

SCIENCE | SEX | SOCIETY

SALVO

Issue 66 Fall 2023

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DYNAMIC DUO

Günter Bechly — **Earth's Big Bang**

Our Life-Giving Moon — *Hugh Ross*

PLUS

Engineered Life

—Jonathan Witt

Conscious Life

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AI-Controlled Life

—Robin Phillips

◦ **Government Surveillance**

◦ HEADLESS AT THE U

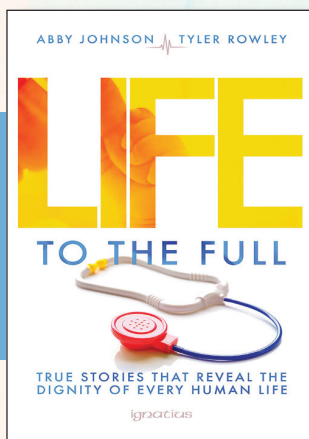
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◦ WEIGHING WEIGHT LOSS MEDS

◦ **From Hippie to Preacher**

◦ BIBLE DATING GAME

THE EVIDENTIAL POWER OF BEAUTY, GOODNESS & TRUTH



◆ LIFE TO THE FULL

Abby Johnson & Tyler Rowley

In the fight against the culture of death, it is love, mercy, and miracles that serve as our oxygen, keeping us determined to an end abortion. The best method of winning hearts is telling stories—true stories. This book tells 23 harrowing personal accounts that demonstrate the evil of abortion and, more crucially, the power of life. These lived human experiences breathe new life into the abortion fight and raise up a new generation committed to protecting the unborn.

“This is the book I want supporters of legal abortion to read,” says Abby Johnson. “It reveals the certainty that it is never okay to kill an innocent human being, and for our nation to know peace, there must be peace in the womb.” This book will inspire all those fighting for life, and make abortion advocates second-guess their convictions.

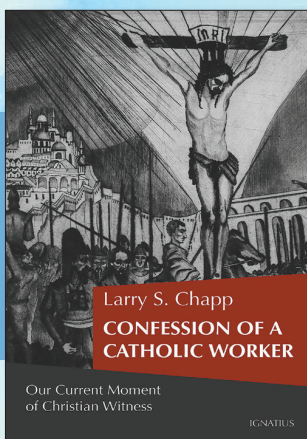
LFP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$16.95

“This inspiring book communicates an eternal truth written on our hearts: life is beautiful and must be protected.”

—Lila Rose, Founder & President, Live Action

“This powerful book exposes the lie that abortion sets women free, and shows beautifully how embracing life instead of an abortion leads to true freedom.”

—Shawn Carney, CEO and President, 40 Days for Life



◆ CONFESSION OF A CATHOLIC WORKER

Larry Chapp

Everyone knows there is a “crisis” in the Catholic Church and in the world around us. In a cold, dying world choked by greed, the Gospel calls for radical love and radical living according to the Sermon on the Mount. Using the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Peter Maurin, and Dorothy Day, Chapp argues that the real remedy to the disease of sin is not niceness, not political liberation, not technical rigor, but a free decision to live totally and joyfully in Jesus Christ, without compromise.

Just as the martyrs chose God over life itself, so each Christian must, in the crucial hour, choose Jesus over all things. Everything hinges on the moment of Christian witness.

CCWP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$17.95

“A bold, passionate ‘confession of faith’—filled with keen observations, penetrating critiques, sharp wit, brutal honesty, and a profound love of Christ crucified. It presents a bracing, salutary challenge to all Christians today.”

—Margaret Turek, Author, *Atonement: Soundings in Biblical, Trinitarian, and Spiritual Theology*

“A clarion call to all followers of Christ to stand up and be counted! In both inimitable style and lightly worn erudition, it’s a book that only Larry Chapp could have written.”

—Rodney Howsare, Professor of Philosophy & Theology, DeSales University



◆ LET BEAUTY SPEAK

Jimmy Mitchell

In an era marked by rampant secularism and endless noise, the ten principles in this unique book empower Christians to evangelize the world by bringing beauty to the forefront of their lives, reminding people what it means to be human. Politics, medicine, technology, and other secular fields have their place in society, but the deepest existential questions of the human heart can only be answered by discovering the true, the good and the beautiful.

From embracing childlike wonder to integrating prayer, work, and leisure into everyday life, this is your how-to guide for evangelizing others by living your humanity well. Turn these principles into a way of life, and you’ll join the long line of saints whose holiness was the remedy for the isolation, confusion and meaninglessness of their times.

LBSP . . . Sewn Softcover, \$17.95

“Beauty is a still, small voice calling us to higher things. Mitchell communicates this with an eloquence and elegance which is itself a thing of beauty.” —Joseph Pearce, Biographer of Shakespeare, Tolkien, and Chesterton

“Drawing deeply from experience and all he has learned from the brilliant light of divine Beauty, Jimmy presents a wise challenge to become beautiful ourselves.”

—Paul Thigpen, Ph.D., Author, *The Biblical Names of Jesus*

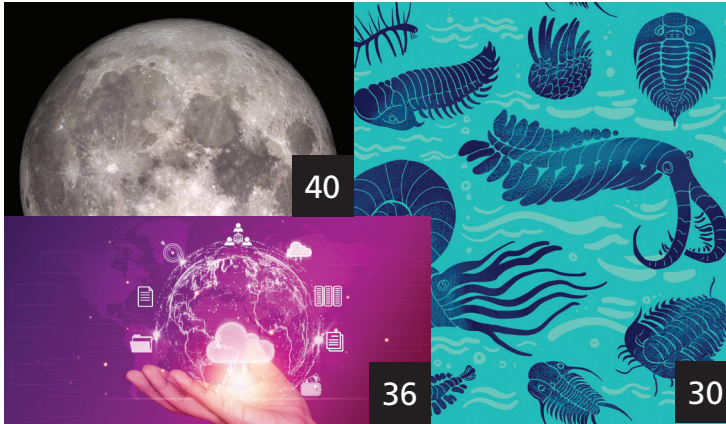


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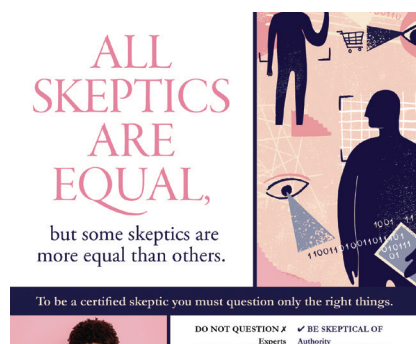
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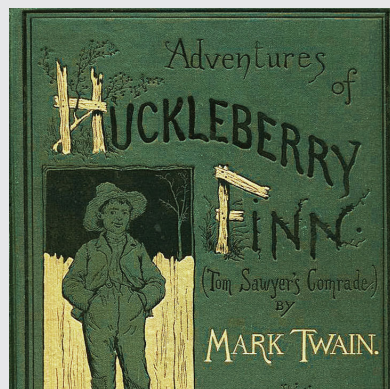
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We find that we live in an insignificant universe, in a humdrum galaxy, lost in a cosmic foam, tucked away in some forgotten corner of a multiverse, in which there are far more universes than people.

—Science popularizer Tyson Karls

CHAOS

THE UNIVERSE IS SO RANDOM

Join us for the third iteration of the award-winning, most-watched science television

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SALVO

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salvo n. (säl'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 modern myths that have undercut human dignity, all but destroyed the notions of virtue and morality, and slowly eroded our appetite for transcendence. It also seeks to promote the Christian worldview. The opinions expressed by individual contributors are not necessarily those of the editors or publisher.

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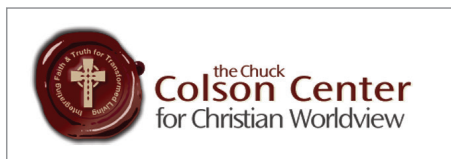
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Fall 2023

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The Only Way Back

Truth Alone Can Restore What's Broken

by Terrell Clemmons

Laura Becker was a depressed fifteen-year-old trying to come out of her shell when she learned about different gender identity expressions on social media and at school. At first, she enjoyed identifying as androgynous and gender queer, but after taking testosterone and undergoing a double mastectomy (“definitely one of the worst mistakes I’ve made”), she detransitioned and resumed living as a female.

Laura is one of several detransitioned young adults who tell their stories in the 2023 documentary *No Way Back*. Originally named *Affirmation Generation* (and reviewed in *Salvo* 65), *No Way Back* was set to premier in theaters in June until AMC Theatres abruptly cancelled all showings in response to objections voiced by a seemingly small, but well-funded and loud activist outfit called The Queer Trans Project. (See p. 10 for more on QT Project.)

A Spiritual Conflict

In her book *Awake, Not Woke*, Noelle Mering characterizes progressive ideology as a cult. While the term may not apply to all things “progressive,” it is certainly the hallmark of cults to try to squelch alternative points of view. Mering astutely observes that we are in a *spiritual battle* against architects of revolution propounding a counterfeit religion. In the introduction, she enjoins Christians *not* to retreat from the field. Her call to engage in the battle of ideas captures quite nicely what *Salvo* is about:

While it is easy to dismiss wokeness as being a movement on the fringe or “out there,” to do so

would be shortsighted. We are called to engage with the world in which we find ourselves. . . . Charity demands that we make a real effort to understand, rather than just hold in contempt, the people falling prey to this ideology. People are looking for meaning in their lives and answers to human questions such as why we are here and how we ought to live. If we aren’t providing these answers in a compelling way, they won’t remain unanswered; they will be answered in distorted half-truths that promise but cannot deliver real solutions.

Restorative Truth

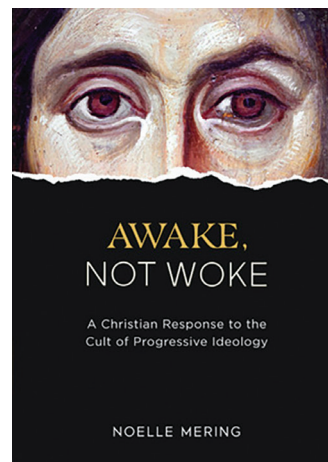
In transgender ideology, as in much of what passes for sophisticated modern thought, it is one’s “inner voice” that determines truth. But as John Stonestreet and Kasey Leander point out (see p. 64), without fixed reference points outside of ourselves, we cannot know ourselves or our place in the world. Moreover, to paraphrase Jean-Paul Sartre, apart from any transcendent point of reference,

nothing temporal has any meaning. The quest to find truth and meaning by looking within is a losing game.

Salvo was launched in 2006 out of an effort to cover developments in intelligent design science, but it was decided from the beginning to also cover sexuality and societal issues—a decision made in the conviction that, just as there is design in the natural world that is detectable and knowable, so there is also a design for human sexuality and guiding principles for ordering a healthy society. That’s how *Salvo* became a magazine of “Science, Sex & Society.”

We believe the Judeo-Christian Scriptures reveal to us truth about reality so that we may know ourselves and the meaning of our existence by knowing God. Noelle Mering agrees, noting that only “the One True Faith brings restoration. It is this restoration—of the person, the family, and the Faith—for which we all hunger. . . [It] is the most fitting avenue toward a more harmonious and whole society.”

There is much brokenness in the world, but restorative truth exists and is knowable. We aim to draw it out because we believe it is exceedingly more beautiful and satisfying than anything dreamt of in the minds of the architects of revolution. Read on and see if you don’t agree. ☺





Doctors Against DEI Medicine

A group of physicians called “Do No Harm” is pushing back against woke administrators in medical schools. Some of the DEI policies they cite include



racial groups; excluding whites and Asians from scholarships, fellowships, and programs; and resegregating medical care by explicitly assigning physicians to patients based on race.

awarding scholarships to favored

“Healthcare policy is at risk of forcing discrimination into every level of medicine and onto every medical professional and patient,” says

Do No Harm. “Critical Race Theory is ultimately making health *more* biased and discriminatory, not less.” According to Do No Harm, these programs make medicine the new platform for CRT. “They are demanding that future physicians be trained to combat injustice and racism instead of caring for the unique medical needs of each individual patient. This divisive campaign will . . . hurt patient health and well-being by lowering standards for medical school and professional certification.” Consistent with the Hippocratic Oath, Do No Harm affirms that the first role of the medical professional is to *do no harm*. •

—Sources: <https://bioedge.org/featured/group-formed-to-combat-woke-discrimination-in-medical-schools/>; <https://dono-harmmedicine.org/faqs/>.

Cancelling Pornhub

Pornhub, a streaming website owned by MindGeek, has enabled a sprawling business of sex trafficking and exploitation, but thanks to the vigilance

of the National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE), three social media sites known to be cyber hangouts for minors—YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok—have now removed Pornhub’s accounts from their platforms. Prior to NCOSE’s intervention, Pornhub had passed

YouTube’s SafeSearch filter and had received Instagram’s “blue check” of verification, despite the fact that it had been driving YouTube users directly to its porn site (a violation of YouTube policy) and had encouraged its 13 million Instagram followers to pursue a career as a porn star. •

—Sources: <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/youtube-removes-pornhub-account/>; <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/another-pornhub-distribution-partner-cuts-ties/>.

Saving Science

Twelve years ago, National Association of Scholars (NAS) president Peter Wood posed the question, “Could science leave the university?” Not much changed, but over the ensuing years, coercive university policies have increasingly constrained scientists’ ability to “do science.” Now, a webzine subsidiary of NAS called *Minding the Campus*, which promotes reasoned scholarship in higher education, is re-raising the question with the launch of *Minding Science* to focus specifically on scientific integrity. “By staying put in the universities,”

writes J. Scott Turner, “scientists have largely ceded to others their traditional control over their profession, and the universities are increasingly disinclined to give control back. Indifference—wanting to be left alone to ‘do science’—is now complicity. It is time for scientists to act on Wood’s question and leave the universities.”

Turner goes on to propose a model for Independent Science Faculties, patterned after professional guilds in law or medicine, that would open opportunities for scientists to provide educational and research services from a position of independence and autonomy, apart from academia’s “ideological



commissars.” Certainly, this would be no small transition, and opposition will likely be massive. But the fact that the conversation has been launched is reason enough to take courage. Good science may well eventually prevail. •

—Source: <https://www.mindingthecampus.org/2023/06/01/science-should-leave-the-university/>.



Not with Our Children

Texas moved to protect children from pediatric trans medicine in June when Gov. Greg Abbott signed a bill preventing gender-modification surgeries on minors. The Texas Children's Hospital in Houston and Children's Medical Center of Dallas had both been providing gender transition medical services, but under the new law, sterilization or removal of any healthy reproductive organ will be prohibited. Dr. Stanley Goldfarb,

chairman of Do No Harm, said he

hoped hospitals would "pivot to the right kind of care for these children." Gender dysphoria is a mental issue, not a medical one, and "the vast, vast majority of these children bring with them a tremendous burden of psychological difficulty." While trans activists attribute gender dysphoria to the lack of access to cross-sex



hormones and medical procedures, Goldfarb states that even with such procedures, "The literature doesn't show their psychological problems will go away." •

—Source: https://www.theepochtimes.com/some-of-nations-largest-pediatric-hospitals-will-no-longer-offer-children-gender-modification_5314727.html.

OB/GYNs Against Propaganda

In the aftermath of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*, pro-life OB/GYNs are refuting a tide of misinformation concerning procedures for miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy. Major news outlets uncritically report claims that women "will die" from ectopic pregnancies and miscarriages because abortion bans prevent doctors from treating them. But these treatments are *not* prohibited by abortion bans, says the American Association of Pro-Life

Obstetricians and Gynecologists (AAPLOG). Neither treatment situation has ever been categorized as an abortion—a distinction that the mainstream American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and abortion advocates are now blurring. "The data clearly shows that restricting abortion does not lead to an increase in maternal mortality," says AAPLOG, but pro-choice ACOG has "sidelined science for pro-abortion advocacy." •



—Source: <https://www.lifenews.com/2022/08/30/7000-pro-life-doctors-launch-campaign-to-refute-pro-abortion-lies/>.

Don't "Try Before You Buy"



A growing body of evidence supports what Judeo-Christian tradition has held all along. Premarital "sexual experience" impairs couples' prospects for a lasting,

fulfilling union. Couples who enter marriage "sexually inexperienced" reported the highest overall levels of relationship satisfaction, stability, and sexual satisfaction. Although the "try before you buy" ethic seems to make intuitive sense, the data show that "cohabitation by itself is associated with higher risk of divorce among couples who go on to get married." Sometimes what is seen as "outdated morality" is not so outdated after all. •

—Source: <https://breakpoint.org/the-stubborn-facts-about-saving-sex-doing-things-gods-way-works/>.

DIY Abortion Pill Complications

As do-it-yourself (DIY) abortions have risen, so have complications. After a “pills by post” at-home abortion policy was instituted in the UK, more than 10,000 women were hospitalized after taking the abortion pill in just one year. One woman gave birth to a stillborn child after taking the pill at 28 weeks gestation (18 weeks past the approved cut-off date), and more instances of women taking the pill after ten weeks have

been reported. In India, a woman bled to death at home after taking the abortion pill. Spokesperson for Right to Life UK Catherine Robinson said, “The increase in ambulance call outs following the introduction of ‘DIY’ abortions is alarming. Not only do these abortions end the life of a unique human being, but the lack of medical supervision places the mother in harm’s way, a fact that pro-abortion activists routinely ignore.” •



—Sources: <https://righttolife.org.uk/news/woman-dies-from-dangerous-diy-abortion/>; <https://righttolife.org.uk/news/uk-police-investigate-diy-abortion-of-28-week-old-baby-using-bpas-pills-by-post-service/>; <https://www.lifenews.com/2022/10/03/botched-abortions-hospitalize-more-than-10000-uk-women-in-just-one-year/>.

Debate Debased

Bringing hundreds of explicitly leftwing judges into the National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA) has fundamentally changed the nature of high-school debate. When debate participant Matthew Adelstein argued in favor of a certain federal water policy, his opponents responded

with a personal attack on his character as *their central argument*. To support the response, the opposing team produced a screenshot of a Twitter exchange that had nothing to do with water policy but everything to do with woke uniformity of thought. The ad hominem attack (see Decipher, p. 15) won the debate round for Adelstein’s opponents.

A bright spot in James

Fishback’s report on this dismal decline in debate was 15-year-old NSDA student Briana Whatley’s shrewd diagnosis of what was going on. “At NSDA tournaments I am not guaranteed a win based on my reasoning, facts, or delivery, [but] rather if I can reinforce my judges’ ideology throughout the debate. It’s antithetical to what true open debate is.” Perhaps there is yet hope for her generation. •

—Source: <https://www.thefp.com/p/personal-tweets-lose-high-school-debates>.

The Alliance for Voluntary Human Extinction

What do environmental and abortion activism have in common? A desire to de-populate the planet. The Heartland Institute’s Tom Harris researched

climate change activist groups’ positions on abortion and found virtual unanimity. The Sierra Club, for example, has not only spent millions on ads defending abortion “rights”;

it described the *Dobbs* decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* as “ecofascism.” Many other environmentalist groups similarly push abortion while pointing to human reproduction as a major source of environmental “injustice.” “While

their position is usually cloaked in supposed respect for woman’s rights,” wrote Harris, “many of these groups strongly support abortion, and it is clear that their drive for de-population is a major reason for it.” •



—Source: <https://cornwallalliance.org/2023/04/using-the-climate-change-scare-to-promote-abortion/>.

Trans: The New Hockey Stick?

The term “rapid onset gender dysphoria” was coined by Professor Lisa Littman of Brown University as a way of explaining why clusters of girls, often in social or peer groups, were suddenly identifying as trans. Prior to Gen Z, most transgenders had been biological men identifying as women, but Britain’s Tavistock gender clinic (now ordered to close) saw a 4,000 percent increase in referrals of girls over the past 10 years. Littman suggested that

the girls’ adoption of a trans identity could be a “maladaptive coping mechanism”—a response to adolescent stress, possibly even a form of self-harm. The hockey stick spike aligns closely with a graph showing girls’ deteriorating mental health. Commenting on the pornified, sexualized culture they’re growing up in, John Stonestreet and Shane Morris of *Breakpoint* commentary asked, “Is it any wonder that so many girls think that the best way to not be



sexualized is to not be female?” It’s a valid question that should not be dismissed out of hand. •

—Source: <https://breakpoint.org/girls-and-the-transgender-hockey-stick-social-contagion-shows-up-in-statistics/>.

Planned Transhood

Planned Parenthood’s 2021–2022 annual report shows the abortion giant expanding its portfolio of services. Abortions, preventive care visits, and adoption referrals were all down, while

assets, government funding, and total revenue were up. The most striking change lies in Planned Parenthood’s reported number of “Other Procedures”—up from just under 16,000 during the year 2020–2021 to more than 256,000 in 2021–2022. That’s 16 times more “Other Procedures” performed from

one year to the next. While Planned Parenthood does not specify what those procedures were, *The Daily Signal*, a news outlet of The Heritage Foundation, attributes the meteoric rise to Planned Parenthood’s new business cash cow—transgender services, which means primarily “gender-affirming” hormone treatments. •

—Source: <https://www.dailysignal.com/2023/06/12/planned-parenthood-annual-report-374000-abortions-more-transgender-services-while-taxpayers-chip-670m/>.

AI in Religion

A Protestant church in Germany held an experimental service led by an AI chatbot, whose humanlike projections spoke from a large screen above the altar. Responses were mixed. One Lutheran pastor who brought a group of teens to the service said he came in skeptical but walked out more pleased than he’d expected. A woman who works in IT and had come out of curiosity felt increasingly put off by the monotone lack of “heart” and “soul.”

“AI is very human-like and . . . it’s easy to be deceived by it,” said a congregant who researches ethics

and technology. “What hope does the common person [have] walking around out there that considers themselves a Christian, that doesn’t read the Bible, but could instantly get all their theological questions answered by this handy-dandy religious avatar of AI on their phone?” asked attorney and blogger Jeff Childers. “You’re gonna want to get advice from Jesus, or Mohammed, [or] Buddha, and there’s gonna be an AI version of these historical figures.” Will people “literally start worshipping them”?

At this point, it’s anybody’s guess how the mix of AI and religion will play out. While fears have been expressed ranging from AI rewriting the Bible to AI manifesting



the demonic, Rev. Connor Penn, a Catholic priest based in Florida, holds hope that as people interact with AI and the faith, the truths of Christianity can still shine through and touch people’s hearts. •

—Source: https://www.theepochtimes.com/in-depth-ai-revolution-takes-aim-at-religion-by-rewriting-bible-and-leading-sermon_5327362.html.



The Queer Trans Project Est. 2021

Build-a-Queer by Mail

The Queer Trans Project

by Emily Morales

Background:

The Florida-based, black- and trans-led Queer Trans Project (QTP) was founded in 2021 by Cielo Sunsarae. A female who identifies as non-binary, Sunsarae started QTP to “alleviate [her] gender dysphoria around [her] chest.” Sunsarae, an “established champion for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ equality [is] passionate about restructuring the biased mental framework in today’s cis, white, and heteronormative society.”

Motivated by the founder’s own body-dysphoria, one of QTP’s first missions was to provide free breast binders for trans-identifying girls. Upon securing donated binders and other resources, QTP next began assembling and shipping free “Build-a-Queer kits,” mostly to youth. After posting a TikTok promoting the kits, Sunsarae gained more than 20,000 followers in just a few days.

Reason for Surveillance:

For the Build-a-Queer shopper, the QTP website delivers a boutique experience. When building her kit, the young transmasculine (female-to-male) shopper is prompted to select a binder, a 4-inch “easy squeeze soft packer,” and other goodies to disguise her pernicious natural-born femininity. The trans-feminine shopper is tasked with selecting a bra, tucking tape to hide that giveaway bulge, and panties. Makeup, false eyelashes, and nail polish are optional add-ons. Queer kits may also be topped off with condoms, books, plushies, additional souvenirs, and a hand-writ-

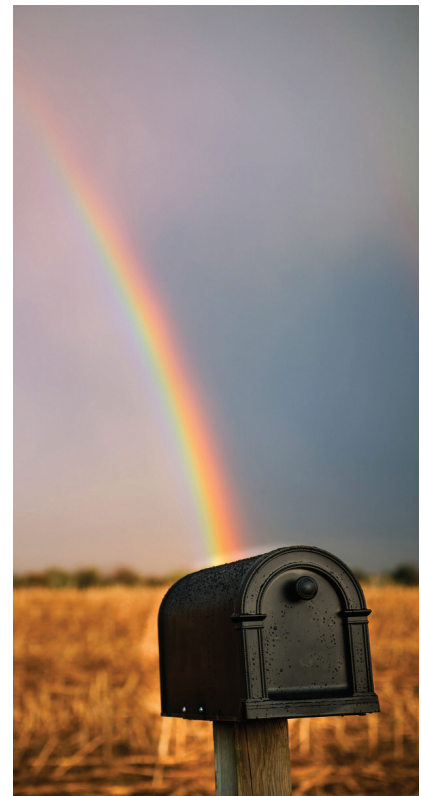
ten “affirming” note. QTP boasts that there are no age restrictions, and obtaining a kit requires no parental consent. And since they are free, Sunsarae points out, they will not appear on a parent’s credit card statement.

In addition to Build-a-Queer kits, QTP provides gender-affirming care flights; sexual education inclusive of all genders, sexualities, and abilities; and until recently, “Trans Self Defense Kits” that included pepper spray, knives, tasers, and steel batons. QTP has also reportedly given away \$6,000 in hormone-blocking drugs and breast-removal surgery funding.¹

Most Egregious Offense:

Trepidatious minors can rest assured that QTP will help them keep their secret. Sunsarae demonstrated in an Instagram video how she cleverly camouflages kits for shipping to prevent parental capture. Items are carefully tucked in the cavity of a plush toy or wrapped in a breast binder, and everything goes inside an empty T-shirt box. Finally, the package bears a fictitious business name and return address.

In a YouTube video titled “Discreetly Receiving Your Build-A-Queer Kit,” Sunsarae advises children on how to receive the goods apart from the watchful eyes of their non-affirming parents by either renting a P.O. Box, having items shipped to an affirming friend or schoolteacher, or doing a “name switcheroo” by putting a different name on the order. If those options won’t work, they could order a mail-hold or follow



tracking notifications to intercept the package.

As if parents are children’s enemy number one, under the guise of “gender-empowerment,” Sunsarae and her QTP activists openly flout parental authority. Yet it will be the caring moms they impugn who will eventually tend to daughters injured by breast-binders.² It is doubtful that QTP “champions” for the LGBTQ+ cause will ever know the young men who will mourn diminished sexual function or sterilization caused by the tucking tape they “heroically” concealed.³ Fixes for problems like these aren’t so easy-squeezy. The care of these injured and maimed youth will fall not to Sunsarae or allies like her, but to the very loving parents they work to undermine. ☹

Notes

1. <https://www.thefirststandard.com/florida-lgbtq-group-sends-weapons-sex-toys-to-kids-for-gender-transitioning/>.
2. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13691058.2016.1191675>.
3. <https://genspect.org/binding-and-tucking-self-harm-101/>.



50 Lines a Woman

by Rick Reed

woman: n. “an adult female human being”

Woman is a remarkable word insofar as its origin is concerned. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) expends fifty lines detailing the evolution of the word’s spelling and pronunciation from Old English through Middle English, Anglo-Welsh, and Modern English. The modern spelling was first recorded in the late thirteenth century, with the plural form *women* not appearing until a century later. By the fourteenth century, both *woman* and *women* appeared consistently in print.

The original ninth-century Anglo-Saxon form, *wifman*, was created by combining *wif* and *man*. As in German, Old English nouns were fully inflected—meaning, among other things, that nouns have gender (which until recently was generally a grammatical term). *Wif* was a neuter noun designating a female person. *Man* was a masculine noun designating a male or female person. Combining the terms provided a feminine noun exclusively designating a female person.

Rejiggering Gender

The OED’s first definition—“an adult female human being”—prevailed for a millennium. It all seems straightforward enough. However, in the 1960s, feminist thinkers began to use the word *gender* in their examinations of socially constructed attributes of the two sexes. Eventually, subjective psychological and social attributes were exchanged for objective biological determinants. The result appears to have stymied certain government officials who cannot define the thousand-year-old term; in 2022, the most recent appointee to the United States Supreme Court explained in a

confirmation hearing that because she was not a biologist, she could not define *woman*.

Eyes That See

In contrast, Judith Loftus, a character in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (see p. 54), has no trouble distinguishing a man from a woman when Huck visits her one evening dressed in a calico gown to gather information without giving away his identity. After a long conversation, Mrs. Loftus reveals that she knows Huck is not a girl.

She points out the way he threads a needle, the way he throws an object at a rat, and the way he catches a lump of lead by clapping his knees together. She can discern from certain behaviors an individual’s sex. In other words, she recognizes a boy when she sees one, despite the way he is dressed or the intonations of his voice. Had Mrs. Loftus been asked to define *woman*, she would not have had to consult a textbook or Charles Darwin.

Similarly, parents, doctors, nurses, and midwives recognize the clear biological markers of male and female when a baby is born. (They do not assign a sex; they observe it.) A mother who has

just given birth to a girl imagines her becoming a mother herself one day. A father imagines her on his arm as he walks her down the aisle to marry a man of whom he approves. When grandparents give the baby a blanket, regardless of color, they know whether they are welcoming a grandson or a granddaughter into the family.

The *Cambridge Dictionary* still carries the same primary definition that appears in the OED. However, a newly added second definition reflects the subjectivity and confusion now prevalent in academia, government, and the media: “an adult who lives and identifies as female though they may have been said to have a different sex at birth.”

A biologist could offer no help in clearing up this confusion. In fact, no one could. Since language exists to facilitate communication among whole populations, a meaning for a word that is knowable only subjectively by the speaker—and alterable at will—does not promote understanding. Rather, it confuses communication while ignoring objective reality. An undeceived, unconfused person knows what a woman is, without the help of either a biologist or a dictionary. ☉





My Therapy, My Choice

The Alliance for Therapeutic Choice & Scientific Integrity

by Christopher H. Rosik

In 1992, three mental-health professionals—Charles Socarides, Benjamin Kaufman, and Joseph Nicolosi—founded the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) to continue the scientific study of homosexuality and its treatment. Socarides, a psychiatrist who had written extensively on the subject and foresaw that the gay-rights movement would undermine societal gender roles and the family, became NARTH's first president. Kaufman, also a psychiatrist and Clinical Professor at the University of California School of Medicine, served as vice-president, while Nicolosi, a psychologist and director of the Thomas Aquinas Psychological Clinic, which specialized in clinical care of unwanted same-sex attraction and behavior, was the first executive director. Nicolosi, a Roman Catholic, was also a consultant for the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese.

In December of that year, a preliminary organizational meeting of about 25 therapists was held in New York City. These professionals were concerned about the increasing politicization of the mental-health field as it pertained to homosexuality and the threats that posed to the ability of professionals from diverse perspectives to study the issue scientifically. Kaufman explained:

NARTH came into existence in response to threats to take away the right of patients to choose therapy to eliminate or lessen same-sex attraction. NARTH defends the right of therapists to provide such treatment and provides a forum for the dissemination of research on

homosexuality. Concerned that professional organizations and publications in the mental health field have fallen under the control of those who would use them to forward social constructionist theories, political agendas, and advocacy research, NARTH was founded for a return to established theoretical approaches, solid research, therapy that puts the patient first, and freedom to discuss, debate and disagree.¹

These guiding principles remain at the heart of the organization today, and given the rapid cultural capture of not just the mental-health organizations but nearly all societal institutions in the West,



they have only taken on more urgency since NARTH's founding.

For Client & Therapist Autonomy

Early on, NARTH leaders simply wanted to protect the rights of clients to receive, and therapists to provide, the change-exploring psychological care that many individuals with unwanted same-sex attractions freely sought to pursue. However, the increasingly controversial nature of what should be an *uncontroversial* right to care meant that NARTH increasingly encountered threats to client and therapist autonomy from coercive professional and political maneuvers.

In 1998, NARTH board member A. Dean Byrd co-authored a letter criticizing the American Psychological Association (APA) for publishing an article in *Psychological Bulletin* that appeared to be a veiled attempt to decriminalize pedophilia, noting that one of the article's co-authors had published other articles in *Paidika*, *The Journal of Pedophilia*. This drew attention to the article and ultimately led to a vote in the U.S. House of Representatives (355 to 0 with 13 abstentions) to condemn the APA's publication of it.

Also in 1998, the Beverly Hilton in Los Angeles kowtowed

to pressure from gay activists and allied local politicians (including the LA City Council) and abruptly pulled out of hosting NARTH's annual conference the day before the event was to begin. Conference organizers scrambled; to the relief of approximately 150 registered attendees, some of whom had traveled from as far away as Germany, they were

able to secure an alternate venue at the Biltmore Hotel, and the conference went on as scheduled.

However, on day two of the conference, protesters stormed in. After being removed by police, they continued protesting outside the hotel, to the extent that conference attendees had to be escorted by security personnel through the hotel kitchen and back door to avoid confrontations. Protests outside NARTH conference venues were

regular occurrences until about 2010, perhaps signaling a realization that the protests were paradoxically bringing publicity to the conference and to NARTH.

Growth & Expansion

In 2014, NARTH expanded to include non-clinicians, such as clergy, religious counselors, families, and those involved in policy development. NARTH was subsumed into a larger organizational

structure with a new name that better described its mission as the culture shifted, The Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity (ATCSI).

NARTH leaders had legally contested the first-in-the-nation ban on change-exploring therapies for minors in California and could see that the struggle to preserve therapy options, especially for religiously conservative individuals with unwanted same-sex attraction, was going to be a defining focus for the organization going forward. This, combined with an awareness of how increasingly politicized the social-science research had become, led to the new organizational identity.

For "A More Complete Truth"

The ATCSI structure expanded to comprise six divisions to give more opportunity for people with diverse backgrounds and interests to affiliate: (1) Ethics, Family, and Faith; (2) Public Education; (3) Client Rights; (4) Clinical; (5) Research; and (6) Medical. During this time, given the mounting legal entanglements surrounding change-exploring therapy, ATCSI also created an attorney position on the Board that continues to guide Board activities. In 2022, the ATCSI Board updated its mission statement to read:

The [ATCSI] exists to encourage human flourishing by promoting a more complete truth, informed by Judeo-Christian values and natural law, about the science of sexual orientation and biological sex through education, advocacy, clinical training, and therapy.

As the political movement to legally ban "conversion therapy" gained momentum, ATCSI leadership responded by becoming increasingly involved in efforts

to challenge this threat to ATCSI therapists' work of non-coercive psychological and pastoral speech-based care. In 2019, ATCSI was instrumental in the first-in-the-nation overturning of laws banning therapy in Boca Raton and Tampa, Florida. Several current or former ATCSI board members were involved in these cases, which have subsequently been upheld by the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Moreover, the defendants did not appeal the cases to the Supreme Court, no doubt out of the realistic fear that SCOTUS as currently comprised would likely uphold the decision, thus striking down all therapy bans across the nation. ATCSI leadership has continued to challenge laws restricting client and therapist freedoms, to provide legal briefs and expert testimonies, and to serve as plaintiffs in legal actions against a number of states and cities. There are currently discordant decisions among different Federal Circuit Courts regarding therapy bans, so there is hope among ATCSI leaders and many others that SCOTUS will soon find it necessary to address this issue.

Worth mentioning as well is the recent implosion of Sam Brinton, whose testimony of undergoing gruesome and torturous "conversion therapy" practices became a high-profile media narrative and formed the foundation of therapy bans. The former Biden administration non-binary appointee faces grand larceny charges after being arrested for stealing women's luggage in two airports. Moreover, Brinton's sister has publicly refuted his claims of having been abused by their Christian parents and subjected to painful "conversion therapy."² Brinton, who happily recalled minute details of the abusive practices he supposedly experienced, nonetheless could not recall the name of his therapist or where his therapist worked, thus raising further suspicion that his story is a complete fabrication.

Guidelines & Research

Beyond having to play defense in challenging therapy bans, the ATCSI also engages in proactive scholarly and clinical pursuits that support the Alliance's mission. In 2009 the ATCSI launched its own professional journal, the *Journal of Human Sexuality*, which serves as a forum for authors who approach homosexuality and gender dysphoria in a scholarly manner but from a traditional perspective that might be refused a hearing in other professional, social-scientific journals.³

In 2018, the journal published practice guidelines for sexual attraction fluidity exploration in therapy (SAFE-T), the Alliance's preferred language for what ATCSI-affiliated therapists and counselors practice.⁴ ATCSI also hosts a monthly clinical discussion group on the latest treatment techniques and approaches for people dealing with unwanted same-sex attractions and behaviors and gender confusion.

Finally, the ATCSI has also been at the forefront of recent research providing a much-needed counterbalance to longstanding claims, by the APA and others, that speech-based clinical care is inherently harmful. Recent work by Fr. Paul Sullins, Ph.D., has brought into serious question the "harm" narrative on the grounds that studies used to allege harm (e.g., increased suicide rates) have universally failed to account for pre-therapy suicidality. Sullins's reanalysis of one study found that therapeutic change efforts actually *decreased* suicidality, when pre-therapy levels of suicidality were controlled statistically, a finding which threatens to upend the entire "change-exploring therapy equals harm" narrative.^{5,6}

In addition, other recent research has pointed out that most studies of "conversion therapy" are conducted with LGBT-identified participants and exclude

by definition most traditionally religious Christian clients who do not identify as LGBT and who appear to have significantly different and more positive experiences with non-coercive, speech-based, change-exploring therapies.^{7,8}

Faith & Hope in the Arena

Despite many successes and contributions to preserving clients' rights to receive, and therapists' rights to provide, change-exploring therapies, the ATCSI remains a veritable David to the Goliaths of the APA, established mental-health organizations, and their gay activist allies. ATCSI operates on a comparatively tiny budget supplied by generous donors and the goodwill of like-minded partners and supporters. Yet there is a sense within the ATCSI that God is at work in this arena and that, much like Gideon's army of 300 against 135,000 Midianites (see Judges 7:1–15), he will give favor to the faithful efforts of the Alliance and like-minded organizations contending for the freedom of individuals to explore change in sexuality and gender. ☺

Notes

1. Kaufman, B. (2001-2002). Why NARTH? The American Psychiatric Association's destructive and blind pursuit of political correctness. *Regent University Law Review*, 14(2), 423-442.
2. <https://dailycaller.com/2023/02/20/disgraced-former-biden-official-sam-brintons-family-says-conversion-therapy-claim-fabricated/>.
3. https://www.journalofhumansexuality.com/_files/ugd/ec16e9_cfd1666f92a5421b-b6863e619698bc37.pdf.
4. https://www.therapeuticchoice.com/_files/ugd/ec16e9_1940a968273d47f5be4bdf9614d2dd0c.pdf.
5. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10508-022-02408-2>.
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Objecting Amiss

The Ad Hominem Fallacy

by Keith Hess

When I taught at a state college in Las Vegas, my students sometimes rejected the truth of the Bible because it was written by “uneducated shepherds.” What should we make of their objection?

First, as a matter of straight logic, in rejecting the Bible because of the standing of its authors, my students committed what’s called an *ad hominem*. “Ad hominem” literally means “to the body” or “to the man.” An *ad hominem* is a fallacy in which someone rejects a claim by attacking the person making the claim, instead of responding to the claim itself. *Ad hominem*s are always fallacious since an attack on a person is irrelevant to the truth status of the person’s claim.

Ad Hominem: Two Types

This fallacy comes in two types: *ad hominem abusive* and *ad hominem circumstantial*. With the first type, someone rejects a claim by criticizing the moral character of

the person making the claim. For example, suppose Peter claims that the earth is round. Suppose Paul rejects Peter’s claim because Peter cheats on his taxes. Paul would be guilty of *ad hominem abusive*. Clearly, the truth of the claim “the earth is round” depends on the shape of the earth, not on whether Peter is honest with the IRS.

The second type occurs when someone rejects a claim based on the circumstances of the person making the claim. For example, while working as a patent clerk, Albert Einstein published important scientific papers. Anyone rejecting Einstein’s theories simply because he didn’t hold a university position at the time would be committing the *ad hominem circumstantial*.

Regarding my students, they seemed to reject the Bible (or its claims) due to the personal circumstances of its authors. But regardless of whether the authors were uneducated shepherds or Roman emperors, their claims might still be true. The station of the authors is irrelevant to the truth status of the Bible’s claims. Thus, when considering any claim of Scripture, it’s the quality of the claim that matters in determining its truth status.

Responding to the Rejection

In addition to being fallacious, my students’ reasoning is based on a faulty assumption. While some of the Bible’s authors may have lacked social standing or a formal education, others were educated and well-positioned. For example, Moses was educated in “all the wisdom of the Egyptians,” David and Solomon were kings, Luke was a doctor, and Paul was a Roman citizen educated under Gamaliel the Elder.

Second, if the Bible traces its source to a divine origin, then whether or not its human authors were educated and well-positioned is inconsequential. God can relay His message through the humblest of means. In fact, 1 Corinthians 1:27–29 indicates that God intentionally works through the lowly: “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.”

While my students clearly missed the mark on this one, they can teach us a more general lesson: when analyzing the truth of a person’s claim, the truth of the message stands or falls independent from the particularities of the messenger. ☉



Government Therapy

Is the “Solution” the Problem?

by Lewis M. Andrews

For the first time in its history, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), a medical advisory service to the federal government, has recommended a national program to screen all adults under 65 for anxiety disorders. It would ideally happen as part of every annual health checkup, says Dr. Lori Pbert, a task-force member and professor at UMass Chan Medical School.

Generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety, separation anxiety, and phobias would all be targeted. Citing U.S. data collected from 2001 to 2022, the Task Force warns that 26.4 percent of men and 40.4 percent of women will suffer from at least one of these conditions over the course of their lives. And because anxiety disorders are currently unrecognized in primary care settings, it argues that continued lack of universal screening will effectively deny needed treatment to millions of Americans.

For universities with graduate programs in psychotherapy, the recommendation is obviously good business. As Dr. Pbert herself

admits, providing services to those flagged by a nationwide screening program would require a vast increase in the number of clinical psychologists, psychiatric social workers, and related professionals. “We know that we have an undersized mental health care workforce,” she says. “We’ll need to expand that workforce to meet the demand.”

Cause for Pause

But for those with some historical perspective on various approaches to treating anxiety, there is ample reason to question the wisdom of universal screening.

First, the record of conven-

tional psychotherapies in reducing anxiety, even among people who have sought counseling without the prodding of a required test, is not very impressive. The USPSTF itself “concludes with moderate certainty that screening for anxiety in adults, including pregnant and postpartum persons, has a moderate net benefit.”

As to the effectiveness of psychopharmacologic drugs, such as antidepressants and benzodiazepines, they do help some people. “But,” as *Wall Street Journal* columnist Daniel Henninger recently noted, “that raises an age-old question similar to administering drugs for ostensibly hyperactive boys in grade school: Would anxiety screening put many more millions on a lifetime regimen of pharmaceuticals?”

Second, the literature on anxiety, both before and after the rise of so-called “scientific” psychotherapies in the early twentieth century, strongly suggests a spiritual aspect to the disorder, especially among long-term sufferers. More specifically, it argues that persistent nervous feelings for which there is no immediate or rational explanation frequently stem from a rupture in one’s relationship with God.

Restlessness of Heart

St. Augustine’s most oft-quoted phrase, which comes down to us in the form of a prayer from his *Confessions*, is, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” Many other great Christian teachers have similarly viewed anxiety as a sign that believers were wavering in their faith, as did the influential twelfth-century Jewish physician Moses Maimonides, who wrote in his text on mind-body connections, *Regimen of Health*, “Let a person replace anxiety with hope [in God] and with this hope it is possible that in fact the opposite of what one fears will actually happen.”

Up until World War I, when almost every American college and university was still affiliated with a Christian denomination, clerical presidents often taught an upper-class seminar on how to deal spiritually with the various problems students were likely to encounter after graduation. A central teaching in these courses was the need to respond to every new fear or setback by remembering that, in the words of Yale President Noah Porter (1871–1886), “He who has brought you to this place will guide you to the end.”

The lesson was no different at women’s colleges. “We often make ourselves unhappy by dwelling on our condition and prospects, and those of our friends,” President Mary Lyon (1837–1849) told her Mount Holyoke students. “But it is our blessed privilege to commit all these to Him, who will certainly take care of us, if He sees we are not afraid to trust Him.”

It is true that most pioneers of what we now think of as psychotherapy—the early twentieth-century medical school psychoanalysts and psychology-department behaviorists—did not share this metaphysical view of anxiety. Yet the notion of a spiritual cause has never completely disappeared from the professional literature.

Harvard’s first psychology professor, the philosopher William James, who struggled his entire life with religious faith, was at least able to settle on a concept of mental health which required accepting one’s place in a universe beyond logical comprehension. “Ascend to some sort of partnership with fate,” he wrote, “go to meet it, work it to our needs, instead of dodging it all our days, and being run down by it at last.”

Having spent much of his own career trying to understand why so many people suffer from anxiety, psychoanalyst Carl Jung eventually came to see the disorder as a sign of unwisely resisting a change in one’s calling. He believed that

each person is presented with a series of life tasks not of his or her choosing—some biologically determined, others culturally absorbed, and still others divinely commanded. Neurotic anxiety, according to Jung, comes from resisting one of these tasks for any length of time.

Attending to “True Impressions”

Coming down to today, the notion of anxiety as a symptom of spiritual misalignment is an important theme in the contemporary revival of the ancient Catholic ministry of spiritual direction. Once offered exclusively by ordained priests, this practice of attending to God’s presence and call through silence, frank conversation with another believer, and a principled relationship with the larger world has proved increasingly popular with Anglicans and many Protestants.

These considerations raise the possibility that a government program might not only waste money on marginally effective secular treatments but, by promoting a policy that narrowly fixes anxiety as a medical or solely psychological condition, also actually aggravate the disorder in many people. For, as the novelist Saul Bellow famously observed in his acceptance speech for the 1976 Nobel Prize in Literature, the greatest difficulty moderns have in dealing with the spiritual lies not in having a sense of it, but in the lack of a publicly comfortable language for speaking about it.

We all have glimpses of the spiritual realm, Bellow noted, “what Proust and Tolstoy thought of as ‘true impressions.’” And,

[W]e never seem to lose our connection with the depths from which these glimpses come. [But] we are reluctant to talk about this because there is nothing we can prove, because our language is inadequate and because few people are willing to risk talking about it. They would have

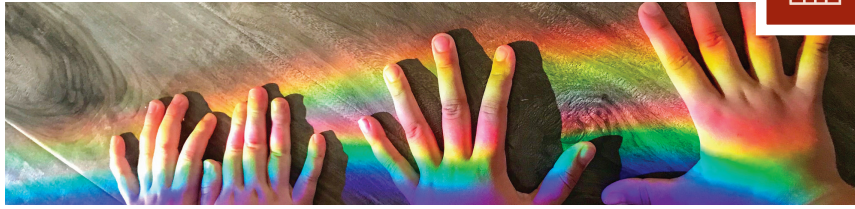
to say,
“There is a spirit”
and that is taboo.
So almost everyone keeps quiet about it, although almost everyone is aware of it.

Of course, a government screening project could avoid fostering an exclusively materialistic definition of

anxiety by simply acknowledging that many people have found help through a closer relationship with God. It might even be legal to fund the expansion of clinical programs with a pastoral-care component and require physicians to make their patients aware of spiritual treatment options. But in today’s world, such proposals would almost surely ignite political controversy, and the USPSTF gives no indication of being ready to cope with that kind of anxiety.

Fortunately, there is nothing to stop any believer who has turned his or her fears over to God from joyfully reporting the results of that treatment protocol. ☺

“That raises an age-old question similar to administering drugs for ostensibly hyperactive boys in grade school: Would anxiety screening put many more millions on a lifetime regimen of pharmaceuticals?”



a Bud Light situation, Target execs actually pulled some of the Pride items, and relocated the Pride sections to the back of the store in certain geographical areas.

NOT THE FIRST TIME

What seems to have repelled potential Target customers this year is the store's focus on children. But Target isn't the only one focused on the kids. Drag Queen Story Hour has for years pushed an extreme sexual ideology on children, and sex ed classes are urging gender nonconformity at ever younger ages. This focus on youth is part and parcel of a historic LGBT push for drawing children into their spheres, and there's some dark history here that the modern LGBTQ+ movement doesn't like to talk about.

In December 1977, the Boston police broke up what then-District Attorney Garrett Byrne described as a "sex ring" of older men who were preying upon boys. A total of 24 men were indicted on charges of statutory rape of boys ranging in age from 8–13.³ Many gay activists believed the charges were trumped up, and they formed something called the "Boise-Boston Committee" to defend

the men. Others joined the emerging pedophile defense movement, and the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) was formed in 1978. NAMBLA still exists, and its stated goal is "to end the extreme oppression of men and boys in mutually consensual relationships." Ending the "oppression" includes abolishing age-of-consent laws: "NAMBLA is strongly opposed to age-of-consent laws and all other restrictions which deny men and boys the full enjoyment of their bodies and control over their own lives."⁴

FOR "EVERYONE'S" SEXUAL LIBERATION

David Thorstad, MA, one of the group's founders, has written extensively in defense of "cross-generational

Targeting Practice

Homosexual Men Have Long Sought Out Children for Sex

by Nicole M. King

As I write, Pride Month 2023 (formerly known as June) is coming to a close. This year was a bit unusual, in that a few corporations finally crossed the line and incurred enough public disgust to suffer some financial setbacks. First, Bud Light and Nike both made the bizarre mistake of partnering with trans influencer Dylan Mulvaney in commercials. (Nike had the gall to use Mulvaney—a *male*—to advertise its female sportswear, including sports bras.) Conservatives, especially men who drink beer, promptly launched a massive boycott of the beer giant, and Bud Light fell from its place as the top-selling beer in America, giving way to Modelo Especial.

Just a few weeks later, Target suffered a similar fate. Two swimsuits in the Target Pride collection bore circular tags reading "Tuck-Friendly Construction" and "Extra Crotch Coverage" (presumably for males who identify as females).¹ A swarm of social media activity then ignited a new debate. *Was Target selling such "tuck-friendly" swimwear to kids?* A Target spokesperson told the AP that, *no*, the extra-crotch-coverage swimsuits were for adults only. But the same AP story admits that a Brooklyn, New York Target the AP visited did indeed have a black swimskirt for children with a tag that read, "Thoughtfully Fit on Multiple Body Types and Gender Expressions."

Another boycott ensued, and this one, too, did its damage. By early June, Target's stock valuation had plummeted by about \$15 billion.² Scrambling to avoid

love.” Such elements have always been a part of the homosexual movement, he writes. Thorstad describes what he calls the “pleasure-affirming impulses of the ‘Stonewall generation’”: “Sex is fun, homosexuality is fun, boy-love is fun, gay liberation is a movement for everyone’s sexual liberation.” Such are “the joys of an outlaw sexuality in the face of the outmoded moral norms of the dominant society.”⁵ This was a vision Thorstad believed was worth fighting for.

But sometime in the 1970s the public began to awaken to the idea that homosexual men preyed upon children. Central in this awakening was singer Anita Bryant’s Save Our Children campaign, which sought to overturn a Miami, Florida ordinance banning discrimination against homosexuals in several realms, including housing, employment, and public accommodation. Bryant opposed the ordinance on the grounds that Christian schools (like those her children attended) would be forced to hire openly homosexual teachers. The movement she launched touched off many like it in other states, and homosexual activists began to band together to fight these groups.

It was in response to this popular pushback, Thorstad explains, that the gay rights coalitions “sanitized” the image of homosexuality by claiming that gays wanted nothing more than what Christian heterosexual couples already enjoyed and by actively distancing themselves from more radical versions of “free love,” including the pedophilia movement.⁶

But while it may have been pushed to the background, the predatory “boy-love-is-fun” contingent didn’t go away. On the 20th anniversary of NAMBLA’s founding, Tom Reeves, co-founder of NAMBLA, wrote,

Gay rights has been a very white, very middle-class, very urban movement. As the American mainstream/right-wing . . . reeled from the events of the sixties, including gays marching in the streets, the new “gay leaders” quickly betrayed those on the margins—especially poor and working class and black and Hispanic queens and boy-lovers.⁷

NOT JUST IN THE 70S

We may (and should) recoil with horror at such evil. But we shouldn’t assume that arguments for acceptance of pedophilia have been left to the dustbins of history. Conservatives have long warned that once gay marriage was normalized, pedophilia would be next. In May of this year, the Connecticut House of Representatives passed a bill to ban discrimination

against “minor-attracted persons”—i.e., pedophiles.⁸

A 2018 TEDx talk (since taken down) featured a German medical student arguing that pedophilia is a sexual orientation, just like any other, even if it should not be acted upon.⁹ And a whole slew of academic literature argues for the rights of the “minor-attracted” and asserts that labels like “pedophile” unfairly malign those who have such impulses but don’t act upon them.

In many ways, such sentiments are more similar to today’s queer movement than to the gay rights movements of yesterday. The gay movement won its demands for nondiscrimination, marriage, adoption, and nearly everything else. Now, the “queer” movement seeks complete annihilation of all limits surrounding sex, age, and “gender.” If a mere child can consent to taking hormone blockers, or to having radical, gender-altering surgery, then it is not a far stretch to claim that a mere child can “consent” to a sexual relationship with an adult.

David Thorstad was right. NAMBLA is right. There has always been an element within the gay movement that sought for the “right” to have sex with children. To gain legitimacy, the gay-rights movement of the 1970s and beyond sought to silence such voices. But now, the queer movement is bringing them back. And tuck-friendly swimwear for boys is only the beginning. ☹

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Between the Lines

Dating the New Testament Based on What It Doesn't Say

by Daniel Buttafuoco

Historically, Christians have held that the books of the New Testament have come down to us as reliable records of true events. Skeptics say, *no*, they can't be accurate historical documents because they were written long after the time in which the events occurred. The skeptics' objection raises an important question, since, all other variables being equal, the earlier the books were written, the stronger is the case for their historical reliability. This is a standard tenet of critical scholarship for any ancient document. Can a good case be made for early dating of the New Testament?

NOT RECORDED: THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

One helpful way to date an ancient writing is by paying attention to what is *not* recorded. If a key event is not mentioned, for example, it is reasonable to argue for a date before that event occurred. Take the fall of Jerusalem. The entire Jewish world was forever changed in the year AD 70, when the city of Jerusalem and the temple were utterly destroyed.

The Bible is, primarily, a narrative about the Jewish people and their relationship to their God, and the fall of Jerusalem literally changed their world. Jerusalem and the temple were part and parcel to being Jewish. Prior to AD 70, religious life centered on the temple, and it was a daily part of life for Jews. Jesus preached at the temple during the Jewish holy days. After his death, his Apostles preached on the temple grounds. Peter healed a crippled beggar on the temple steps. The temple was the center and heart of Jewish life. Everything changed drastically after it was destroyed.

Only when we take into account how the entire gospel story—Jesus' ministry, his miracles, and his life

with the disciples—occurred in a thoroughly Jewish context, can we truly appreciate the importance of this cataclysmic event. How is it, then, that nowhere in the New Testament is the destruction of the temple recorded? It was the most monumental event that took place since the Resurrection.

Furthermore, Jesus had foretold it nearly forty years before it happened. Referring to the temple, he had told his disciples that "not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." Yet, the New Testament never mentions that this happened, just as Jesus had predicted. That is a glaring omission if the New Testament was written after AD 70.

The Jewish historian Josephus records the fall of Jerusalem in great detail. He records the siege of Jerusalem, the death of more than a million Jews, and the destruction of the temple by fire. But despite the fact that Christianity

was virtually "born" in Jerusalem, none of the New Testament authors mention any of this—no mention of the slaughter of more than a million of their families, friends, and relatives.

To overlook the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple in a collection of books that comprise the history of the Jewish people and their Messiah would be like writing a history of New York City in the 21st century and failing to mention the attack of September 11th and the collapse of the World Trade Center. Actually, it would be worse than that. The attack on the World Trade Center left 3,000 people dead. Josephus records a death toll of 1.1 million. Why would the New Testament authors fail to record this world-changing event, especially considering that Jesus himself had prophesied that it would happen? The most reasonable explanation seems to be that it *had not yet happened* when these New Testament books were written.

NOT RECORDED: KEY MARTYRDOMS

Similarly, if a key figure's death is not mentioned, it is reasonable to argue for a date of writing before



The Destruction of the Temple

that key figure died. The New Testament records the death of Jesus Christ (of course). It also records the martyrdom of John the Baptist; the persecution and death of James, one of Jesus' original 12 disciples; and the stoning of Stephen, an event to which the Apostle Paul was an eyewitness and participant. The point here is that these deaths of key figures are all recorded in the Bible.

The martyrdom of James, recorded in Acts 12, can be dated from extra-biblical sources to about AD 44. Thus, the book of Acts was written, at the earliest, after AD 44. But now, let's take the Apostles Peter and Paul, two towering figures for the early Christian church. Both Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome under Nero. Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down and Paul was beheaded, but neither of their deaths is mentioned anywhere in the New Testament. Nero died in AD 68, so this means Peter and Paul both died sometime before AD 68.

These omissions are super-important because they help us to date the writing of the book of Acts. They suggest that Acts was completed before AD 68—a timeline that does not leave much room for legends to take root. This coincides with what Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters

at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:3–6)

Paul writes that many eyewitnesses to Christ's resurrection were *still alive* when he wrote 1 Corinthians. The best explanation for all these omissions is that, at a minimum, the books of Acts and 1 Corinthians were completed before AD 70.

DATING MARK & REVELATION

Briefly, let's look at the dating of two other books, the Gospel of Mark and Revelation.

Many scholars agree that the Gospel of Mark was the first Gospel written, and that Mark primarily served as a scribe recording the eyewitness testimony of Peter, one of Jesus' first and closest disciples. Since, as we have noted, it is believed that Peter was martyred under Emperor Nero at the latest by AD 68, we have good reason to believe that the book of Mark was written before the year 68.

Most also agree that Revelation was the last New Testament book written. Some believe it was written during the reign of Nero (AD 60s), others under Domitian (AD 90s). I argue for the earlier date, for the following reasons.

The Apostle John wrote Revelation while exiled on the island of Patmos. The main reason scholars attribute the later date to Revelation is because of a potentially misunderstood quote by the church father Irenaeus. Irenaeus wrote that John was exiled by Domitian, who was emperor in the 90s. But it's entirely possible that Domitian ordered John's exile while working for his father, General (later Caesar) Vespasian. That would date John's exile and the writing of Revelation much earlier. Further, the later date would mean John was close to 100 years old when he returned to Ephesus, where he died. It seems unlikely that such an elderly man would survive exile and the return journey to Ephesus.

GOOD REASON

Dating the writings of the New Testament as early as possible to the events it records is important, because the dating can reflect on the accuracy of the writings. If the books were written during a time when many eyewitnesses to the actual events were still alive, we have good reason to conclude that the events they record did in fact take place as they said. Thus, we have good reason to believe that some, if not all, of the New Testament books were written before AD 70. ☉



States of Surveillance

European Data Mining in the Name of Welfare-Fraud Detection

by Neil English

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has recently become all the rage around the world, filling some people with awe and others with terror. Just like any new technology, it can be used for good or for nefarious purposes. And right on schedule, governments worldwide are conducting experiments with AI, often without public awareness. While there has been limited reporting on the topic, the focus has mainly been on predictive policing and risk assessments within the criminal justice system. However, there is an area where even more extensive experiments are taking place, and they are targeting vulnerable populations with minimal scrutiny.

OPAQUE TECHNOLOGIES

Extensive welfare-fraud detection systems are now being used in welfare states, such as Denmark and other Scandinavian countries. Ranging from basic spreadsheets to sophisticated predictive algorithms, these systems generate “scores” that can have life-altering consequences for millions. The sales pitch for them emphasizes their potential to recover large amounts of fraudulently obtained funds from public resources. But public authorities have typically resisted calls for transparency, citing instead increased fraud risks or the need to protect proprietary technology. The portrayal of benefit cheats often reinforces the stereotype of the “undeserving poor,” and the debate over these issues in Europe, which has generous welfare states, is highly politically charged.

Consulting firms, for example, who are often the algorithm vendors, tend to exaggerate the extent of welfare fraud, claiming it to be around 5 percent of benefits spending, while national auditors’ offices estimate it to be much lower, somewhere between 0.2 and 0.4 percent. Differentiating between honest

mistakes and intentional fraud in complex public systems is admittedly challenging, but when opaque technologies are deployed to try to distinguish one from the other, or even to simply identify the latter, they pose significant risks to all. Millions of individuals are now being subjected to scoring by these systems based on data-mining operations that take place out of the public eye, as fraud controllers gain the authority to deeply interrogate citizens’ lives. Being flagged by the “suspicion machine” can have severe consequences, and anyone can become a suspect.¹

DENMARK

As a case in point consider Denmark, which spends a whopping 28 percent of its GDP on state benefits. Despite claims made by Bernie Sanders, Denmark is not a socialist country, but its citizens do pay high taxes in exchange for first-class benefits. The average Danish

taxpayer contributes 36 percent of his income to the state in return for “free” universal healthcare, education, and elder services.² Such a system works well in the small, Nordic countries where people must endure long, dark winters with very cold temperatures, thus necessitating more highly coordinated public-spending programs to protect their most vulnerable. Such schemes would be quite unworkable in the United States because of its much more varied demography and climate.

But in recent years, this amount of government spending has become a hot-button issue in Denmark, and the Danish government has cut back on public spending, even as its population is aging. Further complicating the matter, back in 2011, KMD, one of Denmark’s largest IT companies, estimated that up to 5 percent of all welfare payments in the country—an order of magnitude higher than most other European countries—was fraudulent. So Denmark set out to crack down on benefit fraud, and its fraud-detection system has since ballooned in terms of the extent of its surveillance and ethnic profiling. Under the aegis of Annika Jacobsen, the head of



the data-mining unit at the Danish Public Benefits Administration, the agency has tripled the number of state databases it accesses from three to nine.

According to Gabriel Geiger at *Wired*, the Danish system now collects highly personal data on individuals, including information related to their taxes, homes, autos, relationships, employers, and travel. Other variables considered include nationality (now deemed illegal in many Scandinavian countries), connections to non-EU countries through “family relations,” marital status (including “presumed partner”), duration of marriage, living arrangements, home size, income, previous residence outside Denmark, call history with the Public Benefits Administration, and even the residency status of taxpayers’ children. All this data gets fed into sophisticated models said to have the ability to analyze it and then predict potential cases of fraud. But while these programs are highly intrusive, which is problematic in itself, Morten Bruun Jonassen, a decision-maker at the hard end of the automated fraud-control system in Copenhagen’s social services department, says only a “very small” number of the cases he encounters involve actual fraud.³

OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Several other countries, including France, the Netherlands, Ireland, Spain, Poland, and Italy, have also turned to similar AI-based algorithms in response to political pressure to crack down on welfare fraud. The Netherlands in particular serves as a cautionary tale against excessive reliance on technology. In 2021, the Dutch government faced a childcare benefits scandal, which resulted in the resignation of

the entire government. Approximately 20,000 families were wrongly accused of fraud due to officials considering minor mistakes, like a missing signature, as indications of fraudulent activity, and welfare recipients were forced to repay significant sums of money they had received as benefits.

The scandal was enough to bring down the Dutch government, but after reviewing documents obtained from Denmark’s system, Geiger says Denmark’s system goes well beyond the one that brought down the Dutch government.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

As a keen student of American current affairs, I understand the United States to be currently under a radical, far-left administration. According to a report by Thomas Catenacci from the *New York Post*, William Henck, a former Internal Revenue Service (IRS) lawyer who was forced out of his job for accusing his superiors of malfeasance back in 2017, came out as a whistleblower, warning that the greatly expanded IRS was intending to audit millions of small businesses and middle-class taxpayers.⁴ It’s almost certain the IRS will be employing AI algorithms similar to those used in Denmark and other European countries harvesting personal data to conduct these audits.

In an even more sinister move, according to Kyle Seraphin at *UncoveredDC*, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has recently received approval from the Biden administration to keep an eye on Roman Catholics, and especially those who attend the Latin Mass.⁵ As Charlie Kirk, founder of Turning Point USA, put it, “The FBI was just caught plotting to target Catholics who attend Latin Mass using SPLC [Southern Poverty Law Center] rhetoric as justification to treat them as enemies of the state.”⁶ Would the FBI be keen to use this new and powerful data-gathering and surveillance technology to close in on future suspects? Why not?

Raising awareness about these underhanded data-harvesting methods being deployed on an unsuspecting public is the first step toward putting an end to their game. ☹

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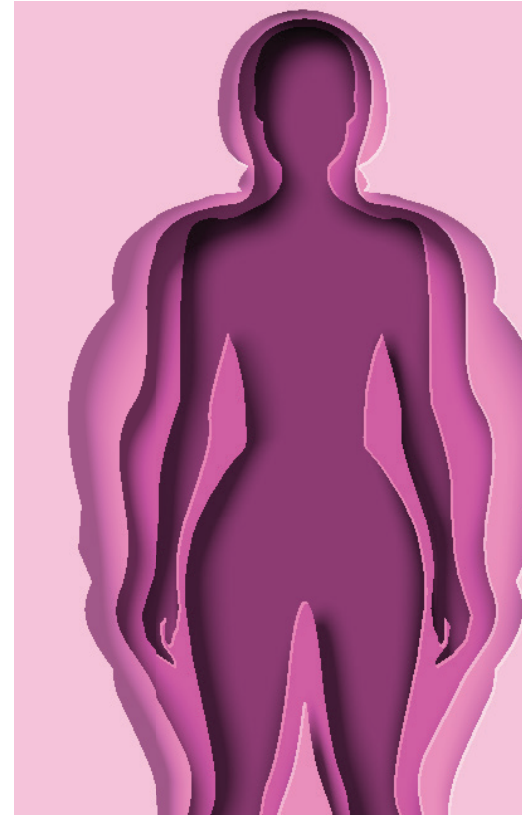


Heavy Questions

Concerns with New Prescription Weight-Loss Injections

by Bryan Just

What would you do if someone offered you a drug that would make dieting a breeze? A drug that not only helped you lose weight, but would also reduce your appetite so that you didn't even notice you were dieting? This may sound like something from a fairy-tale, but the pharmaceutical industry has introduced several drugs that promise to do exactly that, and several more are on the way.



WEIGHT-LOSS DRUGS

The past few years have seen an explosion of drugs for weight loss, such as Wegovy, Mounjaro, and Ozempic. Delivered via a weekly, self-administered injection, these drugs—called GLP-1 receptor agonists—work by mimicking the hormone responsible for making you feel full after you've eaten. Similar drugs have been used since 2005 to treat type 2 diabetes; however, it was quickly realized that one of their side effects was weight loss.

In the U.S., the most commonly used weight-loss injections are Ozempic and Wegovy, both sold by Novo Nordisk. Ozempic was approved by the FDA for treating type 2 diabetes in 2017 but has never been approved for weight loss. Wegovy was developed specifically for treating obesity and was approved for that use in 2021. Despite the different names and usages, they are just different doses of the hormone semaglutide. Eli Lilly sells its own diabetes treatment called Mounjaro, which is being used off label as a weight-loss drug, though Lilly is seeking FDA approval for treating obesity.¹

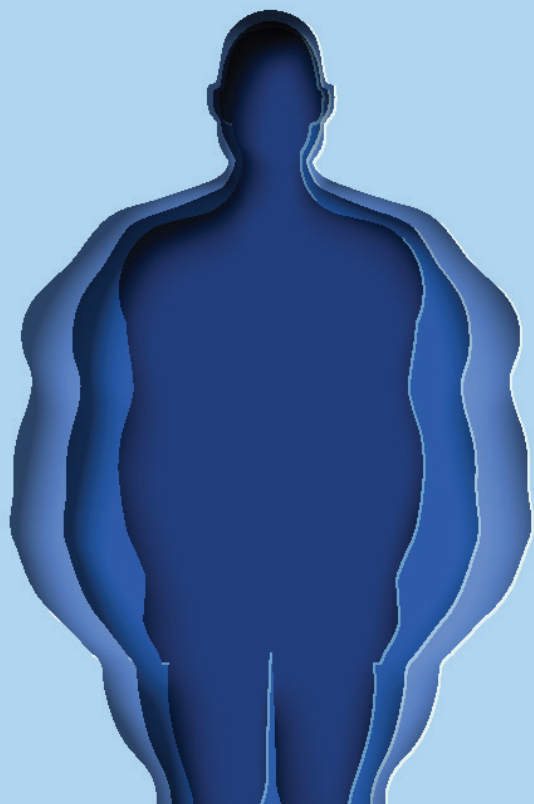
These drugs really do seem effective in causing weight loss, so much so that people have referred to Ozempic as “the skinny pen.”² In a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, those who took semaglutide for a little over a year lost an average of 15

percent of their body weight.³ This is not to say the injections are without risks, however. For Wegovy, Novo Nordisk lists “nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, constipation, stomach (abdomen) pain, headache, tiredness (fatigue), upset stomach, dizziness, feeling bloated, belching, gas, stomach flu, heartburn, and runny nose or sore throat” as common side effects.⁴ More serious possible side effects include pancreatitis, gallbladder problems, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), kidney problems, and increased heart rate.

VIRAL SPREAD

Those who have shed pounds because of their injections often become evangelists for the drugs, sharing the “good news” of their weight loss through social media. Celebrity and influencer endorsements have further spread the drugs' reach. On TikTok, videos about Ozempic alone have received 1.1 billion views.⁵ Influencers commonly take their followers along on their “weight-loss journey” and tout the almost miraculous results. All of this has contributed to prescriptions for weight-loss injections increasing by 2,000 percent over the past 4 years.⁶

Another reason for this precipitous increase is that getting a prescription has become quite easy. Several telehealth websites offer easy access to medication with vanishingly little oversight. Journalists



have reported getting a prescription for Ozempic without ever seeing a doctor—they simply filled out a survey, had a brief phone conversation or message exchange, and paid a fee. The doctors involved never actually saw the “patient,” and no diagnosis of type 2 diabetes or obesity was required.⁷

These factors have turned medicalized weight loss into a hugely profitable field. Ozempic and Wegovy generated \$10 billion in 2022 alone. If tirzepatide (the active ingredient in Mounjaro, which causes even greater weight loss) is approved to treat obesity, some estimate it could bring in \$50 billion per year.⁸

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A number of things about the increasing popularity of weight-loss injections should give pause. Since Ozempic and Mounjaro have so far only been approved for treating type 2 diabetes, prescribing them for weight loss involves an off-label use. While doctors commonly prescribe drugs off label if they believe it will benefit their patients, these uses have not been thoroughly tested. In fact, Novo Nordisk has specifically stated that the company “does not support or promote the use of our medicines outside of the FDA-approved indication, whether by telehealth providers or otherwise.”⁹ This is easily lost

on someone who hears the drug’s benefits peddled on social media and then receives a telehealth prescription.

Relatedly, there has not been time for long-term studies on those who use them for weight loss. Numerous other weight-loss drugs have been taken off the market due to serious side effects that were not recognized until they had been in use for several years. Even if the drugs prove safe, studies seem to indicate that they will need to be taken long term to keep the weight off—those who stop taking the medications tend to see their appetites (and weight) increase.¹⁰ The newness of these treatments and the fact that they are being prescribed off label also mean that most insurance plans do not cover them, which leads to steep costs—a year of injections costs upwards of \$15,000.

The direct-to-consumer advertising, a somewhat uniquely American phenomenon that leads to people asking for medications that may not be indicated for them, is another concern. This dynamic is exacerbated by the popularity of these drugs among influencers on social media. Laws around influencer marketing in the U.S. are outdated and unclear. And even if Novo Nordisk and Eli Lilly do not pay influencers, select distributors of their products do. Some pay influencers directly; others don’t pay them but provide free medication.¹¹ The testimonials people see on social media have proven to be very persuasive, especially to those who have struggled to shed extra weight put on during Covid lockdowns.

Even more concerning is that the drugs are being promoted on social media platforms frequented by children and adolescents. Teens are impressionable and tend to be very concerned about their body and self-image. If adults are easily sucked in by the promise of easy weight loss, we should expect that teens will be, too. Wegovy has already been FDA-approved for treating obesity in children as young as 12. Combined with lax telehealth standards, it is not

The promise of easy weight loss may deter some from developing self-control or addressing underlying personal and emotional factors that led to overeating in the first place.

unthinkable that impressionable teens might start trying to get their hands on weight-loss injections, even if they are not truly obese.

A final concern is that the drugs' newfound popularity has led to supply shortages affecting those who need them to manage their diabetes. Patients usually start on low doses and work their way up to higher ones as their body acclimates; in response to the shortages, Novo Nordisk has limited starter doses until they can work out the supply issues to ensure that those already on the medication can receive what they need. The company even halted advertisements for Wegovy. Though the supply is ticking up, the FDA still lists Ozempic, Wegovy, and tirzepatide injections as being in shortage.¹²

REFLECTIONS

Despite the many causes for concern, safe drugs to help people control their obesity have their place. Obesity-related illnesses lead to thousands of deaths every year. A disciplined diet and exercise regimen is effective for weight loss, but there are a variety of factors why someone could struggle with these, some personal and some physiological. The human body can be quite averse to losing weight and actively fight against it, meaning that sometimes people need additional help.¹³ Shedding excess weight can improve mobility, energy level, and self-perception. Thus, the questions around injectable weight-loss medications are not about whether their effects are beneficial, but about whether these medications are the best way to achieve them—especially for children or those who are mostly healthy but want to shed a few pounds.

That said, weight-loss injections, or any other medication, should not be put forth as a substitute for self-discipline. The abundance enjoyed by many in the U.S. can lead to overindulgence and a lack of care for our bodies. While Ozempic or other medications can help one regain control of weight and appetite, the fact that people tend to regain weight once they stop taking it could be evidence that at least some of them failed to address the underlying issues that led to weight gain in the first place. Novo Nordisk itself has recognized this, and those who are prescribed Wegovy also receive access to supports like a personalized health coach to help them develop better health habits in tandem with taking the medication.

Humans, and Americans in particular, are prone to searching for technological solutions to their problems. Weight-loss injections may seem like a much easier path to weight loss than a diet and exercise routine that requires consistency and discipline.



For some, their use may be indicated and will have many benefits. For others, however, the promise of easy weight loss may deter them from developing self-control or addressing underlying personal and emotional factors that led to overeating in the first place. Thus, we should approach the use of weight-loss medications carefully, being sure that we are not substituting technology for a disciplined, healthy lifestyle. ☉

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Students Without Heads?

How an English Textbook Performs Mass Lobotomies Without a Scalpel by D. Joy Riley

Eighty years ago, C. S. Lewis delivered the 15th annual Riddell Memorial Lectures. It was a series of three lectures, with the objective being to discuss the relationship between religion and contemporary thought. Lewis's chosen subject was, "The Abolition of Man or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools."

He titled the first lecture "Men Without Chests." Lewis was taking to task a certain book being used in British schools, but he did not name either the book or its two authors. Instead, he referred to the book as *The Green Book* and to the authors as "Gaius and Titius." He found that, instead of teaching grammar or literary criticism to the students, through *The Green Book*, Gaius and Titius were indoctrinating students with a novel kind of "ethics, theology, and politics."

Men Without Chests

Gaius and Titius described Coleridge's experience at a waterfall, where he overheard two tourists talking. One described the waterfall as "sublime," the other, as "pretty." Coleridge lauded the first but rejected the second description. Gaius and Titius did not content themselves with explaining why Coleridge may have rejected one in favor of the other description. Instead, they explained that both tourists were "only" talking about their emotions, their *feelings about* the waterfall. As Gaius and Titius cast it, one of the tourists "felt sublime" while the other experienced "pretty feelings." In so doing, Lewis explained, instead of educating students in the English language or literature, the authors of *The Green Book* were debunking the very concept of objective sublimity—trivializing it in such a way that the students were unaware of what was being done to them.

Lewis dissected the damage done to the unwitting students:

The schoolboy who reads this passage in *The Green Book* will believe two proposi-

tions: firstly, that all sentences containing a predicate of value are statements about the emotional state of the speaker, and secondly, that all such statements are unimportant.

Here, Lewis explained, Gaius and Titius claimed to be "cutting away the parasitic growth of emotion [and] religious sanction," but in so doing, they trivialized emotion while also trivializing objective values.

In "Men Without Chests," Lewis analyzed the effect of this trivialization using a three-part model of human anthropology comprised of the intellect, or seat of *reason*; the heart, or seat of rightly ordered *sentiment*; and the stomach, the locus of *appetite*. Our



appetites, or desires, said Lewis, are disordered. The heart is the seat of emotion, but the sentiments must be trained to be properly ordered. We must be *taught* which things are to be enjoyed and which should be avoided. Relying on Aristotle and Augustine, Lewis said that in order for the sentiments to be rightly ordered, the intellect should rule the appetites through the heart (which Aristotle called the “spirited element”).

Lewis decried the use of the term “intellectual” for such men as those who would be formed by *The Green Book*, because they would lack a proper ordering of their sentiments. If we do not teach the younger generation to properly order their affections, he wrote, we are forming “men without chests.” It is our hearts that make us human, he pointed out. If we were only intellect, we would be “mere spirit”; if only appetites, “mere animal.” With his penchant for vivid clarity, Lewis characterized the results of such instruction as Gaius and Titius provide:

[W]e remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.

What Is an Argument?

Several years ago, I purchased a copy of the text used in my son’s college English class. It was a book used in many American colleges and universities. I wanted to know what he was being taught, and I also had another interest. It was unclear to me why papers I received from some of the upper-level college or newly minted graduate students I taught seemed so utterly lacking in understanding what constitutes an argument. What were these students learning in their English classes?

It would be easy enough to begin with a definition. This one is from *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

An *argument* is a set of two or more sentences or beliefs. . . . One of the sentences or beliefs is the conclusion, the rest are premises. The premises of a good argument provide justification, warrant, evidence, or support for its conclusion.¹

But that is not how the college textbook discussed the making of an argument. Following Lewis’s lead, I will call it *The Red Book*.² I read the first third of *The Red Book*, but I could have stopped on page 10. By that point, I had read enough to be more than concerned. The authors write:

.....

If Gaius and Titius through *The Green Book* formed “men without chests,” and we through *The Red Book* are forming “men without heads,” then the new generation is above all to be pitied—and perhaps feared. Without heads or chests, we end up with only bellies: appetites.

Often, writers argue to inform others, to give information, much like a bumper sticker that simply provides an organization’s name and Web address: R & L’s House of Ribs: www.R&L.com.

While it is true that writers often argue to inform others, the authors of *The Red Book* teach that virtually every conceivable expression of a point of view is an argument:

The clothes you wear, the foods you eat, and the groups you join make nuanced, sometimes unspoken arguments about who you are and what you value. So an argument can be any text—written, spoken, aural, or visual—that expresses a point of view. In fact, some theorists claim that language is inherently persuasive. When you say, “Hi, how’s it going?” in one sense you’re arguing that your hello deserves a response.

. . . We have many reasons to argue, then, and not all of them are about winning. In addition to convincing and persuading others, we use arguments to inform, to explore, to make decisions, and even to meditate or pray.³

What Is an Assertion?

The authors of *The Red Book* conflate many things with arguments, but I will focus on only one of them—the *assertion*. An assertion, according to the *Free Dictionary*, is “a positive statement or declaration, often without support or reason; allegation.”⁴

The 2013 edition of the book opens with a description of “women driving day” in Saudi Arabia,



ing “men without heads.”

The result is even worse than we might imagine. If Gaius and Titius through *The Green Book* formed “men without chests,” and we through *The Red Book* are forming “men without

heads,” then the new generation is above all to be pitied—and perhaps feared. Without heads or chests, we end up with only bellies: appetites.

along with tweets and social media postings from Middle Eastern countries during the 2011 “Arab Spring.” The authors write, “anyone, anywhere, with access to a smart phone, can mount an argument that can circle the globe in seconds.” Indeed, “arguments are all around us.”

Had the authors used the word “assertion” in those last two sentences, they would have been correct. But “Everything is an argument” is a specious claim. To assert that “Everything is an argument” nullifies the definitional requirement that an argument consist of premises and a conclusion—the very elements of a bona fide philosophical argument. Note that the statement, “Everything is an argument” is, itself, nothing more than an assertion. Thus, the *Red Book* authors have enlarged, even transmuted the meaning of the term *argument* by merely making an assertion.

Furthermore, if *everything* is an argument, that would include values, our moral obligations to one another. If honesty, generosity, and kindness are only arguments, then presumably so are lying, selfishness, or generalized nastiness. If this is so, then what do we teach our children? How do we rightly order our own lives, morally, if there is no objective moral truth? *The Red Book* would have us believe that these competing values would merely be competing arguments.

Men Without Chests . . . or Heads

Returning to Lewis, if there is no objective moral truth, then what hope does a person have of ruling his or her appetites? Lewis wrote of the head (the intellect) ruling the appetite (the belly) through the chest (rightly ordered sentiments). *The Green Book*, Lewis argued, produced people without chests.

Now, *The Red Book* muddles the intellect with a definition of argument that includes “everything.” But a definition inclusive of “everything” is restricted by nothing. This makes it virtually meaningless, and rightly ordered thinking is thereby a casualty. Students’ intellects are not being developed properly if they internalize the fallacy that *everything* is an argument. Using the Lewisian anthropology, we are form-

Rule by Appetite?

The word “appetite” derives from the Latin for “longing” or “desire.” Appetite is not related only to hunger for food. Whatever the desire—food, land, love, money, power, sex, or “x”—there is an appetite for that.

Suppose I have an appetite for sweets. In order for me to live well, my food intake needs to be informed by knowledge of the need for proper nutrition for a human body, as well as the realities of body habitus, blood glucose levels, and even family history. Ignoring these data points (for whatever reason) and taking in a diet of unchecked sweets will likely result in one or more maladies, such as tooth decay, malnutrition, obesity, and possibly type 2 diabetes. Real results will follow, even if I choose to ignore them for a time. Similarly, striving to satiate any overpowering appetite will produce a myriad of results for the one with the appetite and likely for many others.

If a man or woman has neither intellect nor rightly ordered heart through which to rule the appetites, he or she can only have desires. Lacking both intellect and heart, the desires will be disordered, but they will be accompanied by the drive to have the appetite satiated, for that drive is in itself a desire. Fulfilling these disordered appetites will require power, perhaps an arsenal.

If the will to power is not the kind of world in which we wish to live, then some changes are in order. Perhaps we could begin by replacing *The Green Book* and *The Red Book* with curricula that teach what an argument really is, and how to properly order emotions. After all, appetites we already have—aplenty. ☉

Notes:

1. <https://plato.stanford.edu/Archives/Win2005/entries/relativism/supplement3.html>
2. Lunsford, Andrea A., and John J. Ruskiewicz. *Everything's An Argument*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013.
3. *Ibid.*, pp 5-6
4. The Free Dictionary, 2010. <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/assertion>



Life's "Abominable"

The Cambrian Explosion as Evidence for Intelligent Design

by Günter Bechly

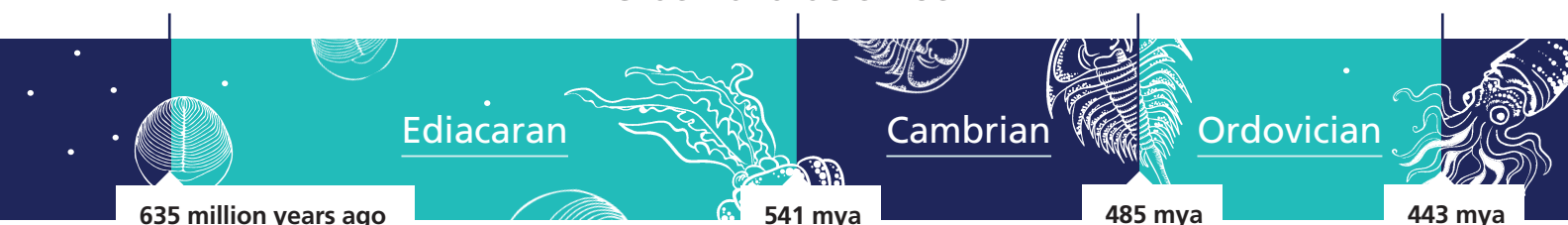
Every good scientific theory worth its name makes precise predictions that allow us to test with real world data if the theory is correct. This is also true for Darwin's theory of evolution, which predicts that big differences between organisms came about by the accumulation of many small differences over long periods of time. This is also called gradualism.

In his seminal book *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin quoted the Latin sentence "*natura non facit saltus*" ("nature does not make jumps") six times, because he was fully aware that only a gradual development would allow for a purely naturalistic mechanism, while saltations (abrupt changes) would imply some kind of miracle-like intelligent interventions. That this gradualism is not a marginal issue, but instead lies at the very core of the theory of evolution, was admitted by one of its most prominent modern defenders, Richard Dawkins, who wrote

in his 2009 bestselling book, *The Greatest Show on Earth*, "Evolution not only is a gradual process as a matter of fact; it has to be gradual if it is to do any explanatory work."

Wouldn't it be great if we had a time machine to check if Darwin and Dawkins were right with this prediction of gradual development? Well, we indeed do have a sort of time machine: it's called the fossil record. Fossils provide a window into deep time; thus, we have hard data and do not have to rely on educated guesses.

GEOCHRONOLOGICAL SCALE



able” Big Bang

The Cambrian is a period in Earth history about a half-billion years ago. In the early Cambrian layers, all the different body plans of animals appear suddenly in the fossil record, without any of the postulated precursors documented in earlier layers. Even Dawkins has conceded that, “It is as though they were just planted there, without any evolutionary history.”

Putting Darwinian Gradualism to the Test

So, does the fossil record support Darwin’s prediction? In Darwin’s time, it clearly did not, and Darwin was well aware of this problem. In his magnum opus he admitted, “Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain; and this, perhaps, is the most obvious and serious objection which can be urged against the theory. The explanation lies, as I believe, in the extreme imperfection of the geological record.” In other words, he appealed to the incompleteness of the fossil record and our poor sampling of it to explain away the conflicting evidence. This is no longer possible, because with our enormously expanded knowledge of the fossil record since Darwin’s time, the discontinuities have not disappeared but have become even more pronounced.

Furthermore, we meanwhile have developed very good statistical tests (such as the “collector curve”) for evaluating the completeness of our sampling of the fossil record. These tests confirm

that sudden appearances of novel life forms followed by stasis are not artifacts of preservation or under-sampling but are genuine data in need of an explanation.

The most well-known event in Earth history featuring such an abrupt appearance is what’s called the Cambrian explosion. The Cambrian is a period in Earth history about a half-billion years ago. In the early Cambrian layers, all the different body plans of animals appear suddenly in the fossil record, without any of the postulated precursors documented in earlier layers. Even Dawkins has conceded that, “It is as though they were just planted there, without any evolutionary history.” The different body plans are commonly classified as distinct animal phyla, such as echinoderms, mollusks, annelids, arthropods, and chordates, etc. Of the 33 living animal phyla, at least 20 are recorded in the Cambrian explosion, while the missing ones are mostly tiny worm-like organisms confined to very special habitats.

All these different body plans exhibit highly complex distinct organ systems that would have



required a long chain of thousands of transitional species if they had developed by a stepwise Darwinian mechanism, but these links are totally missing. The two most famous localities for the Cambrian explosion are the Burgess Shale, from the Canadian Rockies, and the Chengjiang Formation in China. Both have preserved even small soft-bodied organisms in such intricate detail that in some cases even their internal organs, such as the gut and nervous systems, can be studied.

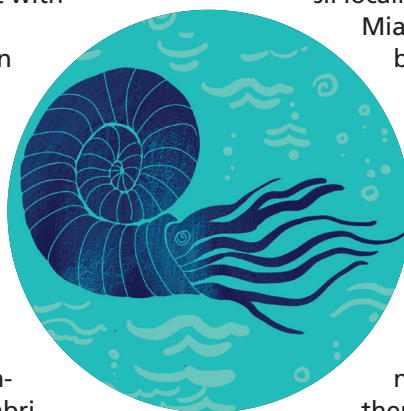
Inconvenient Evidence for Darwinists

Evidence from the Cambrian explosion represents an inconvenient truth for staunch Darwinists, and they have often responded to it with a blunt science denial. Some have claimed that the Cambrian explosion is a misnomer for an event that was not abrupt at all but was indeed as gradual as predicted by the theory. For example, vertebrate paleontologist Donald Prothero claimed that the Cambrian explosion lasted 80 million years. He arrived at this dubious number by simply adding the complete time span of the Ediacaran and Cambrian periods, even though the Cambrian explosion is an event in the Lower Cambrian that lasted at most 20–30 million years, with its main pulse lasting only 5 million years. (A common length of time cited in the technical literature for the Cambrian explosion is 5–10 million years.¹)

But the actual experts on Cambrian fossils know very well that the Cambrian explosion really was an abrupt event. Here is a quote from a recent monograph on *Epigenetic Mechanisms of the Cambrian Explosion*, by Nelson R. Çabey (2019):

Nevertheless, now, 150 years after *The Origin*, when an incomparably larger stock of animal fossils has been collected, Darwin's gap remains, the abrupt appearance of Cambrian fossils is a reality, and we are still wondering about the forces and mechanisms that drove it. Despite the fact that, from time to time, a small number of students have questioned the reality of the Cambrian explosion on the same ground as Darwin, today's consensus is that Cambrian explosion is a scientific fact.

Other experts have made very similar statements and would laugh Prothero out of the room.



An Explosion of Ad Hoc Hypotheses

→ The Artifact Hypothesis

Since denial of these facts is pretty much hopeless, more serious evolutionists have tried to explain away the Cambrian explosion with different ad hoc hypotheses. The most popular approach has been the artifact hypothesis, which claims that the lack of evolutionary precursors in older strata is either due to their anatomy being too small and soft for preservation or to a lack of suitable sediments like the Burgess Shale that could preserve such organisms.

This argument is no longer tenable, however, since the discovery of about a dozen Ediacaran fossil localities (e.g., the Lantian Formation and Miaohu biota in China or the Zuun-arts biota in Mongolia) having exactly the same conditions as the Cambrian Burgess Shale. These localities could have preserved even small and soft-bodied ancestors of the Cambrian animals but have only yielded fossil algae and a few problematic fossil taxa of dubious affinity. Even mainstream evolutionists now acknowledge that Ediacaran animals are not missing because we have not found them, but simply because they did not yet exist in the Ediacaran period.

→ Ediacaran Biota as Precursors

Nevertheless, some scientists have thought they could locate the ancestors of the Cambrian animal phyla among the fossils of the Ediacaran biota. In the Ediacaran period, which immediately preceded the Cambrian, the first macrofossils that even a layman would recognize as fossil organisms are recorded. However, these fossils of the Ediacaran biota cannot be potential ancestors of the Cambrian animal phyla because they have a very alien structure unlike any later fossil or living organisms. They have a unique air-mattress-like quilted body without any visible organs or openings, a strange glide symmetry (offset left and right body side), and a weird fractal growth pattern. Nobody really knows what they are, and there are advocates for almost any conceivable option—from giant protists to an independent multicellular kingdom (Vendobionta), to lichens, fungi, algae, or coelenterate-grade animals. Only a handful of enigmatic Ediacaran fossils have even been discussed as potential ancestors of sponges, cnidarians (*Haootia*), mollusks (*Kimberella*), annelid-like worms (*Yilingia*), and lophophorates

Evidence from the Cambrian explosion represents an inconvenient truth for staunch Darwinists, and they have often responded to it with a blunt science denial.

(*Namacalathus*). However, these are highly controversial and hardly stand up to scrutiny, which is why mainstream experts on these groups have either remained skeptical or rejected such claims. Even if the advocates are correct, such few exceptions would by no means explain the sudden appearance of most other animal phyla in the Cambrian explosion.

➡ Small Shelly Fossils as Precursors

Another attempt was the claim, made by intelligent design (ID) critic Nick Matzke and others, that so-called small shelly fossils fit the bill as putative ancestors of the Cambrian animal phyla. The problem with this claim is that it commits the fallacy of equivocating between two very distinct and unrelated groups of fossils. The first is the Small-Shelly-Fauna *sensu stricto* from the Lower Cambrian, which is nothing but fragments of shells and spines and exoskeletons of Cambrian animal phyla. The other is the Ediacaran Shelly Fauna, which only consists of rather complete body fossils of just three different taxa (*Namapoikia*, *Namacalathus*, and *Cloudina*). These three genera are of enigmatic affinity and are almost certainly unrelated to the bilaterian Cambrian animal phyla. There is neither temporal nor anatomical overlap between these two small shelly faunas; all they have in common is the name. Thus, under closer inspection, this claim is just another case of smoke and mirrors by Darwinists desperate to explain away conflicting evidence.

➡ Trace Fossils as Evidence of Precursors

A more reasonable argument was based on the trace fossil record. Trace fossils are fossilized remains of walking and burrowing tracks in the petrified seafloor. The Cambrian explosion correlates with the first appearance of traces of burrowing activity deep into the sediment, which is also called the Cambrian Substrate Revolution. There are also trace fossils from the Ediacaran, but these are strictly confined to the surface of the ancient seafloor. Some of them indeed look like traces of crawling or creeping invertebrates, or even walking tracks of arthropods. Could

these be the otherwise elusive Ediacaran ancestors of the Cambrian animal phyla?

This was a strong argument until a seminal study in experimental paleontology by Giulio Mariotti et al. (2016).² Their study was based on the well-known fact that the Ediacaran seafloor was covered with bacterial mats. So Mariotti and his colleagues decided to grow such bacterial mats in aquarium tanks, stir them up, and see what kinds of artifacts were created by the settling mats. Lo and behold, all the characteristic types of Ediacaran trace fossils could be exactly replicated by folding and shrinking artifacts of these mats, without any animals involved. Since then, a few new worm-like tracks have been discovered, but these could as well have been created by giant protists (this still happens on deep seafloors today) or crawling cnidarians. The only good evidence for an association of traces and possible animal fossils are *Kimberella* and *Yilingia*, but both are of uncertain affinity. Therefore, the trace fossil record is no solution to the Cambrian dilemma after all.

➡ From Ad Hoc to the Exotic

Evolutionists who do not deny the suddenness of the Cambrian explosion have suggested a lot of different hypotheses regarding what might have caused this remarkably quick burst of biological novelty. Such hypotheses include nearly anything from global glaciations, raised oxygen content, a surge of nutrients (e.g., phosphorous), plate tectonics, cancer-like freak development by poisoned sea water, an armed race between predators and prey, to even extraterrestrial ancestry by panspermia. Other less exotic suggestions focus on genetic and epigenetic factors, such as microRNAs and HOX genes.

None of these mechanisms can explain how all the complex specified information for new genes and new proteins could originate in such a short time. Therefore, some scientists like Charles Marshall have simply denied that any new genes and new proteins were required. Instead, they have suggested that so-called gene regulatory networks (GRNs) just had to be reshuffled and rearranged like

Lego bricks, without the generation of much new information. However, this claim has been refuted by recent research (e.g., Paps & Holland 2018³ and Heger et al. 2020), which shows that the origin of all the animal phyla and generally all major transitions in the history of life involved the origin of many new genes and new proteins.

Overstated Claims

Finally, here is a recent example that demonstrates how sweeping claims about alleged solutions to the Cambrian problem must always be taken with a large grain of salt: Allison Daley et al. (2018) published a study on the fossil record of Cambrian arthropods.⁴ It was celebrated in press headlines as proof that the Cambrian explosion was a lengthy and gradual event after all; however, if you read the actual report, the findings proved the exact opposite.

Here is what they discovered. About 518 million years ago, we find the oldest stem group arthropods like *Anomalocaris*. About 537 million years ago, we find the first evidence for derived crown-group arthropods like trilobites. Thus, the putative descendants are 19 million years older than the putative

ancestors. This forced the scientists to postulate a hypothetical ghost-lineage of stem arthropods that is not documented in the fossil record. The scientists also acknowledged that until 550 million years ago, no arthropods or other animals existed. This would imply that complex arthropods with an exoskeleton, articulated limbs, compound eyes, and gut and nervous systems developed from jelly-like ancestors in only 13 million years. Such a sudden transition to a totally new body plan is simply impossible with a blind Darwinian mechanism, as can be easily demonstrated by population genetic calculations. (This is often called the waiting time problem).

A Consistent Pattern of Abrupt Appearances

Could the Cambrian explosion just be an exception from the rule? Theoretically it could be, but in reality, it is not: similar abrupt appearances of biological novelty are rather the rule and have been consistently found in all periods of Earth history, in all geographical regions, and over all taxonomic categories, from plants and protists to invertebrate and vertebrate animals.

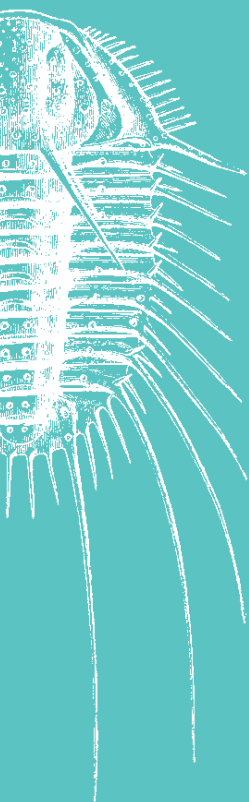
Some examples would be the very origin of life itself; the origin of photosynthesis; the Avalon explosion with the origin of the strange Ediacaran biota prior to the Cambrian; the Great Ordovician Biodiversification Event; the Devonian Nekton Revolution and Odontode Revolution; the Silurian-Devonian Terrestrial Revolution with the origin of land plants; the Carboniferous explosion of winged insects including true metamorphosis; the Triassic explosions of marine reptiles and of tetrapods like dinosaurs; the Cretaceous origin of flowering plants, called an “abominable mystery” by Darwin because it violated his gradualist expectations; the Paleogene origin of butterflies; the Paleogene avian radiation of modern birds and radiation of placental mammals; the Neogene “Big Bang” of our own genus *Homo*; and last but not least, the sudden origin of human culture in the Upper Paleolithic Human Revolution. All these events were named explosions, revolutions, or “Big Bangs” by mainstream paleontologists to highlight their sudden and non-gradual nature, and many have been explicitly compared with the Cambrian explosion.

When the Data Don't Fit, Extend the Synthesis

This consistent pattern of abrupt appearances clearly contradicts the core prediction of gradualism by Darwin's theory. When a theory is so

Other Notable Explosions!

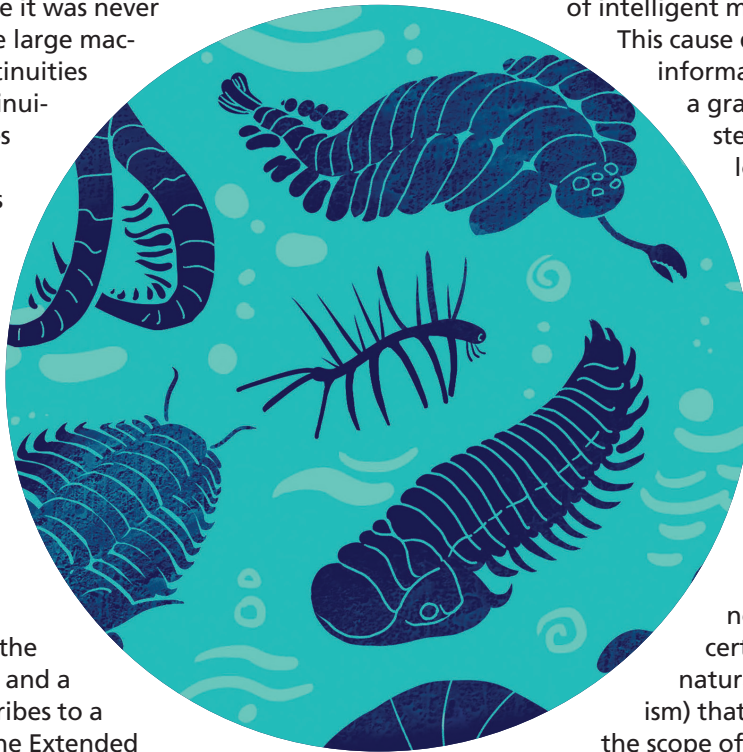
- **The origin of life itself**
- **The origin of photosynthesis**
- **The Avalon explosion**
- **The Great Ordovician Biodiversification Event**
- **The Devonian Nekton Revolution**
- **Odontode Revolution**
- **The Silurian-Devonian Terrestrial Revolution** (land plants)
- **The Carboniferous explosion** (winged insects, metamorphosis)
- **The Triassic explosions** (marine reptiles and tetrapods)
- **The Cretaceous origin** (flowering plants)
- **The Paleogene origin** (butterflies)
- **The Paleogene avian radiation** (modern birds, placental mammals)
- **The Neogene “Big Bang”** (our own genus *Homo*)
- **The Upper Paleolithic Human Revolution** (human culture)



thoroughly refuted by empirical evidence, it is time to put it to rest and look for better alternatives. Of course, most secular scientists will not consider design as a valid option, so they keep searching for naturalistic alternatives. The earliest attempts were the theory of neutral evolution, put forth by geneticist Motoo Kimura, and the theory of “punctuated equilibria” by paleontologists Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould. The former fails to explain complex adaptations, while the latter was largely misunderstood, because it was never designed to explain the large macro-evolutionary discontinuities but only minor discontinuities in species-to-species transitions.

A newer attempt is so-called Constructive Neutral Evolution, but it also fails to explain complex adaptations and can only explain superfluous complexity, similar to funny Rube Goldberg machines. Among theoretical biologists, the recognition that Neo-Darwinism has failed is increasingly becoming the mainstream consensus, and a large group now subscribes to a new paradigm called the Extended Evolutionary Synthesis (EES), which proposes a host of new mechanisms like niche construction, phenotypic plasticity, or natural genetic engineering.

This EES has also been called a third way of evolution to distinguish this paradigm from the alternatives of Neo-Darwinism (which has been refuted) and Intelligent Design theory (which is considered forbidden territory). However, none of these third-way mechanisms has yet resolved the failures of Neo-Darwinism, as evidenced by the fact that none of them is emerging as a consensus view, even among EES proponents. They only agree that Neo-Darwinism fails to explain crucial phenomena, such as the origin of biological novelties, phenotypic complexity, and non-gradual transitions, that were explicitly listed as the explanatory deficits of Neo-Darwinism by renowned Austrian evolutionary biologist Prof. Gerd Müller in his keynote talk at the prestigious Royal Society of London 2016 conference, “New Trends in Evolutionary Biology.”



The Design Hypothesis: Still Unrefuted

Since all these alternatives also fail, maybe it is about time to reconsider the design hypothesis. Darwin himself used a common and very reasonable approach that proposes explanations of past events by reference to known causes operative in the present. There is, in fact, a single cause that is known to produce new complex information and specified complex structures. It is the conscious activity of intelligent minds as free agents.

This cause does not produce novel information and structures via a gradual process of tiny steps accumulating over long periods of time, but rather can work abruptly with bursts of creativity.

We can make an inference to the best explanation, based on our positive knowledge about the kind of causes capable of producing the effect in question. As good scientists, we should not be biased towards certain worldviews (like naturalism and materialism) that arbitrarily restrict the scope of allowed explanations. Good scientists should follow the evidence wherever it leads, and discontinuity is the hallmark of intelligent design.

The Cambrian explosion, together with the total evidence of the discontinuous fossil record, strongly suggests that intelligent design is the best explanation for the observed pattern in the data. Materialist invocations of aliens or time-traveling genetic engineers from the future only push the origin-of-life and origin-of-information problem to the next level. While the identity of the designer is a different question altogether, theists nonetheless have the more reasonable and consistent explanation—divine creative activity. ☺

Notes

1. https://evolutionnews.org/2013/07/how_sudden_was_/.
2. <https://pubs.geoscienceworld.org/sepm/jsedres/article-abstract/86/4/287/145517/Microbial-Origin-of-Early-Animal-Trace-Fossils?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.
3. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-018-04136-5>.
4. <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1719962115>.

SERVING THE MACHINE

AI & the Specter of Digital Totalitarianism

by Robin Phillips

Artificial intelligence—the prospect of machines capable of perceiving, synthesizing, and inferring information—has been the Holy Grail of the tech industry since the 1950s. But while various forms of machine learning have been around for decades, our world has recently witnessed a quantum leap forward in AI technology. After countless generations of self-learning, neural network systems have become so advanced that they are often incomprehensible even to those who wrote the original code. Computer engineers know that AI works, but they often don't know how or why it works. As *Vice Magazine* explained last November:

The people who develop AI are increasingly having problems explaining how it works and determining why it has the outputs it has. Deep neural networks (DNN)—made up of layers and layers of processing systems trained on human-created data to mimic the neural networks of our brains—often seem to mirror not just human intelligence but also human inexplicability.

Most AI systems are black box models, which are systems that are viewed only in terms of their inputs and outputs. Scientists do not attempt to decipher the “black box,” or the opaque processes that the system undertakes, as long as they receive the outputs they are looking for.

Expanding Our Concept of Everything

As AI continues to provide desired outputs, is there any limit to the problems it might help us overcome? Not really, according to many thinkers. Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, predicts that within two decades, “computer programs . . . will do almost everything, including making new scientific discoveries that will expand our concept of ‘everything.’” In the process, Altman argues, poverty will be greatly reduced, and robots will deliver a future that “sounds utopian.”

But might these aspirations for utopia inadvertently end in dystopia? Is AI something we should be concerned about? To answer this question, we need to understand the mechanisms whereby technology in general, and AI in particular, become integrated into society.

Enveloping the World Around the Machine

On its own, AI is not intrinsically useful to human beings. If you were to release an AI chatbot into a hunter-gatherer society, it would be no more useful than releasing a book into a purely oral culture. Before AI can perform services that are useful to men and women, something else must first happen. We must first adjust our environment so that the machine can flourish within it.

A good example of creating an environment in which a machine can flourish is a dishwasher. We don't just build a robot to stand at the sink and do dishes because that would be exceedingly expensive and not very effective. Instead, we build



now controlled by cars even if we don't have one. There is nothing surprising about this, for throughout history, humans have been accommodating their internal and external environments to their inventions in a symbiosis that causes the inventions to take on new importance and indispensability.

The Emerging Information Society

What happened with the car is analogous to what is happening today as we forge an information society. Before information and communication technologies can appear smart and useful, we must first envelop the world around them. We must create a society in which digital code can, so to speak, flourish.

What does a world look like after it has been enveloped around digital code? Well, look around you. Contemporary life is increasingly built atop a substructure known as the "internet of things," whereby physical and digital objects

constantly communicate with one another—and often make decisions for us—in a sprawling network of inter-operating systems. You might think you are only using the internet when you are interacting with a screen, but you are actually using it when you shop, drive, watch TV, fly on an airplane, or go to the mall. This is because the technologies that facilitate activities like shopping and driving are increasingly built on a foundation of ubiquitous computing, embedded systems, and wireless sensor networks.

These systems now comprise an entire ecosystem of semi-autonomous processes that could not be easily stopped without massive disruptions. W. Daniel Hillis explained back in 2010 how so much of the modern world is now built on top of this ecosystem.

More and more decisions are made by the emergent interaction of multiple

In a world of digital totalitarianism, all problems come to be perceived as an information-processing opportunity.

Ultimately, digital totalitarianism leads us to reinterpret ourselves.

a three-dimensional space in our kitchens in which a "robot" (in the most general sense of the term) can accomplish the task. At a 2013 talk for the Innovation Forum, Italian Oxford philosopher Luciano Floridi referred to this process of customizing the environment as "enveloping" an environment around the machine.

What is true on the micro level with things like dishwashers is also true on the macro level of society as a whole. The process of customizing our social spaces, routines, and expectations for our machines has been a recurring theme throughout the history of technology. One very clear example is with the invention of the automobile. When the automobile was invented, it was widely believed that the new transportation would save time for ordinary people, especially women. While the ease of travel did open up new opportunities, its promise as a time-saving mechanism never materialized. This is because the infrastructures of economics, townscapes, and social life gradually adapted to the automobile and the expectations that came in its wake. We enveloped the world around the invention.

Moreover, given all the changes that came as a result of cars (the emergence of large department stores, zoning requirements, city planning, and on and on), in many ways the structures of our lives are

communicating systems, and these component systems themselves are constantly adapting, changing the way they work. This is the real impact of the Internet: by allowing adaptive complex systems to interoperate, the Internet has changed the way we make decisions. More and more, it is not individual humans who decide but an entangled, adaptive network of humans and machines . . . We have embodied our rationality within our machines and delegated to them many of our choices.

--- An Informational Approach to All of Life

Since Hillis wrote those words more than a decade ago, we have continued embodying our rationality in machines and delegating many of our decisions to them. In the process, a strange phenomenon began to occur: our own understanding of the world began to be modulated by our machines. Floridi described this in his 2014 book, *The Fourth Revolution: How the Infosphere is Reshaping Human Reality*. He pointed out that in a world where wireless information is ubiquitous and interconnected with every aspect of our lives, our information and communication technologies end up “promoting an informational interpretation of every aspect of our world and our lives in it.”

One example of an “informational interpretation” of our lives comes from Floridi himself. The Oxford philosopher has spent his career attempting to collapse anthropology, psychology, metaphysics, and history into branches of information studies. Floridi has argued that human beings are merely one variety of informational organism among many others. Anthropology and technology are on the same ontological plane of existence because all of us—you, me, and my PC—are just informational organisms.

Even among those of us who have not succumbed to Floridi’s reductionist anthropology, it is hard to escape from an informational interpretation of many aspects of our world. As we envelop our world around our machines, we produce a state of affairs in which technology that is unintelligent—and would have been completely useless in past epochs of history—begins to seem indispensable. “Smart” technologies become unavoidable to the degree that the option to opt-out is increasingly removed from the table.

Indeed, we have accommodated our environment to our machines to such an extent that in many parts of the urbanized world today a person can no longer flourish without having the right relationship to what Floridi calls the “infosphere.”

Our employability, our ability to borrow money, and even our social capital are largely contingent on how we stand in relation to data in the cloud. The machines that store, organize, manage, and manipulate this data start to seem very important and smart to us, but only because we have built social, political, and economic environments around them. As Floridi puts it in *The Fourth Revolution*, “The digital online world is spilling over into the analogue-offline world and merging with it,” leading to “the informization of our ordinary environment.”

In short, instead of merely making computers user-friendly, we have also been making our world computer-friendly. In the process, we have created a data-centric world in which information is becoming all-important and indispensable, thus requiring ever more powerful systems to manage and control that information.

--- The Information Society

What does all this have to do with AI? As we begin customizing our world for AI—essentially enveloping our society around it—this will likely lead to *new ways of perceiving the world*, including an intensified tendency to interpret everything through an informational lens. Let’s unpack that.

Before AI can be useful, we need to first create a macro-environment in which AI can flourish—a world where whole swaths of life are handed over to processes and procedures that operate by digital code. This type of societal shift is already significantly underway with the developments described in the last section. However, this process will only be complete when we transition to a state of total technology and information immersion, or what I sometimes refer to as “digital totalitarianism.”

Digital totalitarianism refers to the final stage of enveloping our world around our technology, when all aspects of life are mediated through, managed by, and integrated with the information regime. Until recently, this type of condition might have been a pipedream of engineers and people on the spectrum. But thanks to AI, this type of world now seems within reach. As AI becomes more sophisticated, it claims to offer more “objective” and efficient solutions to problem-solving. But this comes with incentives, often unspoken, to reframe more aspects of life and culture (including ethics, politics, health, education, and more) in terms that AI can understand, manage, and contribute to.

In a world of digital totalitarianism, all problems come to be perceived as an information-processing opportunity. Ways of working with the world’s material and cultural potential that cannot be framed



in digitized terms are marginalized; things that at one time would have been moral issues become re-framed as engineering problems, and all objects, including perhaps human beings themselves, become receptacles of data.

Ultimately, digital totalitarianism leads us to reinterpret ourselves. Floridi, who celebrates recent digital developments as ushering in a new epoch of self-understanding, nevertheless offered this warning about ways our self-understanding may be modulated under the influence of emerging systems:

The risk we are running is that, by enveloping the world, our technologies might shape our physical and conceptual environments and constrain us to adjust to them because that is the best, or easiest, or indeed sometimes the only, way to make things work. . . . The deepest philosophical issue brought about by ICTs [information and communication technologies] concerns not so much how they extend or empower us, or what they enable us to do, but more profoundly how they lead us to reinterpret who we are and how we should interact with each other.

AI does not necessarily have to lead to digital totalitarianism. If AI can predict when a bridge is about to collapse, help identify wildfires, or relieve workers from repetitive tasks, few would dispute these are good things. AI could also help humans more effectively exercise the virtue of prudence. According to Proverbs, prudence involves collecting information prior to making a decision. Sometimes

information-collecting comes from a human source (wise counsel), but sometimes it also comes from a natural source (evidence of past high watermarks on a riverbank) or an electronic source (a calculator or spreadsheet). AI could fall into the latter category as an additional source to inform wise decision-making. In fact, AI already does just that: every time we do research using a search engine, we are using AI.

Risky Bargains

Yet these benefits need to be weighed against substantial risks. As the trend to envelop our world around our technologies expands to include seamless integration with AI, we simply do not know what type of world will emerge. Just as the internet of things has become a semi-autonomous infrastructure on which much of modern life now depends, the future could be morphing into a place where nearly all departments of life are built atop a substrate of machines making decisions on our behalf, yet without any clear exit strategy should this prove dehumanizing.

The risk is that instead of using machines to customize the world to our needs, we may end up customizing the world to the machine. In a world customized for AI, the engineering mentality becomes the *modus operandus* for all of life, and we face the temptation to turn all problems into information-processing opportunities. Worse, we face the prospect of becoming habituated to a vision of human good forged in the opaque recesses of a sea of neural networks.

Consider that many of the ways AI has already proven dehumanizing (pricing algorithms that capitalize on disasters, bots that hire and fire workers with callous disregard for human factors) are precisely the result of reshaping human society around the type of intelligence appropriate only for a bot. As a result of ceding huge swaths of life to the machine's way of doing things, new problems may emerge, and to solve these problems we could end up capitulating to even deeper levels of machine dependence.

In customizing our environment to data-dependent states of affairs, are we in danger of losing the things that matter most to our humanity? If so, could that be the real AI dystopia we should be worried about? Not algorithms taking over and acquiring agency, and not AI evolving its own intentionality, but humans creating a world customized for the flourishing of artificial intelligence? In our attempt to create machines to serve our needs, we could end up refashioning ourselves into servants of our machines. ☹

SUPER MOON

Without Our Lunar Partner There Would Be No Life on Earth

by Hugh Ross

Astronomers' quest to find another planet somewhere in the universe capable of supporting life continues in earnest. While this primary goal remains elusive, the search has succeeded in revealing new insights about the features essential for a planet to host life. As research advances, planet Earth appears all the more rare and exquisitely designed as a viable habitat for advanced life.

This is the face of the Moon that we see from Earth. This image is based on data from NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter spacecraft.

Earth-Moon System

*Earth-Moon sizes and separation distances are to scale.



..... Distance between Earth & Moon **Present Day**



..... Distance between Earth & Moon **4 Billion Years Ago**

Perhaps you've already learned that a life-sustaining planet must reside in a particular orbit around its star—an orbit where heat is sufficient, but not too intense, where radiation is present but not too deadly, where water is sufficient but not overabundant, etc. To date, 13 such planetary habitable zones have been identified as essential for life's existence, and the number seems likely to continue growing.¹

Meanwhile, astronomers have been able to find and to determine at least some of the orbital and other physical features of nearly 5,400 planets.² Many of these planets reside in one, and several reside in two, of the specific zones essential for habitability, such as the zones where liquid water may be available and where the incident ultraviolet radiation is suitable for life. However, only one planet—among all those yet discovered—is known to reside where *all* 13+ planetary habitability zones simultaneously converge, and that's our Earth. Astronomers have also come to recognize that significant credit for our planet's extraordinary suitability for advanced life goes to our extra-large Moon and its stabilizing influence.

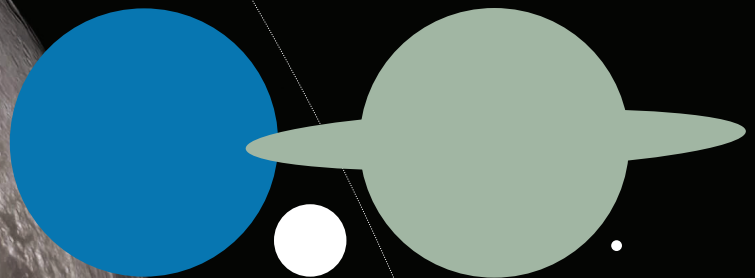
Earth's Moon as a Contributor to Life

Since the 1990s, astronomers have understood that life more advanced than microbes requires a rocky planet orbited by a moon of substantial mass. Only our relatively massive moon could sufficiently stabilize Earth's rotation axis to provide us with a survivable climate stability. In the case of the Earth-Moon system, the lunar mass equals 1.230 percent of Earth's mass.³ This percentage may seem small at first glance, but relative to its host planet, it is unprecedented. The second highest known moon-to-planet mass ratio is that of Titan, which orbits Saturn. Titan's mass equals 0.0236 percent of Saturn's mass. The Moon-to-Earth mass ratio is 52 times greater.

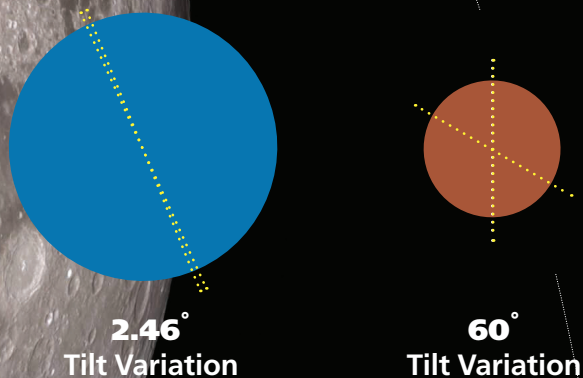
The relative massiveness of our Moon maintains Earth's slight rotation axis tilt variation of 22.04 to 24.50 degrees. By comparison, Mars's

Earth vs. Saturn Moon Mass Ratios

*Saturn is 10x diameter of Earth.



Earth vs. Mars Axis Tilt Variation



rotation axis tilt varies from 0–60 degrees. The steady tilt of Earth's rotation axis means our climate remains sufficiently stable to allow for the existence of advanced life.

Thanks to the combination of our Moon's high mass relative to Earth's *and* its proximity to Earth (see figure), lunar tidal forces effectively recycle life-critical nutrients all along Earth's continental shelves, thereby sustaining the biomass and biodiversity that advanced life requires.

The Moon's tidal forces for the past 4.47 billion years⁴ have served to gradually slow Earth's

rotation rate from 3–4 hours per day to the current rate of 24 hours per day. A 24-hour rotation rate happens to be ideal for advanced life, whereas a 23- or 25-hour rotation rate would result in either inhospitable climate or temperature effects that would limit where humans could live on Earth.⁵ Thanks to the Moon's just-right mass and orbital recession rate (i.e., gradual distancing from Earth), Earth arrived at a 24-hour rotation rate just as the Sun's luminosity became adequately stable for existence of advanced life.⁶

The Moon also rescued Earth from losing all of its atmosphere and surface water. During the first 700 million years of the Sun's existence, it blasted out particles and radiation that would have sputtered away all of Earth's atmosphere and water if not for the Moon's characteristics. Both the early Earth and early Moon possessed hot liquid iron cores. Because the two bodies were sufficiently close to one another, their mutual tidal forces caused the liquid iron in their cores to circulate. This circulation generated powerful magnetic fields around the two bodies. Nothing less than the coupling of these two fields, called magnetospheres, could have preserved Earth's atmosphere and surface oceans.⁷

Typical Moons as a Danger to Life

In a recently published paper, physicist Bradley Hansen has demonstrated that large moons orbiting rocky planets would be more likely to *destabilize*, rather than to stabilize, their planetary hosts and entire planetary systems.⁸

Hansen cites research showing that it takes a fine-tuned collision between two (or more) rocky planets to form a large moon, one that subsequently remains for extended time in orbit about its planet.⁹ A collision and consequent merger of two rocky planets cause the resulting rocky planet to rotate more rapidly than it did prior to the collision and merger. If the consequent planet's rotation rate is too low, the planet will extract angular momentum from the orbit of the newly formed body, the moon, causing it to spiral inward and, relatively quickly, crash back into the planet. On

the other hand, if the planet's subsequent rotation rate is sufficiently high, the angular momentum will be transferred to its moon, causing it (in nearly all cases) to spiral outward until it escapes the gravitational grip of the planet.

Hansen further demonstrated that once the large moon escapes its planet's gravitational hold, another collision with its planet will eventually occur. Here's why: when the moon spirals outward to the point at which it no longer orbits its planet, it still continues to share the planet's orbit about their host star. Thus, the runaway moon will experience repeated close encounters with its planet over time. Thus, Hansen showed that "nearly all of the freed exomoons will eventually collide with the original host planet."¹⁰

Hansen's study tells us that one day, but not anytime soon, the Moon will collide with Earth. Today, the Moon is spiraling away from Earth at a rate of 3.82 centimeters per year. Because of how massive the Moon is relative to Earth, the tidal forces exerted by the Moon on Earth will someday slow the planet's rotation rate to a point at which Earth will become tidally locked to the Moon.

That is, one hemisphere of Earth will always face the Moon. This event will cause the movement of the Moon away from Earth to reverse. Forty billion years from now, the Moon will collide with Earth. Before then, however, in just 4.5 billion years, the Sun will become a red giant star and incinerate both the Moon and Earth. For those who think our planet will be stable and habitable forever, this news is sobering, if not devastating. On the other hand, the relationship and features of both the Moon and Earth appear to have been carefully and strategically orchestrated.

Tabby's Star as an Illustration

In 2015, the star KIC 8462852 was investigated by a team of astronomers led by Tabetha Boyajian and quickly became a media sensation.¹¹ Unusual luminosity fluctuations in a star that came to be known as "Tabby's star"—fluctuations such as a dimming of its light output by as much as 22 percent—caused astronomers and other sky watchers to speculate that an extraterrestrial intelligent



civilization might have constructed a “Dyson sphere” around the star.

A Dyson sphere is a megastructure hypothesized by physicist Freeman Dyson. In Dyson’s scenario, an intelligent species that captures a large percentage of its host star’s power output could potentially transform that power into useful energy for its civilization. An opaque alien megastructure surrounding a star would certainly be responsible for blocking or dimming its light to such a degree as that which researchers noted in the case of Tabby’s star.

However, Hansen’s study, to the disappointment of many, provides a reasonable explanation for the KIC 8462852 luminosity variations. The collision of one or more moons with one or more planets in the star’s orbit would have generated huge clouds of dust around the star and, thus, would account for the observed dimming variations.

Follow-up observations of KIC 8462852 that continued through 2017 did, in fact, show wavelength-dependent dimming consistent with huge dust clouds periodically blocking out some of KIC 8462852’s light, just as Hansen’s model predicts. An opaque alien megastructure would have blocked out all wavelengths equally.¹² (The plausibility of such a structure’s existence represents an entirely separate matter for discussion.)

Additional Surprises

Hansen further explained that these inevitable collisions between rocky planets and their large moons would likely eradicate life or the possibility of life on all neighboring bodies within a given planetary system. Advanced-life-habitable planets

The relationship and features of both the Moon and Earth appear to have been carefully and strategically orchestrated.

must not only be rocky and reside in all 13 known habitable zones simultaneously, but they must also possess a moon that’s neither much more nor much less than 1 percent of the planet’s mass. Such a moon has the right mass to remain in a stable orbit about the planet for a sufficient length of time—sufficient time for advanced life to exist and endure and discover these facts.

The idea that all these requirements could be met without invoking supernatural, super-intelligent Agency seems beyond any realistic probability.¹³ Hansen’s research seems to add even more weight to the ever-growing body of evidence for the existence and action of a personal, purposeful Creator. We humans and our home would appear to be part of a divine plan that extends beyond the known boundaries of matter, energy, space, and time. We simply cannot, at least not reasonably, take our existence for granted. •

Notes

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Ingeniously Made

Systems Biology & the Engineer Who Leaves Big Tech in the Dust

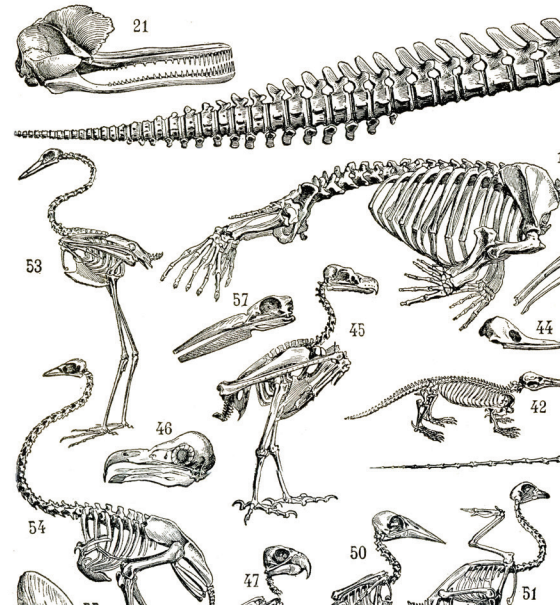
by Jonathan Witt

Most academic biologists would sooner parasail into Mordor than admit intelligent design beats blind evolution. Modern Darwinism is very much the reigning paradigm in historical biology. Curiously, however, the hottest branch of experimental biology nowadays actually adopts as a working *heuristic* the view that biological systems are optimally engineered. This hot new approach—systems biology—has proven so fruitful that there is a growing demand for engineers to join biological research groups to help those groups think like engineers.

Recently I had the privilege of attending a scientific conference that took this systems biology approach—the Conference on Engineering in Living Systems (CELS). What makes this gathering stand out is that the biologists and engineers in attendance don't adopt the design paradigm as merely a working heuristic. They are convinced that the biological systems under review exhibit clever engineering solutions because they really were cleverly engineered. Every CELS talk I attended spotlighted a different ingenious design in biology, or upended some cherished Darwinian assumption, or both.

In one lecture, internationally distinguished Brazilian chemist Marcos Eberlin discussed the engineering marvels of proteins, *ribosomes*, and their underlying amino-acid architecture. Ribosomes contain proteins and RNA. They are waterproof, mechanically resistant, flexible, and elastic, with long-lived, connecting units. They work like knitting machines but are much smarter than knitting machines, Eberlin explained.

Proteins, likewise, are extraordinarily strong, flexible, and elastic structures—much better than



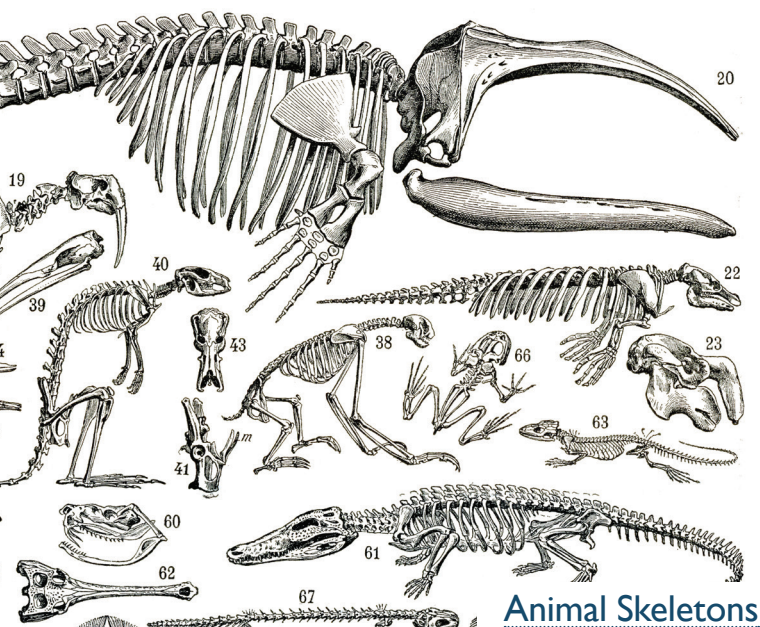
man-made nylons—and are able to self-fold into the precise *four-dimensional proteins* needed for life. They do so in a myriad of shapes that fulfill a host of challenging tasks. These protein machines, moreover, don't just work individually; they work together symphonically.

Eberlin said that many of his fellow scientists deny God but plagiarize him all the time in a research field known as biomimetics. The kicker is that when they manage the copying feat, they usually do so in a way inferior to the original.

A CHICKEN-AND-EGG PROBLEM

Eberlin also pointed out problems with the idea that RNA, proteins, and ribosomes evolved gradually through a mindless process. To get ribosomes and any kind of protein, you need various kinds of amino acids, all left-handed. (No, amino acids don't have hands. They do, however, have amine groups either on the right-hand or left-hand side.) How did mindless nature sort through the righties and lefties and choose exclusively left-handed amino acids? There is no purely mindless natural process for generating or selecting only left-handed amino acids.

Eberlin warned against slipping into a view of physical laws as having foresight or intentions. The laws of nature were never striving to produce purely left-handed amino acids. Nature's laws don't care about nursing life. If anything, the mindless forces of nature want to tear life apart.



Animal Skeletons

To overcome these buffeting forces, Eberlin says, you need molecular biological machines. One is the ribosome. It's essential for making proteins, but ribosomes are themselves partially made up of proteins. So which came first in the evolutionary story?

You also need very large RNA molecules to make ribosomes. Some origin-of-life researchers say life began as an RNA world, with DNA and proteins arriving later. Others say, no, proteins came first. Others, that no, ribosomes were first to the party. But really you need all three, Eberlin says. None of them can survive without the others.

It's a classic chicken-and-egg problem, and Eberlin said that overcoming it requires foresight and planning, activities reserved for intelligent agents. Three chemists won a Nobel Prize for mapping the ribosome, and Eberlin said the prize was well deserved. So, what prize, he asked, is due the one who designed the ribosome in the first place?

THE PROBLEM OF ORPHANS

In another CELS talk, philosopher of biology Paul Nelson discussed a rising challenge to modern evolutionary theory—the exponential growth in the catalog of orphan genes.

Orphan genes are functional DNA sequences without known *homologues* outside a given species or lineage. A commitment to *universal common descent* led biologists to expect such genes to be rare. After all, if all species evolved from ancestor species in a gradually branching tree of life, starting with the Last Universal Common Ancestor (LUCA), with genetic changes accumulating only very gradually through

small genetic mutations, then novel genes—seemingly without ancestry—should be quite unusual. But as it turns out, they're not.

Nelson related an experience from years ago when he was called out in a lecture at Dartmouth. He was speaking on the challenge orphan genes pose for evolutionary theory, and his critic complained that we didn't have enough of a sample—just 122 bacterial species—to conclude that there was any real problem for evolutionary theory. Surely this signal would dissipate, said the critic, once the genomes of more bacterial types were sequenced.

So what has occurred in the intervening years? A Polish research team has now surveyed the genomes of more than 60,000 bacterial species and close to 200 million bacterial proteins. In the process, they have uncovered 8.5 million orphan proteins. The signal, far from fading out, is now loud enough to rattle teeth.

Nelson noted that it isn't just bacteria either. Whenever the DNA of a previously *unsequenced* plant or animal form is sequenced, many new orphan genes are uncovered.

The pattern clashes with what universal common descent anticipates but meshes well with an intelligent design paradigm. If a feature is closely shared with another species, then we might expect the

This pattern of discovery harkens back to the scientific revolution itself. The founders of modern science were tutored in the Judeo-Christian understanding of reality. Their early breakthroughs were fueled by seeing the book of nature as the work of a great craftsman whose deep designs called for careful study to illuminate their hidden intricacies.

designer to repurpose a module already in use. If the feature is unique to the species or lineage, then we could expect the designer to write new DNA code for the new feature, much as a software engineer would proceed, with the result being more orphan code. And that is the pattern that is emerging.

THE POINT OF THE PENTADACTYL

Another CELS speaker was engineering superstar Stuart Burgess, professor of engineering design at Bristol University in England. Burgess is the editor of two bioengineering journals and a lead designer

for the British Olympic cycling team. His work there helped the British track cyclists win the top medal haul in both the Rio and Tokyo Olympics. Burgess also has had two research fellowships at Cambridge University and was the lead designer for the European Space Agency's Metop satellites.

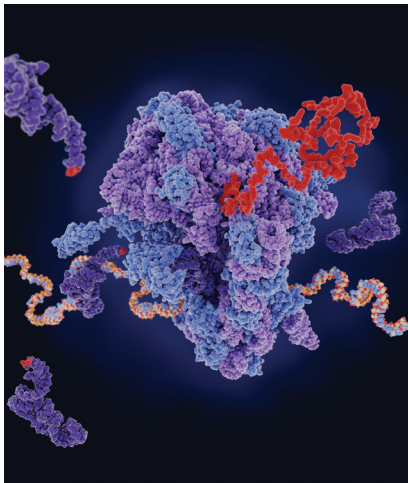
In his CELS talk, Burgess made the case that an understanding of engineering principles well explains the repeated appearance of the pentadactyl (five-digit) limb design throughout the animal kingdom.

Evolutionists have long argued that this pattern is due to evolutionary common descent—that is,

KEY DEFINITIONS ::: Casey Luskin

Four-dimensional proteins: Many proteins are four-dimensional in the sense that they have a three-dimensional shape, but that shape might change over the lifespan of an organism, adopting different shapes, or *conformations*, in response to the functional needs of the organism.

Heuristic: A heuristic is a paradigm or theory that can guide scientific research. For example, intelligent design can serve as a heuristic/paradigm to guide research because it makes useful scientific predictions, such as that we should be able to discover function for junk DNA, or that many molecular machines will turn out to be irreducibly complex.



Homologue: Traditionally in biology, two features are said to be *homologous* if they share a similar structure and function. In protein science, a *homologue* is usually defined as a protein that has a similar amino acid sequence to another protein—with a degree of similarity that's greater than what would be expected by chance. While evolutionists often say that protein similarity (or homology) reflects their common ancestry, another possible explanation is that the similarity is the result of common design.

◀ **Ribosome:** A complex molecular machine where the information in DNA, having been transcribed into messenger RNA (mRNA), is translated into proteins which perform vital functions in the cell.

◀ **Sequenced / Unsequenced:** A genome is said to be "sequenced" when biologists have determined the ordering of the nucleotide bases (i.e., "A," "T," "C," "G") in the DNA of that organism. Many genomes are millions or even billions of nucleotide bases in length, and thus the sequence of a genome can be very long.

Universal common descent: The idea that all living organisms are related through descent with modification. In essence, not only are all humans related to one another, but we also share common ancestors with horses, fish, plants, fungi, and every other organism that has ever lived.

Vestigial / Vestiges: A vestigial trait or feature of an organism is one that was functional in the evolutionary past, but today is said to be functionless and no longer used by the organism. Classic examples would be the human appendix or tonsils, although it is now known that these features have important immune-related functions. This follows a trend, in that organs said to be useless "vestigial" features often turn out to have important functions.

that a series of mutations constructed the five-digit design in a common ancestral lineage and that the blueprint was passed down to various descendants on the branching limb of animal life, leaving everything from human hands to whale flippers sporting the pentadactyl design. But even a fully paid-up evolutionist such as Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould conceded that this tidy story breaks down. In his book *Eight Little Piggies*, he noted various exceptions to the pentadactyl rule before he gamely tried to fit the much messier picture into a Darwinian frame.

Burgess offered what he sees as a more elegant solution. Namely, an engineering analysis shows that five digits (as opposed to, say, one or three or seventeen) provides an optimal tradeoff between strength and flexibility/dexterity. A single digit would be strongest, and a dozen digits more flexible or dexterous. But if you want an optimal combination of these two virtues, and you graph them with strength decreasing with each additional digit, and flexibility/dexterity increasing with each digit, you find that the two virtues cross at the five-digit point. Five digits thus represent what engineers describe as a constrained optimization of competing attributes.

The five-digit design appears so often in the animal world, in other words, because the designer was a good engineer and selected it as the best trade-off between competing virtues.

Take the five-digit whale flipper. The flipper must be strong but also flexible enough to twist in various subtle ways in the service of making the creature a master swimmer. An engineering analysis found that five digits best achieves that compromise, Burgess said.

WHALE BONES OF CONTENTION

At this point in the talk Burgess anticipated an objection: *Yes, but whales have vestigial pelvic bones, left over from their land-dwelling ancestors, pelvic bones largely useless to the whales. Surely that screams blind evolution, not design.* Burgess noted that this oft-recycled argument for evolution is badly outdated, since research has long revealed important functions for these bones.

The point was conceded in a 2014 paper in the journal *Evolution*. "Due to their highly reduced state, cetacean pelvic bones are sometimes thought of as 'useless vestiges' of their land-dwelling ancestry," but, the authors continued, these whale bones in fact serve "important roles in male reproductive function."¹ In support of the claim, the article cited more

than a dozen corroborating scientific papers stretching from 1881 to 2009.

As one would expect from an article in the journal *Evolution*, the authors scrambled to provide an alternative evolutionary explanation for the pelvic bones, but the cherished evolutionary story of "vestigial" pelvic bones joins the growing pile of discredited icons of evolution detailed by biologist Jonathan Wells, first in *Icons of Evolution* and then further in *Zombie Science: More Icons of Evolution*.

In the case of the pelvic bones of the whale, the Darwinian framework led many scientists astray, whereas the view that these bones are the product of rational and skillful engineering pointed in the right direction.

This pattern of discovery harkens back to the scientific revolution itself. The founders of modern science were theists, tutored in the Judeo-Christian understanding of reality. Their early breakthroughs were fueled by seeing the book of nature as the work of a master author, a great craftsman whose deep designs called for careful study to illuminate their hidden intricacies. So we shouldn't be surprised that in recovering this approach to the living world, today's systems biologists find themselves in the midst of a fresh revolution of discovery. ☉

Note

1. James P. Dines et al., "Sexual Selection Targets Cetacean Pelvic Bones," *Evolution* 68, no. 11 (Nov. 1, 2014), 3296–3306, <https://doi.org/10.1111/evo.12516>.

Brazilian chemist Marcos Eberlin said that many of his fellow scientists deny God but plagiarize him all the time in a research field known as biomimetics. The kicker is that when they manage the copying feat, they usually do so in a way inferior to the original.



Hall of Mirrors

The Consciousness Conundrum Continues

by Denyse O’Leary

To contemplate consciousness is, as professor of religion Greg Peterson put it, like looking into and out of a window at the same time.¹ Brain imaging was supposed to dissolve the hard problem of consciousness, but new information and insights have only deepened it.²

One quest has been to discover the seat of consciousness—the specific bit of the brain that spews out the unthinking electrical charges that create it. Seat? But wait, isn’t consciousness the *table*? You see the difficulty, of course . . .

It’s a long and winding road. For example, functional MRI imaging only tells researchers where blood is traveling in the brain. The problem is, as a Duke University research group pointed out, “the level of activity for any given person probably won’t be the same twice, and a measure that changes every time it is collected cannot be applied to predict anyone’s future mental health or behavior.”³

THE DISCARDED TRIUNE BRAIN THEORY

Surely, many have reasoned, our consciousness would reside in the most “human” parts of the brain. A popular theory of mind—the *triune brain theory*—attempted to meet this objective. Originally developed decades ago by Yale University physiologist and psychiatrist Paul D. MacLean (1913–2007) and promoted by celebrity skeptic Carl Sagan (1934–1996), it divides the brain into three parts.⁴ The reptilian brain controls things like movement and breathing, the mammalian brain controls emotion, and the human cerebral cortex controls language and reasoning. This approach birthed some immensely reassuring ideas for some. For example, pop science could depict a widely disliked boss or politician as a “dinosaur

brain.” In 2021, Jeff Hawkins, inventor of the PalmPilot (a predecessor to the smartphone) even claimed to have figured out how human intelligence works by relying on his own interpretation of the mammalian brain.⁵

It turned out on further study, though, that key neurological functions are distributed throughout the brain. Also, triune brain theory doesn’t square with the mammal-like intelligence recently discovered to exist in *invertebrate* octopuses. Nor do claims for the mammalian brain square with the high intelligence found in some birds.⁶ And human consciousness, far from being leveled by all this theory and research, remains an absolute outlier.

But MacLean’s triune brain idea proved much too culturally satisfying to be spoiled by mere neuroscience.

As one research team notes, “despite the mismatch with current understandings of vertebrate neurobiology, MacLean’s ideas remain popular in psychology. A citation analysis shows that neuroscientists cite MacLean’s empirical articles, whereas non-neuropsychologists cite MacLean’s triune-brain articles, and neuroscientists have urged psychologists to abandon the theory.”⁷

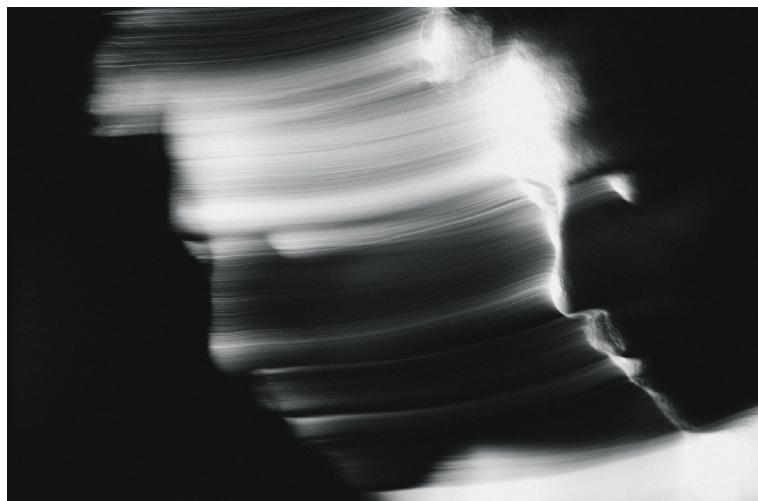
“I AM MY CONNECTOME”?

Never mind, the exciting new world of *-omes* (genomes, epigenomes, biomes . . .) beckons. Could the *connectome*—essentially, a complete “wiring diagram” of the brain—identify human consciousness? In 2010, computational neuroscientist Sebastian Seung told humanity, “I am my connectome,”⁸ a thought on which he expanded in his 2012 book, *Connectome: How the Brain’s Wiring Makes Us Who We Are*. In 2012, National Institutes of Health director Francis Collins was thinking along the same lines: “Ever wonder what is it that makes you, you? Depending on whom you ask, there are a lot of different answers, but these days some of the world’s top neuroscientists might say: ‘You are your connectome.’”⁹

That moment, too, passed. Harvard neuroscientist Jeff Lichtman, who is trying to map the brain, surveyed its awful complexity nearly a decade later and summed up the “Existential Crisis in Neuroscience”:

[If] I asked, “Do you understand New York

City?" you would probably respond, "What do you mean?" There's all this complexity. If you can't understand New York City, it's not because you can't get access to the data. It's just there's so much going on at the same time. That's what a human brain is. It's millions of things happening simultaneously among different types of cells, neuromodulators, genetic components, things from the outside. There's no point when you can suddenly say, "I now understand the brain," just as you wouldn't say, "I now get New York City."¹⁰



In short, once we are into the abstractions of the mind, we are no longer dealing with the concrete substance of the brain.

CONSCIOUSNESS AS BIOELECTRIC FIELDS?

But what about the bioelectric fields that swarm throughout the brain? Bioelectric currents, unlike electric currents, rely on ions rather than electrons, but they are still electricity. Evolutionary biologist and lawyer Tam Hunt argues, "Nature seems to have figured out that electric fields, similar to the role they play in human-created machines, can power a wide array of processes essential to life. Perhaps even consciousness itself." That's a remarkable idea because it includes the notion that our individual cells exhibit consciousness: "Something like thinking, they argue, isn't just something we do in our heads that requires brains. It's a process even individual cells themselves, and not requiring any kind of brain, also take part in."¹¹

This sounds cool but gets us nowhere. We could say the same about claims that everything is conscious, or conversely, that nothing is. We have no reason to believe that our individual brain cells are conscious; what we do know is that we, *as whole human beings*, are conscious. Whatever such fantastical claims may do, they shed no light on the consciousness conundrum at hand.

PERCEPTRONIUM?

Max Tegmark, MIT physicist and author of *Our Mathematical Universe* (Knopf, 2014), goes more boldly than anyone. He suggests that consciousness is a so-far-undetected state of matter, *perceptronium*, "defined as the most general substance that feels

subjectively self-aware."¹² Which, again, sounds way cool but gets us precisely nowhere.

Prominent neuroscientist Christof Koch notes more mundanely that physical distance in the brain matters: "A new study documents an ordering principle to these effects: the farther removed from sensory input or motor output structures, the less likely it is that a region contributes to consciousness."¹³ So while here, as elsewhere, it pays to be close to the source, this, too, brings us nowhere closer to understanding consciousness.

Meanwhile, Koch has also written a book, *The Feeling of Life Itself* (MIT Press, 2019), in which he offers many observations—on dogs, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, sentient machines, the loss of his belief in a personal God, and sadness—all seen as "signposts in the pursuit of his life's work—to uncover the roots of consciousness."

Nonetheless, the roots remain elusive. In short, the neuroscience approach to understanding consciousness is back where it started, but we do have some interesting new books and big-idea words. ☺

Notes

1. <https://www.religion-online.org/article/god-on-the-brain-the-neurobiology-of-faith/>.
2. <https://consc.net/papers/facing.pdf>.
3. <https://today.duke.edu/2020/06/studies-brain-activity-aren%E2%80%99t-useful-scientists-thought>.
4. https://www.realclearscience.com/articles/2023/06/03/what_carl_sagan_got_very_wrong_about_the_human_brain_903398.html.
5. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/03/03/1020247/artificial-intelligence-brain-neuroscience-jeff-hawkins/>.
6. <https://www.lesswrong.com/posts/ixZLTmFfnKRbaStA5/book-review-a-thousand-brains-b>.
7. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0963721420917687>.
8. https://www.ted.com/talks/sebastian_seung_i_am_my_connectome.
9. <https://directorsblog.nih.gov/2012/11/05/the-symphony-inside-your-brain/>.
10. <https://nautil.us/an-existential-crisis-in-neuroscience-rp-237679/>.
11. <https://nautil.us/the-link-between-bioelectricity-and-consciousness-238148/>.
12. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/physicists-say-consciousness-might-be-a-state-of-matter/>.
13. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-020-0925-7?utm_c=target.



A Few Good Men

Magnum, P.I.

by Anthony Esolen

My family and I are fond of the old *Magnum, P.I.* television show, not because its protagonists are saints—they're far from that—but because the writing is good, the dialogue is snappy and credible without a lot of phony wisecracking, and the general mood of the show is cheerful, not grim. It usually does not take itself too seriously—not likely, when the hero, Thomas, is frantically trying to jimmy open the door to the guest house while Zeus and Apollo, the Dobermans Higgins has trained as guard dogs, are racing across the lawn to get a piece of him. Or when Thomas's voice-over gives us some of his experience-laden wisdom about the detective business, only to have it contradicted by the next shot we see.

But much of the appeal of the show lies in the complicated crisscross of feelings and acts of friendship among the four principal characters—Thomas; his Vietnam platoon buddies T. C. and Rick; and Higgins, a British soldier from World War II whose military and human experiences are immensely broad, though he's often a bore and, at least in appearance, a snob.

UNLIKELY FRIENDS

In fact, they are unlikely friends. Thomas is a bit of a ladies' man, though we are often made aware that he wanted something else entirely—he was separated by violence from his Vietnamese wife. Perhaps he might have grown up, then, but in many ways he's an overgrown teenage boy—irresponsible with money, constantly hitting up his friends for favors he promises to repay but almost never does, wearing his Detroit Tigers baseball cap, and living in that guest house, which is always in a state of disorder. T. C., a powerfully built black man, usually smiling, or laughing, at Thomas's foibles, flies his own brightly colored helicopter for tourists; *Island Hoppers*, it's called, and many are the times when Thomas presses him into service, promising to pay for the gasoline—but who pays for the gunshot holes that the helicopter so often suffers? T. C. is divorced, but he is not happy with that; he has a teenage son, and he coaches a baseball team for the boys. Rick is a scrappy little guy under the direct authority of Higgins and the elite King Kamehameha Club, the beachfront dinner club he manages. Rick lost both his mother and father when he was young, and the one man who came to the assistance of Rick and his kid sister, "Ice Pick," was a mob boss. Ice Pick now lives in Hawaii. He is one of Rick's sources of inside information, and Rick will not hear a word of criticism of the old man. Loyalty, in fact, is the great virtue common to all four men.



Each of the four characters is fleshed out in full; not one is a stock character or a caricature. Each man, you come to understand, possesses a fund of unrealized possibilities; each one has seen and done things, or thought and felt things, that make him sharply distinct—an individual, though not one of them prides himself on being such. Each is defined by loyalties to something or someone *other than himself*. Such men honor loyalty in others, and that honor helps bind them together, despite the frequent clash of personalities and peccadilloes. The soldier recognizes the soldier.

TRUTH-TELLING IN TV

There are three important themes I believe the Christian can draw from this show, despite its assumption that fornication is simply a part of life—a part of life, though the show's writers do not glamorize it; meanwhile, religion is always treated with respect. All three help to reveal some truth about man that we have forgotten.

Male & Female

The first is right in front of our noses. You cannot imagine the show with women in place of the men. It isn't just that a police-woman up against Thomas or T. C. would be like sending a doe to fight a grizzly bear. It's that the men behave like men, and women are not like that. Women do not insult each other, making fun of their bodies or brains, as a way to strengthen the bonds of friendship. Nor do women put their bodies on the line to save some man in distress. These men's hobbies are masculine. They talk and walk, they shout and laugh, as men. And each of them, at many times in the series, will be called on to protect a woman in need, and will do so with decisiveness and energy. Nor must the women be love-interests. What matters is simply that they are women.

This first is important not simply insofar as it runs counter to our current celebration of effeminate men, those uneasy self-contradictions, most of whom have implicitly rejected their sex's natural orientation

toward women and for women, as if their world could get along happily without the other sex at all. It is also important for our need to reaffirm the goodness and the distinctness of the sexes.

Let us draw this matter out. Our laws now assume what does not exist: a sexless human being. What is called "equal opportunity," as regards men and women in employment, achieves equality by assuming that the sexes are interchangeable, which is bad enough, and

“Who am I?” is seldom asked because more important questions must come first, such as, “What must I do? For whom or for what should I give my life? What do I owe to my teammates, my family, my country, and God?”

by denying that the sexes are supposed to be for each other. We are to forget that a married man, or a man soon to be married, works not merely for himself but for his wife and children, and thus we are to consign to invisibility that woman who depends upon him and his income. My wife Debra used to take it ill whenever women faculty members at my old college demanded “free” childcare at the school, because she knew that such care came at the expense of women like her, who took care of their own children at home, already foregoing what might have been a sizable second income.

This de-sexualizing of the employee is but a particular yet inevitable result of the de-personalizing of business, which finds its roots in the industrial revolution. Dickens saw as much when, in *Hard Times*, he has the fraud Josiah Bounderby, the industrialist at Coketown, refer to his employees as “hands.” They are fragments of persons, and as far as the employer is concerned, the fragmentation is essential to the massive enterprise. The industrialist’s best friend, not that they are really friends, is the utilitarian schoolmaster, Thomas Gradgrind. “Facts, facts, facts!” he cries. “Teach these children nothing but facts!” Everything else is to be extirpated. That is the educational counterpart of the amputation—hand from body, body from mind and soul, individual person from family and from other natural human societies—that the industrialist assumes as necessary or desirable. The school severs one form of reasoning, that which performs its analysis on dissections of empirically observable and testable reality, from the fullness of what the wisest philosophers placed under the purview of reason; it severs reason from imagination; it severs science from religion; it severs the present from the past; and it acknowledges no duties of loyalty, love, piety, and gratitude.

Members in Community

For the second thing I see in *Magnum* is precisely a refusal to make those reductions or amputations. In many a television show, the characters are hardly characters at all, but are one-note instruments to set a general comic or dramatic scene, or they are what their authors wish human beings were: wonder-women who violate the laws of physics, never mind anthropology; or grim, sour men who take nothing seriously but themselves and their jobs. But *Magnum*, T. C., and Rick, and we can add Higgins into the bargain, are not like parts of a machine or items in a set. They are like irreplaceable and unrepeatable members of a family—I mean in their distinctness, their areas of responsibility, and their unlike relations

to one another. By that, I imply nothing about feelings, and certainly nothing about sentimentality. T. C.’s friendship with *Magnum* is not like his friendship with Rick, and *Magnum*’s often irritable and frustrating friendship with Higgins is like nothing I’ve ever known personally, but is simply and straightforwardly believable.

The characters sometimes strive for some distinction as individuals—what we might now call a drive for “authenticity”—but that striving is usually shown up as delusory or puerile. *Magnum* is *not* the world-class detective he sometimes pretends to be. Higgins is *not* a great author of military memoirs. The question “Who am I?” is seldom asked because more important questions must come first, such as, “What must I do? For whom or for what should I give my life? What do I owe to my teammates, my family, my country, and God?”

For there is no “authentic self” free-floating in the spiritual atmosphere, which we may turn into the false god of our hypocrisy, our play-acting, such as is all the rage now, particularly among people who have turned their sexual vices, neuroses, and puerilities into ruling principles. “Mirror, mirror on the wall,” I imagine such a person asking, “who is the phoniest of them all?” Comes the reply: “You are, O Queen!”

The Christian knows, or should know, what the wisest of the old pagans suspected—that just as he who would save his life must lose it, so you do not even become a person to begin with unless you give yourself up, in love, to the good that is beyond you—a good you may sometimes apprehend but never comprehend and that is not a matter of your definition or determination. Thrill-seekers fare ill on *Magnum*. Thomas spends every July 4th rowing far out to sea, not for the thrills, but to be alone with his thoughts and his feelings, because on a July 4th long before, when he was but a boy, he and his mother got the news that his father would never return from Korea. Rick keeps up his association with Ice Pick, not because he enjoys skating on the edge of the law, but because he loves and esteems the man as a human being. T. C. can do anything he likes with a helicopter, but what he really wants is for his family to be intact again.

Echoes of the Faith

And that is the third thing I find in the show. It is not the Christian faith, but it is in accord with an approach to the faith; it does not get you into the sanctuary, but it points you in the direction of the church. It tells important truths, and it does a good job of it. And for that, these days, we should be grateful. ☉

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but some skeptics are
more equal than others.



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Hormone therapy
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A Boy's Life

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

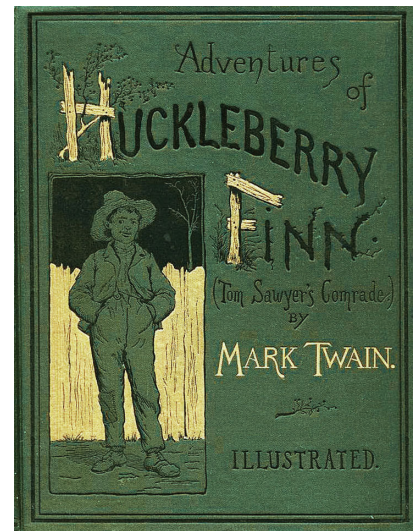
by Rick Reed

"You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer'; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth."

So begins *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1884. It is the first book to be written completely in vernacular American English and in the voice of a rural boy in his early teens. Though surrounded by controversy from the beginning, making it one of the most banned books in America, Ernest Hemingway said of it, "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. . . . There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since." It is a novel that has much to say to readers today, especially about boys.

A BOY LEARNING TO BE A MAN

In some ways, Huck is the quintessential boy whom Anthony Esolen extols in his book *Defending Boyhood*. He is resourceful, adventurous, and plucky. Though he plays second fiddle to the title character in *Tom Sawyer*, Huck is clearly the hero of *Huckleberry Finn*. When held captive by his alcoholic father, he devises a successful escape plan—utterly different from the nonsensical plan devised by Tom to liberate Jim, the runaway slave. After throwing in his lot with Jim, Huck embarks on a thrilling, though often perilous, rafting journey down the Mississippi with the initial aim of delivering Jim into freedom. Always quick with a story—though not always consistent with details—Huck uses his wits to protect both himself and Jim. When they encounter murderous thieves on a crashed steamboat, Huck risks his life to see that the criminals face justice. Huck is a boy learning to be a man.



In that process of maturing, Huck's greatest growth lies in the development of his moral sense, which he begins to figure

out on his own in a break with his shiftless father, who had abducted him from the care of the Widow Douglas and Miss Watson with two equally vile motives: first, because he resents Huck for learning how to read and write and wants him to quit going to school (Huck is happy to oblige him), and second, to secure Huck's \$6,000 fortune, awarded after he and Tom had discovered stolen gold in a cave in *Tom Sawyer*. Fortunately, Huck's money is safely kept in a trust fund overseen by Judge Thatcher, but Pap Finn nevertheless keeps him locked in a shack in the woods. While Huck enjoys living free of the women's attempts to "civilize" him, he also recognizes that his father's cruel control is deeply wrong. Huck's clever escape is the first step on his journey into manhood.

MORAL SENSE & SENSIBILITIES

It continues in earnest when Huck encounters Jim, a slave who escaped from Miss Watson. After placing a dead rattlesnake in Jim's bedroll, which leads to Jim getting bitten by its mate, Huck is struck with the realization that he has endangered a fellow human being's life. Though he has briefly considered turning Jim over to slave hunters, when Huck faces them, he instead fabricates a tale to protect Jim. Later, the two are separated in a fog. Once reunited, Huck tells the distraught Jim it was just a dream, but Jim is hurt that someone he cares about would lie to him. Now guilt-stricken, Huck learns about the obligations of relationship. As their adventures together continue, Jim shares a memory of his daughter, who was

A BOY'S LIFE by Rick Reed



rendered deaf by scarlet fever, and Huck sees more clearly that Jim has human affections like his own. Life together on the raft forges a bond between boy and man that eventually overcomes the inhumane assumptions embedded in the world in which Huck had been living.

Encounters on land during their voyage down the river also contribute to Huck's developing morality. Taken in by one family involved in a feud, he witnesses the senselessness and tragic cost of commitment to a grudge. He watches a Southern colonel gun down an unarmed drunk, which confronts him with the human capacity for cruelty. For an extended period spent with two conmen who join Huck and Jim to escape their latest victims, Huck witnesses the potential for vileness in the human soul. These two criminals bilk unsuspecting villagers with a ridiculous "show" and attempt to cheat three orphaned girls of their inheritance, and Huck realizes he and Jim must separate themselves from the scoundrels.

When he learns that one of them has sold Jim for forty dollars, Huck encounters his greatest moral quandary. At first, he thinks Jim would be better off with Miss Watson, even though that would mean he would remain a slave. But after contemplating the consequences of arranging for that exchange, Huck says, "The more I studied about this the more my conscience went to grinding me, and the more wicked and low-down and ornery I got to feeling." To resolve his crisis of conscience, he tries to pray to be conformed to the "Christian" values of his former pro-slavery environment. Yet in the end, he confesses, "You can't pray a lie." Despite the confusion in his young mind, Huck decides to tear up the letter he has written and to set about finding and freeing Jim.

CULTURAL COMMENTARY & CRITICISM

Of course, *Huck Finn* is about more than the protagonist's moral coming of age. Mark Twain directs

his satirical eye at the hypocrisy and shallowness that characterized much of American life in his time. The Grangerford-Shepherdson feud unmasks the attractive appearance of two aristocratic families to expose the vengeful brutality they assume as their prerogative. The incident with Col. Sherburn exposes the cowardice of mobs, as well as the arrogance of the self-entitled. And the townspeople's credulousness toward the conmen lays bare the gullibility Twain saw in many of his countrymen.

Even though he is more than a little skeptical toward organized religion and pokes fun at the hypocrisy he sees in several "Christian" characters, Twain's parodies both amuse and prickle as they highlight real hypocrisy. And of course, Huck's decision to free Jim is genuinely noble, true, and right.

THE ART OF THE MATTER

This parody-filled book, which has absorbed readers since its first publication, exemplifies the traditional role of art. It challenges our assumptions and exposes our faults and foibles, while engaging us on points we may see from a different perspective. Twain's art is a form of civil discourse, unlike much contemporary art, which too often functions primarily to express (or stir up) outrage. T. S. Eliot called this novel "the only one of Mark Twain's various books which can be called a masterpiece."

Perhaps that is why until very recently it was frequently assigned in American high schools. However, this classic includes more than 200

instances of a most offensive racial term, as well as 11 instances of the word *slave*. Despite any context in which they might be justified, these are words the "new Puritans" cannot abide. So they cast *Huck Finn* on the bonfire they are kindling to burn down the West.

Yet, the perceptive reader can see beyond the offensive language as well as the religious skepticism. Yes, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* may offend some today, as it did when it was first published, but it can also transform us, along with our perceptions of society. Twain's masterful artistry and his ability to make us examine ourselves still make this "boy's book" well worth reading. ®

This parody-filled book exemplifies the traditional role of art. Twain's art is a form of civil discourse.

Counselor at Law, Apologist at Heart

Daniel Buttafuoco Presents Evidence for the Faith

by Terrell Clemmons

Dan Buttafuoco is a board-certified civil trial lawyer and founder of Buttafuoco & Associates, a personal injury law firm in Woodbury, New York. He's also a Christian apologist; founder of the Historical Bible Society, which collects and preserves ancient biblical texts and manuscripts; and author of *Consider the Evidence: A Trial Lawyer Examines Eyewitness Testimony in Defense of the Reliability of the New Testament* (2018).

You were born into a family of missionaries and evangelists. But as the saying goes, God does not have grandchildren; he only has children. How did you become a Christian?

I was immersed in the Bible from an early age. My first words were probably Scripture, and I have very early memories of singing hymns. My uncle was pastor of an Assemblies of God church, and my father's side of the family were street preachers. I actually remember accompanying them on missions on the street.

I came to faith when I was about 10. There was a guy in church singing, and I was very moved. I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, and my uncle asked me if I would like to give my heart to Jesus. I did, but I didn't really get serious about God until I was about 16.

I was puzzled by the whole thing. It didn't make a lot of sense to me, because what I saw in church didn't add up with what I read in the Bible. I guess I was looking for any excuse not to believe, especially when I reached my high school years. What gave

me the best excuse was when I saw the organ player and the chief usher fighting in the church parking lot. I thought, if this is supposed to be religion based on love, I'm not seeing it here. It took a while for me to reconcile the God of the New Testament with what I was seeing in church. That's probably a lot of people's experience.

And so, I immersed myself in academics. I came from a poor family, and my way out of that was education. My parents encouraged me to pursue a scholastic career path, and I read a lot. I still read a lot. Later on, I decided to try to understand *why* we believe what we believe, and that's how I got into apologetics.

Unlike the rest of your family, you did not go into full-time ministry, but you became a lawyer. How did that come about?

I got swept up in the "Jesus Revolution" revival. I wasn't quite a hippie, but I sort of had those leanings. I went to church every night in the summer of 1974, except for Monday nights, and it wasn't only because of the pretty girls that were there.



Church would start at 7ish, and we'd leave at midnight. I distinctly remember being very impacted by that. It's where I met my wife. I literally prayed for a girlfriend on Wednesday and met my wife on Friday.

As part of that movement, we were sitting around in a circle one night, and someone asked, *What do you want to do when you get older?* They went around the circle, and the answers were, pastor, pastor, pastor, until it came to me, and I said, lawyer. Everybody looked at me like I was demon-possessed. I don't know why, but I felt the call of God in doing that. And it turned out great, because I'm actually much more suited to be a lawyer.

I got caught up in the success and the money about 25 years ago, and God had to deal with me. He explained to me very clearly that it was not about making money or getting the biggest verdict or gigantic settlements. It's about helping people. "You

have the cart before the horse,” he said. “You’re aiming for the money, instead of aiming for helping people.” God spoke to me in a way that made me realize that every successful person in the world was not trying to get rich. The ones that are truly successful were trying to solve a problem.

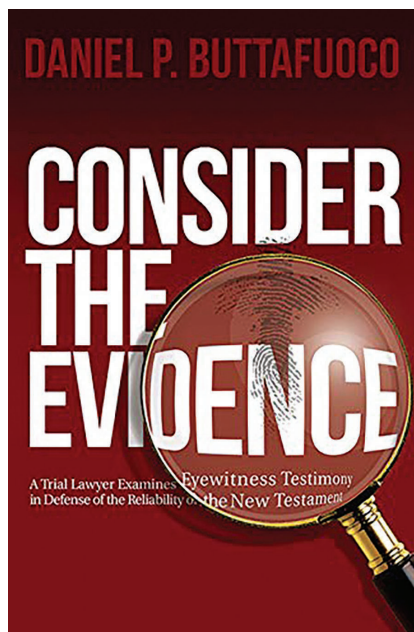
I went through a tough time there, with some major issues in my life where God was using hardship as discipline for about a four-year period. That was very dark, and that’s when I decided to go to Bible school and clear my head of all of the courtroom stuff I’d picked up.

My wife suggested I take an apologetics course, so I took one course and then a second one. Later, I started to blog. I write articles defending the faith. Some are funny, and some are very serious. Some put out gospel calls for repentance and salvation. I cover a wide variety of topics—law, philosophy, and theology, and I think I do it from a somewhat unique perspective as a trial lawyer and someone who is a specialist in evidence. What does it take to prove something? That’s something that I bring to the table.

You wrote that your life was forever transformed with the acquisition of the 1560 Geneva Bible, and that eventually led to the Historical Bible Society.

God had an amazing plan here which I could have never thought of on my own—this crazy, unusual, and very rare and valuable collection of antique Bibles and manuscripts.

We started with the 1560 Geneva Bible, which is the first Bible ever with chapter and verse. It was an illegal book in that the organized church did not want the Bible translated into English. The book that really got me going, though, was the first edition 1611 King James Bible. When you look



at it, your jaw drops open. It’s just that beautiful. I realized that this is something that engenders interest in people, so I decided to start filling in the gaps. What else could I get?

We started to show them in churches. My talk centers around how we got the Bible. It’s a history lesson about a story that isn’t being told. I spoke at an Arabic church in Chicago to over 100 college kids, and they peppered me with questions. It was amazing. We’ve had some really cool experiences with this.

And then you wrote *Consider the Evidence*. What motivated that?

Unfortunately, a lot of Christian apologetics takes place in the stratosphere, where you have intellectuals talking to each other at a very high level, guys that are just super-brains. And they write these tomes that you could lift weights with, but the public has no idea what they’re talking about. My skill set is to take complex truths and break them down for jurors. So, I wanted someone to be able to read that book on the train going to work, or on vacation. Because these ideas are

wonderful! We have great arguments for the Christian truth. When I found out these arguments, I was overjoyed. I thought, *This is great stuff! Why don’t we know about this?*

I believe it’s how I serve the Lord—to get this stuff down into the public domain, where you could have the plumber talking to the plumber. And when someone says the Bible was only written by men, someone else could come back with an answer like, *Yeah, but those men were eyewitnesses to Jesus, and Jesus claimed to be God.* I want these kinds of discussions to happen.

You work in the secular realm, but you proactively put your faith out there.

There hasn’t been much downside. People respect you for it, especially in the courts. They know where I stand on these issues. We keep our word. We don’t kick our adversaries when they’re down. I want to win, but I don’t want to humiliate anyone. We’re honest. We do whatever it takes to help people. And I think when you’re helping people, others see that.

What’s your greatest joy?

Oh, my greatest joy is playing with the grandkids. One of them says, “Pop knows everything.” But, I’m like, “Guys, I don’t know everything. Only Jesus knows everything.”

What’s next for you?

I want to go full steam to the end. A woman asked me once, Dan, who’s your favorite saint? “That’s easy,” I said, “It’s Peter. Peter was an ordinary guy and a fisherman. And I’m an ordinary guy, and I love to fish.” It’s amazing what God can do with ordinary people. ☺



From Pit to Pulpit

The Story of a High-School Hippie Who Went to Church

by Tom Camp as told to Carla Brown

"Oh God! Manifest yourself to us, God, if you're really there!" My buddy Mike and I, standing on the roof of my house and high on PCP, ducked, expecting God to strike us with lightning. No lightning struck, and we lived another day.

The Early Years

I grew up in Lafayette, Indiana, the oldest of four children. My father wasn't home a lot, and my mother wasn't the nurturing type, so I didn't have an ideal childhood. Not only did I witness constant fighting between my parents, but my mother could become short-tempered and sarcastic. Sometimes she took her anger out on me. Popular sitcoms of the day, such as *Leave it to Beaver*, actually depressed me, because my home life looked so different from what I saw portrayed on TV.

I never liked school, either. I thought it was a waste of time, and I often felt antsy. If I were a student today, I would probably be diagnosed with ADHD—I was so hyperactive, I drove my mother half crazy! On my first day of kindergarten, she had to chase me around the school to get me inside. However, since I was strong and athletic, I became the natural leader of neighborhood football, basketball, and baseball games, and once I entered junior high, I found an outlet in team sports. I joined the baseball and football teams and soon gained the reputation of being the guy who hit the hardest when he tackled.

A Seed Planted

As far as religion went, my family usually only attended church on Christmas and Easter. But

providentially, the family next door had an aunt named Melba "Meb" Bundrick. Meb was a strong Baptist, and one day when I was ten, she invited me to a church revival. That Sunday morning, I walked up the aisle, crying, and said the "sinner's prayer." It was so real, and I did feel different when I went forward. I attended church with her a few more times, but without encouragement from my family, church attendance fizzled, and that seed lay dormant for a season. Later Meb would remind me, "I'm praying for you." I appreciated it, but I wasn't ready to change my life.

By the time I got to junior high, my parents had almost divorced, and that really messed me up. Home felt empty and chaotic at times, so I looked to my little posse of friends to become my surrogate family. By age sixteen I would sometimes leave home and sleep on park benches or in the woods, scrounging up food people had left behind on picnic tables. I also started drinking and smoking marijuana.

Married at Sixteen

Once I got to high school, things didn't improve much. My teachers accused me of not paying attention, and I would be disruptive or fall asleep in the classroom (when I wasn't skipping school, which I did a lot). During my sophomore year, I met a girl, an 18-year-old senior.

We began dating and soon she became pregnant. I thought I was in love with her, and since I felt a moral obligation to marry her, we got married, even though it meant I had to quit the football team. Then, three days after the wedding, she had a miscarriage. That freaked us both out. We began fighting all the time, and we realized we no longer wanted to be married. Eventually she found an attorney and divorced me.

Drugs, Rock & Roll, & God-Haunted

As we entered the seventies, my long-haired friends and I started partying with LSD, cocaine, and marijuana as we jammed out to groups like Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd. We knew people who were breaking into pharmacies and stealing drugs, and we would get our supply from them to use and resell. I was hesitant to try LSD, but my friends persuaded me, and one night I hallucinated so strongly I saw houses breathing and trees moving. It was terrifying, and I became fearful all the time after that. I knew I had damaged my psyche, and that was my last experience with LSD. One of my close friends wound up losing his mind because of LSD and is to this day schizophrenic.

Despite my lifestyle, I did still have a God-consciousness. One day my buddy Mike and I stood on the roof (because in our minds it was closer to heaven) and called out, "Oh God! Manifest yourself to us if you're really there!" But no lightning struck, and we lived another day. I remember camping out and

reading the book of Revelation while getting high. I really was trying to figure out who God was. Meanwhile, Meb was still praying for me. She used to say, "Tommy, you're such a good-looking boy. You got all that 'haar' on your head and that big old beard on your face, and you look ugly! And you need Jesus in your heart!"

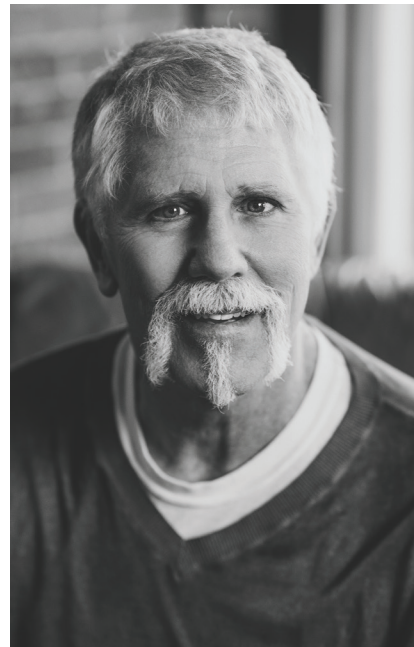
In 1973, my junior year, the principal suggested I drop out, since I had missed so much school. I took his advice, but not before I noticed Teri Owen, a pretty, quiet girl in the tenth grade. She wasn't interested in me at the time (she knew my reputation). However, a few years later, she started showing up at parties I attended, and something clicked. She even took me to her senior prom, to the chagrin of her parents. She had planned to go to Purdue University in the fall, but I talked her out of it, and soon we discovered she was pregnant.

Where's God?

I told Teri I couldn't marry her, because I'd never seen a good marriage, but we could live together. So, we moved into a house in

November 1974, and our daughter April was born the following spring. I worked construction jobs off and on, and then began selling drugs again. As time went on, the emptiness inside started to consume me, and the alcohol and drugs weren't helping. One night, after drinking heavily, I returned home, and Teri started

quizzing me about where I'd been. I passed out on the couch, and when she tried to wake me,



I slugged her and gave her two black eyes. The next morning, I was shocked to see what I had done.

Teri called her mother, who suggested we go talk to the pastor at First Assembly Church. "No," I said, "we can do this on our own." But my depression worsened. I started doing cocaine more often and developed paranoia. One day Teri asked if I needed to see a psychiatrist. "No," I said, "I need to talk to a minister." I didn't act on it, though, and by the time December rolled around, I was really depressed.

Christmas Day 1976 found me so low, I didn't want to come out of my room. I asked myself, *Where's God?* Well, God must be in a church, I thought. So, Teri and I drove around looking for churches, and when we found one that was open, we sat in the back, hoping someone would come talk to us. No one did, and we got the impression we were unwelcome.

Delivered

The next week I thought about Meb and her church, and off we went. Meb saw us and came right over and took us to her pastor.

Looking back over the years, it's been amazing to see God's faithfulness. He gets all the glory for the redeemed life of this wayward hippie, and I will be forever grateful.

"I'm depressed; I feel empty," I told him. He proceeded to lead me in the sinner's prayer, then asked Teri if she wanted to pray as well. She did, but it was more obligatory than heartfelt.

Then he said, "Son, you're going to have to get married to this girl."

"I wanna do that!" I replied.

But he didn't stop there.

"You also need to change all your friends, and you need to change your wardrobe and cut your hair." He gave us a King James Bible and encouraged us to read it. We agreed to all his suggestions, and I wanted to oblige him, but once we got in the car, Teri said, "I love Meb, and I'm sure this is a good place, but why don't we try out First Assembly?"

So, we went through New Year's Eve without drinking, and tried to read through the Bible, although the archaic language made it difficult. We decided to go to the Sunday evening service at First Assembly, but when Sunday rolled around, my buddy Mike and I had helped a friend move and later wound up getting drunk. When Teri came to pick us up and

discovered we'd been drinking, she went off to church, angry, by herself.

Mike and I followed a bit later, still drunk, and proceeded to walk across the chairs to get to where Teri was slouched, embarrassed by our arrival. But when the pastor started preaching on being delivered from bondage to sin, I started to weep. At the end of the sermon the pastor gave an altar call, and the youth pastor came up to us and asked if we wanted to go forward to receive Christ.

Even though Teri and I had recently said the sinner's prayer, Mike was all excited to go forward, so we went with him. There were about 300 people in church that night, and a huge number came down front to pray for us. They'd never seen hippies get saved before, and they were so excited, it sparked a revival in their congregation.

Teri and I got married soon afterward, and our faith deepened. As we plugged into First Assembly Church, the emphasis was no longer on our outward appearance, but rather on changed hearts and our relationship with Christ.

Calvary Chapel

Later, the church sent me to Central Bible College in Missouri. In 1982, after visiting Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, we fell in love with the teaching style of Pastor Chuck Smith. We returned to Indiana and became involved with the Calvary Chapel movement, where I served in various leadership capacities. In 1993, the Lord called me to start Harvest Chapel in my hometown of Lafayette, and I have served as senior pastor ever since.

We now have four grown children. They all attend church with us, with the exception of our son Jeremy, a multiple Dove Award-winning Christian artist, who lives in Tennessee with his family.

Looking back over the years, it's been amazing to see God's faithfulness. He gets all the glory for the redeemed life of this wayward hippie, and I will be forever grateful. ☺

—This article was adapted from the upcoming book, *Great Is Thy Faithfulness: The Tom and Teri Camp Story*, by Carla Brown.

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Dead Endings

A Review of *The Story of Abortion in America: A Street-Level History, 1652–2022*

by Marvin Olasky & Leah Savas

by Joshua Pauling

Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health has unleashed a series of uncertainties that we are only beginning to reckon with: competing state laws either limiting or liberalizing abortion, court rulings on abortion pills, and further unknowns lying on the horizon. To navigate this post-Roe world, it helps to understand how we arrived here. What did the average person think about abortion throughout American history, and how was that manifested or obscured in media, social practices, legislation, and its enforcement or lack thereof? And how have such issues been distorted in historical memory?

Marvin Olasky and Leah Savas address these questions and more as they bring history down from the suite level of legalities and law journals to the street level of social history and primary sources. Their excavation clears up common misconceptions about our past and provides readers with a better grasp of the abortion landscape from colonial to contemporary times.

The ABCDEs of Abortion

Their framework centers on five core themes:

Anatomy: Does that creature in the womb have human characteristics?

Bible: Is its teaching on the sacredness of human life binding on us?

Community: What kind of advice and support do vulnerable women receive from boyfriends or husbands, parents and friends, employers or government, or anyone

to whom a woman might look for emotional or financial help?

Danger to women: What is the likelihood of an abortion ending with not just one victim but two?

Enforcement: In what informal and formal ways do those with influence and resources protect the most vulnerable?

As the story unfolds, the interplay of these questions is central to the ebb and flow of opinion and policy. Consider the colonial era, where despite minimal knowledge of fetal anatomy, a high view of biblical authority, community taboos, and the real danger posed to women kept abortion largely at bay. Compare that to the second half of the 20th century, where despite extensive understanding of fetal development, a low view of biblical authority, community structures enshrining autonomy, and lowered medical risk contributed to wider acceptance of abortion. The five questions function as

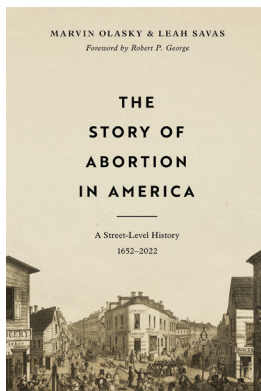
an analytical tool, and in each era, one can see how different answers to these questions exert significant impacts.

Debunking Common Misconceptions

Olasky and Savas show that on numerous points, common narratives used to justify abortion are not based in actual history. One of the first sacred cows they bring down is the assumption, present in *Roe v. Wade*, that in common-law tradition, abortion was not a crime prior to quickening (when the mother can feel movement). Meticulous primary source documentation using newspapers and court records provides substantial evidence to the contrary. Many other misconceptions are also addressed, including the pro-choice talking points that coat hanger and Lysol abortions were common in the 20th century, that pro-lifers are religious extremists, and that if *Roe* was overturned, women would be forced into “back-alley” abortions.

For Understanding and Engagement

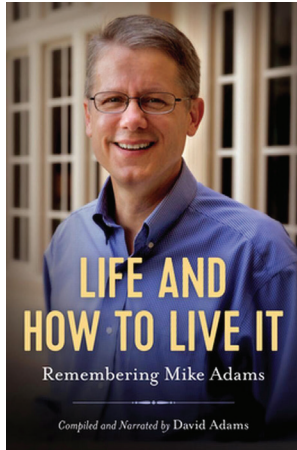
Olasky and Savas have provided a meticulously documented resource for understanding our time and place as it relates to abortion in America. And even more, they do so through moving and engaging stories—of young women victimized by irresponsible men and abortion accomplices, of opulence and corruption among infamous abortionists like Madame Restell and Inez Burns, and of the few but bold 19th-century preachers who connected ending slavery with ending abortion. Readers will find all these threads colorfully brought to life and conscientiously documented. You will also find similarities with where we are today, which can inform our engagement as the tumultuous post-Roe landscape settles out. ☉



Unsettled: What Climate Science Tells Us, What It Doesn't, and Why It Matters

by Steven E. Koonin

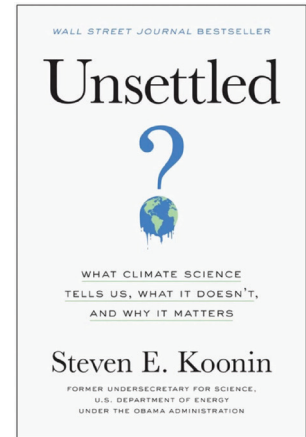
A Caltech physicist and former Undersecretary for Science in the Department of Energy under President Obama, Koonin has become a vocal critic of how climate science is presented to the public. Here he dispassionately unpacks such aspects of "The Science" as how climate modeling works, how relevant but non-hype-supporting details get buried in appendices of reports, and much more. He writes primarily for the sake of scientific integrity but also as a matter of conscience.



Life and How to Live It: Remembering Mike Adams

compiled and narrated by David Adams

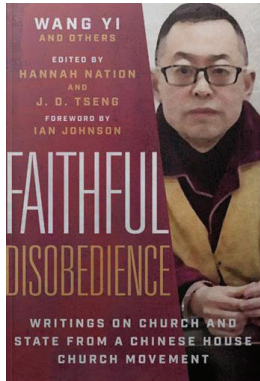
As a leftwing atheist criminology professor, Mike Adams (d. 2020) got along swimmingly with his university until he became a Christian and began criticizing administrative derelictions of duty, especially involving speech codes holding sway on campus. Loved by students but treated viciously by colleagues, he sued his own university for politically motivated retaliation and prevailed. This collection of his essays captures his love for his students and his life lessons for them.



Against the Great Reset: Eighteen Theses Contra the New World Order

edited by Michael Walsh

The World Economic Forum (WEF), founded and chaired by German engineer Klaus Schwab, is promoting a massively ambitious vision called, "The Great Reset." WEF ads tell us that by 2030, "You'll own nothing, and you'll be happy." Here, seventeen independent thinkers address the Great Reset from a variety of perspectives and expose it as merely the latest iteration of would-be dictators out to reengineer the world to suit their own designs.



Faithful Disobedience: Writings on Church and State from a Chinese House Church Movement

by Wang Yi, et al.

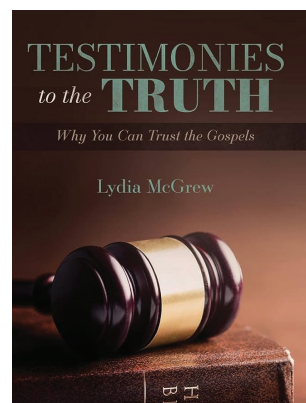
Chinese lawyer turned pastor Wang Yi, imprisoned since 2018, saw the conflict between unregistered house churches in China and the Chinese Communist Party as a conflict between the City of God and the City of Man. These writings by Yi and others will help Christians think well about how to wisely and shrewdly maintain faithfulness to Christ while also properly regarding and respecting governing authorities in a climate of overbearing state authoritarianism.



Testimonies to the Truth: Why You Can Trust the Gospels

by Lydia McGrew

Christianity makes huge claims that stand or fall depending on the reliability of the gospel texts. Here, McGrew evaluates the gospels by the standards applied to any ancient work to make the case that they hold up as exactly what they purport to be—robust factual reporting of eyewitness testimonies to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. This book will both strengthen your Christian witness and help sustain your confidence in the faith through seasons of challenge.





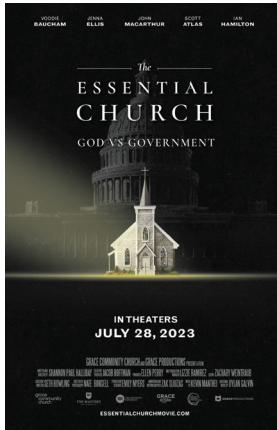
Altered Humans: How Biotech Is Changing Who We Are

This EpochTV documentary examines technological “progress” in medicine, especially developments at the intersection of biotech and transhumanism. Is the practice of medicine about improving human well-being? Or modifying the human race? Or even restructuring how the global human population coexists? Real harm can result when ethical lines aren’t clearly drawn. This film offers excellent food for thought as we think through these big questions.

Film Blips 

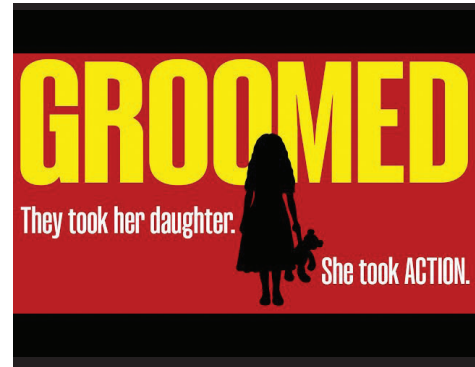
Groomed: The Gripping Story of a Mother’s Battle for her Daughter’s Innocence against Transgender Extremists

Groomed tells the story of a California mother who went to the mat to rescue her adolescent daughter after her daughter’s mind was virtually abducted by a combination of sex-ed instructors in school and transgender activists online. Five years later, her daughter is recovering, but with no thanks to professional medicine or counseling. Available at DailyCaller.com, *Groomed* is worth watching solely for seeing what trans activists are perpetrating on children.



The Essential Church

Relationships between church and state have always been complicated. This film recounts the experiences of three churches, one in California and two in Canada, during state-mandated church closures. Both Canadian pastors spent time in prison for holding services, and Grace Community Church-Los Angeles navigated serious legal entanglements and ultimately prevailed. The film raises important questions for Christians who want to properly obey governing authority without ceding to the state that which is due only to Christ, the rightful head of the church.



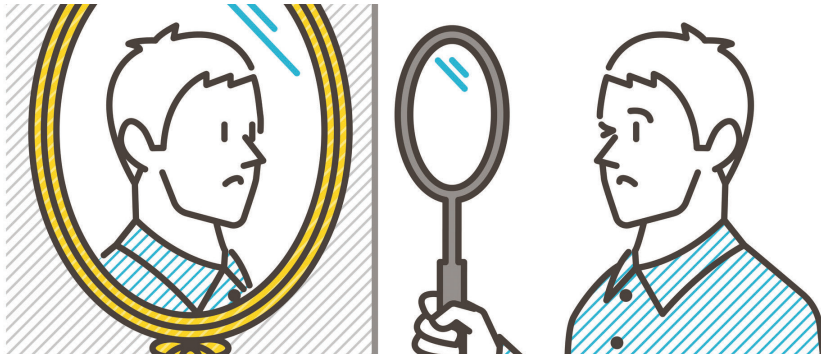
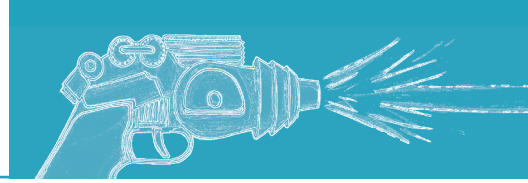
Across

Inspired by an episode of the *Maybe God* podcast, this four-episode documentary relates the journeys of three refugee families and the Christian churches in America that stepped up to help them. Without getting into politics, the heartrending but inspiring stories show how compassionate Americans can come to the aid of suffering refugees “yearning to breathe free”—in these cases mostly from the perils of living in a virtually lawless country. Available at AcrossDocumentary.com.



High-Speed Internet Porn & the Experiment Generation

Sex-addiction therapist Roane Hunter calls this documentary “the best explanation of internet porn’s effect on the brain.” It describes the “Coolidge Effect,” whereby the brain’s reward system seeks ever-increasing novelty to get an ever-diminishing dopamine rush. Former porn users’ descriptions of their experiences (language warning) personalize the phenomenon and drive home the urgency of the risks porn poses to us all. Available free on YouTube.



Therapy Unlimited

Good Counseling Looks Outward as Well as In

by John Stonestreet & Kasey Leander

Therapy is about as much of the American experience these days as baseball, pickup trucks, and apple pie. In 2019, nearly 20 percent of Americans received some form of mental health treatment ranging from medication to therapy, and more than 40 percent have seen a counselor at some point in their lives.

New York Times journalist Susan Dominus recently asked an important question, especially given that the U.S. is in the grip of an ever-worsening mental health crisis: “Does therapy really work?”

On one hand, dozens of studies confirm the value of talk-based therapy. A landmark 1977 study, for example, found that those with significant psychological distress “fared better than 75 percent of those with similar diagnoses who went untreated.”

Other research, Dominus explains, is less clear. A 2021 study found that more than half of depression patients saw little or no benefit from talk therapy, and only one third found their depression receding long term. Another study found that only 50 percent of patients responded to cognitive behavioral therapy regarding anxiety disorders. The uncertainty has led some to push for alternative treatments, including more prescriptions of drugs like psilocybin, the active ingredient in so-called

magic mushrooms. One prominent researcher mused, “Maybe we have reached the limit of what you can do by talking to somebody.”

Fixed Reference Points Required

Of course, the results of therapy depend on a number of factors. While counseling is a powerful tool, it can only aim at the question, “What’s going on inside of me?” Often missed, which is especially consequential for a culture in a crisis of mental health, are the fixed reference points outside of ourselves by which we can be known and orient who we are.

Psychology is one of the many areas of modern life that has taken what sociologists call “an inward turn,” characterized by radical individualism and reliance on self-definition. Rather than pursue healing or the restoration of relationships, counseling can devolve into endless rounds of affirmation, a sort of perpetual re-baptism in the church of

self-expression. This is just one way that therapy has replaced religion for many seekers. Self-discovery is the new salvation, and therapists the new priests. The key feature of psychology as religion, however, is the self as the new deity.

This has only enabled, as Lisa Selin Davis observed recently at *The Free Press*, so many of the West’s top schools and institutions to embrace and employ Critical Race Theory rhetoric and LGBTQ politics. The American Counseling Association now divides counselors and clients into “privileged” and “marginalized” groups with a dedicated script for each and little mercy for those who dissent. More states have passed so-called “anti-conversion-therapy” laws, which threaten professionals who do anything other than only affirm a client’s proposed gender identity.

When Helping Harms

As a result, deeper mental health issues are never addressed, and anyone who speaks up can find themselves out of a job. One therapist in training put it, “My concern is that we’re not helping people heal and transcend. We’re just helping people live in their victim mentality.” In a tragic irony, the inward turn has made it harder, not easier, for strugglers to know themselves.

There are some, many of them Christians, striving to rethink psychology and counsel others by looking outward as well as inward, to know themselves by first knowing what is true and good. We can only know ourselves by first knowing *reality*, ultimately God and the world he made. Any mental health journey without that fixed reference point is destined to harm more than it helps. ☉

—This article first appeared at *Breakpoint.org*. Used with permission of the Colson Center for Christian Worldview.



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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

THE UNIVERSE IS SO RANDOM

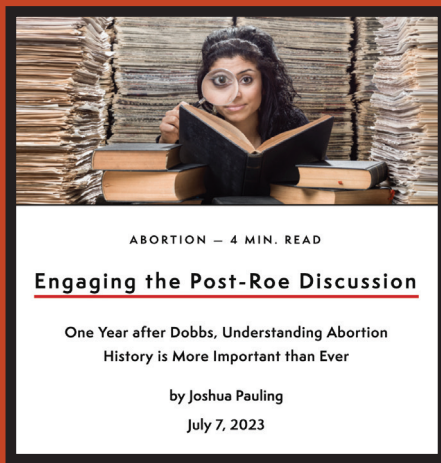
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