," says the valet—and here we may glance at the comfortable members of Fabian Societies and pot-bellied professors seasoning their



Veronica Lake and Joel McCrea

filet mignon with a dash of Marx—"think of poverty in the negative, as the lack of riches; as disease might be called the lack of health. But it isn't, sir. Poverty is not the lack of anything, but a positive plague, virulent in itself, contagious as cholera, with filth, criminality, vice, and despair as only a few of its symptoms. It is to be stayed away from, even for purposes of study. It is to be shunned."

That is not Sturges's last word on poverty, far from it, nor may a good Christian rest easy here. But there is no sentimentality, and no convenient reduction of poverty to a mere economic condition, easily corrected. Poverty reaches into the dark and dreadful corners of the soul. The poor are sinners, too.

THE GIRL

Well, Sullivan persists, the essential ingenu, and a series of unlikely likelihoods follows in his steps, many of them of a rollicking, belly-laugh hilarity. A ride through the bumpy fields at more than a hundred miles an hour, for example, in a whippet-tank driven by a thirteen-year-old and suitably helmeted farm boy on his way to school—Sullivan is trying to get free of the studio people who have been following him in a "land yacht," looking out for his safety.

But the crucial early turn in the film comes when a coincidence or two lands Sullivan, still dressed as a tramp, back in Hollywood, and in a greasy little diner he meets a girl (the sultry Veronica Lake) who is on her way back home to the Midwest. She doesn't know that he is a rich and famous director, so she buys him a simple breakfast of ham and eggs and coffee.

Sturges does not let us look at her as a sweet girl with a heart of gold who has ended up in the wrong place. The Girl—we never learn her name—had gone out west to realize her dream to act in the movies, but now she speaks as someone disillusioned by the seamy and selfish underside of the industry. To make your way, you have to cozy up to the men in power. "Just think," she says, "if you were some bigshot like a casting director or something, I'd be staring into your bridgework saying, 'Yes, Mr. Smearcase. No,

What Sturges has done, while satirizing "relevant" movies with a social message, is to produce the best of them all.

Mr. Smearcase. Not really, Mr. Smearcase! Oh, Mr. Smearcase, that's my knee!" And she takes a puff of her cigarette as her voice drops.

Of course he takes an interest in her, and after a short stop back at his posh manor, where she pushes him into the swimming pool for being a "big dope," he and she take to the rails together, she dressed as a boy in oversized clothes. She has to go, she says, because somebody has to take care of him. In fact, they take care of each other, so that the usual screwball comedy mode—big, foolish, intelligent man against wily and beautiful woman—is tempered by a real and surprising warmth, and an unstated appreciation of the sexes in their strength; the visual contrast between McCrea (6' 3") and Lake (4' 11") is itself comical and charming.

A SEEMING SUCCESS

Sturges, who also wrote the screenplay, tells the story of their adventures with a touch that ranges from the lighthearted to the deeply poignant and sorrowful. We have scenes of quick and snappy dialogue, and words that say more than their speakers intend—"Amateurs," grunts one tramp to another in a train-car as Sullivan and the Girl barely manage to run and climb into it as the train pulls away. "What do you think of the labor situation?" Sullivan asks him. The tramp's reply is to spit out the straw between his lips, and walk away.

We also have the best of what the old *silent* films had to offer, without words or captions, since none are needed: Sullivan and the Girl getting surprised by bedbugs or lice in the hay of the train-car; the sad and careworn faces of men and women, old and young, and children too, as they are all packed together by the hundreds on the floor of a charity house; the stew they gobble down next to an old toothless man whose gums work like a great mill; the urgent and ineffectual noise, told by music alone, of the preacher who urges the masses to leave their wicked ways; and one moment when Sullivan and the Girl, alone, their backs to us, look to westward in the evening sun, and he places his arm around her waist.

The enterprise seems to have been a success, as Sullivan and the Girl return to Hollywood, where his studio boss has made lemons into lemonade, using it all for publicity for that great human film to be made, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* Sullivan, remembering the people who did him a good turn when he was a tramp, says he will commemorate the event by going out one last time, at night, with new shoes on his feet and a load of five dollar bills in his pocket,

to hand them out one by one to the poor people he comes across. His charitable walk takes him along the train tracks, where a tramp has followed him, noting the money—and the shoes.

What happens then, I do not wish to give away, but I will say that not one viewer in a thousand will guess it. Let it suffice to say that Sullivan ends up among people with less to their names than any he had met before, by way of property or respect from their countrymen.

LOADS LIGHTENED WITH LAUGHTER

In one scene, for my money the most powerful church moment in Hollywood history, a kindly black preacher, a *basso profundo*, prepares his congregation for a special movie entertainment that night, as a big white sheet is undraped in front for a screen, and the projector is ready, along with a smiling lady at the pump organ for the music.

They are going to have guests, too. The preacher begs his all-Negro congregation not to put on airs, and neither by word nor look to make these guests feel unwelcome, or to act "high-toned" before their visitors tonight, because "we is all equal in the sight of God," and Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone," and "The blind shall see, and the lame shall leap, and glory in the coming of the Lord!" And then, with the organ playing, he leads them in singing "Go Down, Moses" as, led by a warden with a rifle, the men of a chain gang enter the church, shuffling and clanking, gaunt, slow, dispirited, but doffing their hats (if they have them) as they enter.

Sullivan is among them, and not by design.

What great cinematic work they watch, I will not say. But the preacher, his people, and the prisoners burst out into peals of raucous laughter, while Sullivan looks about him nonplussed, and then he, too—the moment is magical—in all his misfortunes, laughs again, laughs loud and long.

What Sturges has done, while satirizing "relevant" movies with a social message, is to produce the best of them all. People need to laugh, says Sullivan in the last words of the movie, because that's all that a lot of us have. "To the memory of those who made us laugh," reads the opening shot, "the motley mountebanks, the clowns, the buffoons, in all times and in all nations, whose efforts have lightened our burden a little, this picture is affectionately dedicated."

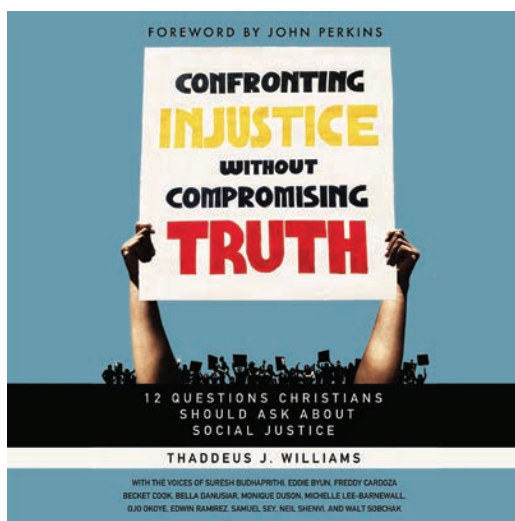
And we Christians may go farther, to sing with the kindly black people in the church at night, and to be fools for Christ, let the world think what it will. ☉

Justice for All

A Review of Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask About Social Justice, by Thaddeus J. Williams

by Terrell Clemmons

Everyone knows there is real injustice in the world, and although the concept of social justice began in the church, most everyone today agrees that we should all be about the work of it. But is everything that is branded justice actually justice? Given the cacophony of voices laying claim to justice, knowing the difference can be a tall order. People who want to pursue true justice, whether or not it accords with the trends of the day, will want to discern the real thing from potential lookalikes. Thaddeus Williams's latest book, *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth*, is the go-to resource for this urgent task.



Rather than critique any given organization, Williams offers an insightful set of questions for evaluating any cause or movement flying under the banner of "justice." Since deception often begins with redefined words, he starts by defining some terms. For millennia, justice has centered on *rendering to others that which they are due*—treating people as people should be treated and their actions as the actions deserve. When a punishment fits the crime, for example, we rightly say the criminal has been *brought to justice*. When people are treated like property, on the other hand,

we rightly call that *unjust*.

Williams's filter begins where all good thinking should, at the worldview level. True justice, he writes, will always begin with *theistic* justice—giving worship to that which is worthy of worship. Put differently, true justice must begin with a right posture toward God and an accurate understanding of the created order. If the Bible's picture of reality is *true*, theistic justice is "the justice issue from which all other justice blooms."

His questions, then, help us evaluate how any given cause aligns with (or doesn't align

with) the way the world actually *is*. He sets up two categories. He designates biblically compatible justice-seeking movements as "Social Justice A" and those that blur or erase the Creator-creation distinction as "Social Justice B." The operative questions fall under four headings:

- **Worship:** Does the vision of social justice take the nature of God seriously? Or does it put something else, such as man or the state, in the place of God?
- **Community:** Does it promote love and forbearance, or does it stir up rage and resentment? Does it make group identity more important than the New Testament's identity dichotomy, which says one is either "in Adam" or "in Christ"?
- **Salvation:** Does it see the root problem as sin in the human heart, or does it locate blame in people groups or abstract systems? Does it distort the gospel?
- **Truth:** Does it prioritize seeking truth, or does it assign truth by "lived experience" or tribal group?

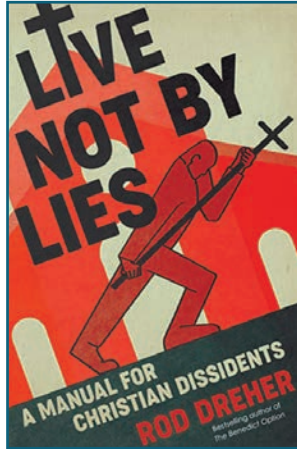
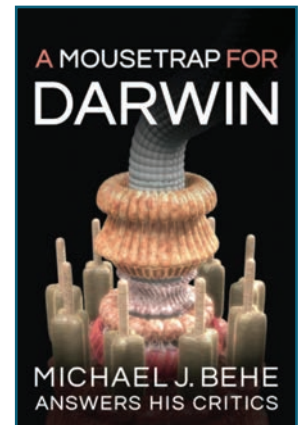
With vivid clarity grounded in Christian compassion for the suffering, Williams shows throughout how Social Justice B efforts end up *causing harm*, both to those they are intended to "help" and to the would-be "helpers." No matter how well-intended or passionate the activists, this is inevitable because they're operating according to a false picture of reality.

"The Bible's call to seek justice is not a call to superficial kneejerk activism," he writes. No, "the God who commands us to seek justice is the same God who commands us to 'test everything' and 'hold fast to what is good.'" Williams has given the church an excellent resource for putting justice movements to the critical worldview test. Parents and youth pastors, get hold of this book and work through it with your kids. ☺

A Mousetrap for Darwin: Michael J. Behe Answers His Critics

by Michael J. Behe

Behe's critics have charged that he doesn't respond to them. Well, here is the evidence that he *has*! Here is a quarter-century of razor-sharp responses, some of which his critics declined to publish. Though technical in a few spots, Behe's slam-dunk precision is laugh-out-loud funny at times, as he exposes the utter vacuity of their reasoning. But don't read this for the victory lap factor. Read it because truth matters.

**Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents**

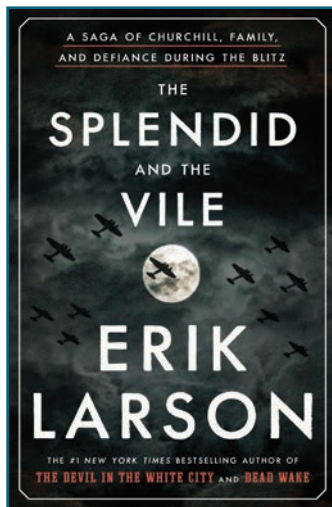
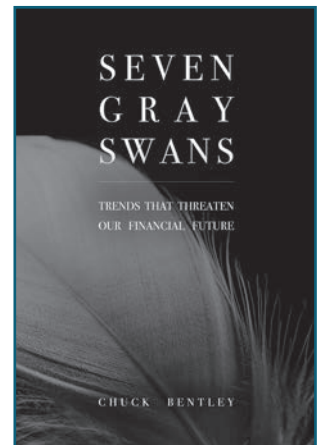
by Rod Dreher

Dreher sought out the testimonies of Christians who survived Soviet Communism with their faith, souls, and sanity intact, and with their input, he wrote this urgent counsel to American Christians. Part One examines the nature of the new looming totalitarianism, and Part Two offers practical strategies for how to prepare *now* for prudent resistance when called to contend for the faith. It's heavy, but for the sake of the next generation, is a must-read for today's church.

Seven Gray Swans: Trends That Threaten Our Financial Future

by Chuck Bentley

A "gray swan" is a potential danger that people can see coming but tend to ignore because it's considered unlikely to happen. Bentley, the CEO of Crown Financial Ministries, explains in plain language the seven gray swans he sees as most critical, and offers sound biblical wisdom for being best prepared, regardless of which ones, if any, come to pass. This is a short, concise read, and well worth your time.

**The Splendid and the Vile: A Saga of Churchill, Family, and Defiance During the Blitz**

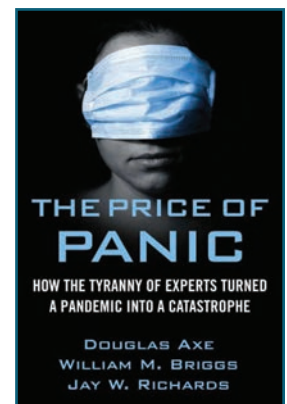
by Erik Larson

When Winston Churchill was appointed Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in May 1940, German forces appeared unstoppable, and England was sure to be their next conquest. With historical accounts that read like fiction, Larson chronicles the ensuing year and a half when England alone, under the indomitable Churchill, held her ground in defiance of looming evil. Western readers today would do well to learn from this saga of exemplary courage, conviction, and perseverance.

The Price of Panic: How the Tyranny of Experts Turned a Pandemic into a Catastrophe

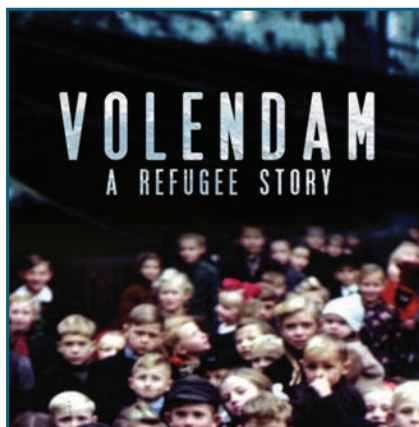
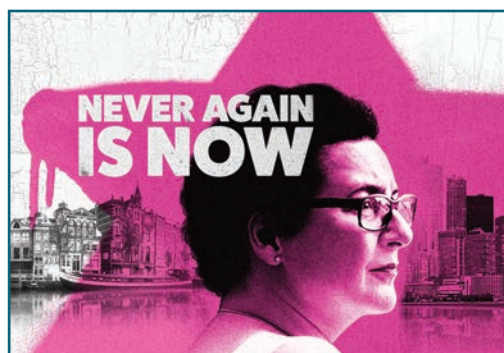
by Douglas Axe, William M. Briggs, and Jay W. Richards

A molecular biologist, a statistician, and an economist dissect responses to the pandemic on the part of the public, the press, and governments and argue that panic-induced lockdowns exacted exorbitant tolls in human wellbeing, while doing little to save lives. More important, the authors issue a clarion call for level-headed citizens to resist outsourcing their minds and political liberties to a politicized "cult of expertise."



Never Again Is Now

Evelyn Markus's Jewish parents both survived the Holocaust. In 2006, deeply troubled over Islamist antisemitism in their home city of Amsterdam, she and her Jewish lesbian partner Rosa immigrated to the U.S. She made this film telling her story primarily to sound a needed alarm about global antisemitism. As a side feature, it also bears witness to America as a force for good in the world and a home for all who seek liberty.

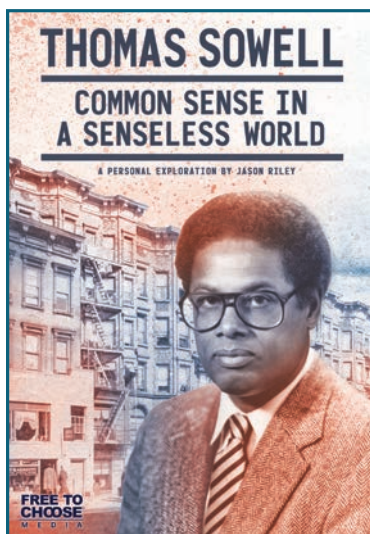
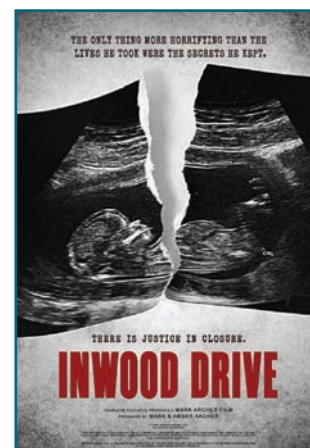


Volendam: A Refugee Story

In the aftermath of World War II, a community of Ukrainian Mennonites, having survived poverty, famine, war, and religious persecution, found themselves trapped inside Berlin's Soviet-occupied zone. Through a combination of first-person interviews, archive footage, and dramatized reenactments, this documentary tells the story of their harrowing journey, which culminated in a 1947 voyage to Paraguay aboard the Dutch steamer *SS Volendam*.

Inwood Drive

The politics of abortion is about so much more than what is seen on the news, and the social pathologies of it are likewise seldom plain to the common observer. This documentary, which covers fifteen years of pro-life work in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, does a marvelous job of bringing to light that which would otherwise go unnoticed—both the heroism and the horror behind the human faces on either side of the divide.

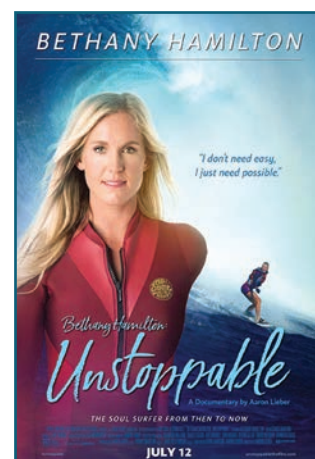


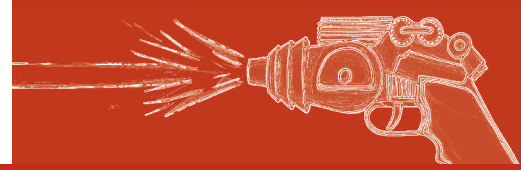
Thomas Sowell: Common Sense in a Senseless World

Orphaned at a young age and raised in Harlem by relatives, Thomas Sowell overcame humble beginnings to become one of the world's most respected scholars and prolific authors. Known to be a stubborn stickler for facts, he wrote on everything from economics to education to race, always with an eye toward showing how public policies on these matters affected real people. This hour-long program is but an overview of his massive contribution to American thought.

Bethany Hamilton: Unstoppable

Bethany Hamilton was a child prodigy champion surfer when she lost her left arm to a tiger shark at age thirteen. Four weeks later, she was back in the water, learning to surf with one arm, a story told in the 2011 feature film *Soul Surfer*. This documentary, which follows her into adulthood, marriage, and motherhood—all while still surfing!—is an inspiring, humbling, and visually stunning adventure of optimism, perseverance, and unconquerable childlike faith.





The Covid Baby Bust

The Decline Reflects a Disturbing Cultural Reality

by John Stonestreet & Roberto Rivera

At the start of the pandemic, many expected the lockdowns and quarantines to lead to a “baby boom.” Instead of a “boom” it’s been a “bust.” As CBS reported, records from more than two dozen states show a “7% drop in births in December—nine months after the first lockdowns began.”

While 7 percent may sound like a small dip, it’s not. As the *New York Times* puts it: “The pandemic’s serious disruption of people’s lives is likely to cause ‘missing births’—potentially a *lot* of them. Add these missing births to the country’s decade-long downward trend in annual births and we can expect consequential changes to our economy and society in the years to come.”

As the *Times* pointed out, this “baby bust” is a pre-existing condition of Covid, not created by the virus but made worse. While some have talked about the ongoing birth dearth for years now, a major news outlet reporting on it is itself newsworthy.

Until recently, most media outlets have insisted the problem is overpopulation, that too many humans were literally destroying the planet. However, as USC demographer Dowell Myers told CBS, America’s shrinking fertility rate and its economic impact is nothing less than a “crisis.” Fewer babies means a smaller work force in the future, which means lower economic productivity and a smaller tax base. This, in turn, means additional stress to Social Security, and fewer people to take care of a rapidly aging population.

If Covid isn’t the cause, how did we get here? Ideas . . . bad ones with consequences.



At the top of the list is a myth. In 1970, Paul Ehrlich, author of *The Population Bomb*, predicted that “sometime in the next 15 years, the end will come . . . an utter breakdown of the capacity of the planet to support humanity.” That didn’t happen, but here’s what did: within 15 years of Ehrlich’s prediction, nearly every developed nation, along with many developing ones, had embraced some version of his stark theory and declared war on human fertility. As a result, birth rates dropped below replacement rates.

In addition to the population myth, there’s an anthropological one. For decades, women were told that their bodies were in the way of their progress. If women wanted equality, they would need to be liberated from their own procreative potential. The tragic

irony is that once women were, in fact, disconnected from their bodies, transgender men stepped in and appropriated all of the equality and rights promised to women. And now, climate change has been added as the latest reason to forego child-rearing.

The postponing and foregoing of childbirth has corresponded to the postponing and foregoing of marriage. Since 1980, the median age of first marriage has gone from 24.7 for men and 22 for women to 30 and 28 respectively. The additional six years for women puts them almost exactly at their peak fertility.

It’s impossible to over-emphasize the role of culture in all this. When was the last time marriage and childbearing, at least in their traditional forms, were celebrated on TV or in film? When was the last time they were celebrated in church?

Israel is a notable exception to the global Covid-19 “baby bust” trend, with a birthrate twice that of the U.S. Even non-religious Israelis are having children above replacement level. The cultural attitude toward marriage and family there is just as distinct as the results. Sabbath dinner is a sacrosanct family event, for religious and non-religious Israelis alike, and children figure prominently in Israelis’ definition of “life, liberty, and happiness.”

Christians, of course, should hold at least as high of a view of marriage and fertility. After all, God never revoked the command to be fruitful and multiply, and Jesus’ command to let the little children come to him implies there are children around in the first place. Scripture is clear that “children are a heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). Next to the Gospel itself, children are the greatest gift we can give future generations. ☺

—Adapted from a Breakpoint broadcast (breakpoint.org), March 11, 2021. Used with permission.

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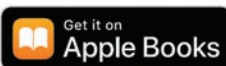
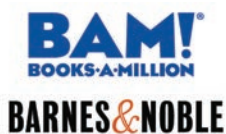
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The book cover features a green circle with a white dot inside, flanked by horizontal lines. Below this is the title "LIVING SPIRITUALLY IN THE MATERIAL WORLD" in a serif font. Underneath the title is a green circle with a white dot inside, flanked by horizontal lines. Below this is the subtitle "The Lost Wisdom for Finding Inner Peace, Satisfaction, and Lasting Enthusiasm in Earthly Pursuits" in a smaller font. At the bottom is the author's name "LEWIS M. ANDREWS, PH.D." in a serif font.

**LIVING
SPIRITUALLY
IN THE
MATERIAL
WORLD**

*The Lost Wisdom for Finding Inner
Peace, Satisfaction, and Lasting
Enthusiasm in Earthly Pursuits*

LEWIS M. ANDREWS, PH.D.

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Blankenship Chair in
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University of Oklahoma