

SCIENCE | SEX | SOCIETY

# SALVO

Issue 76 Spring 2026 — Your Final Reality Check

THE PERMANENT THINGS

## THE LAST SALVO

Terrell Clemmons, John Ellis  
Anthony Esolen, Bryan Just  
Titus Kennedy, Nicole M. King  
James M. Kushiner, Juan Merced  
Sara Miranda, Emily Morales  
Denyse O'Leary, Joshua Pauling  
Bob Perry, Rick Reed, Hugh Ross  
Tamer Nashef, John G. West  
Amanda Witt, Jonathan Witt

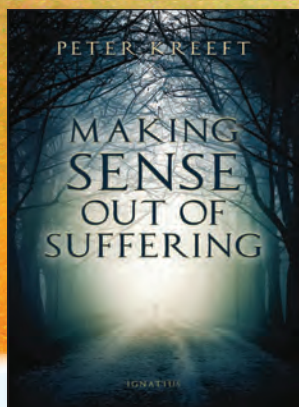
# THE GOOD

# THE TRUE

# AND THE BEAUTIFUL



# SUFFERING, MEDICINE & THE MERCY OF GOD



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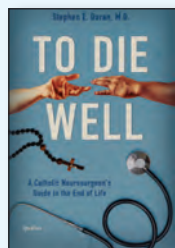
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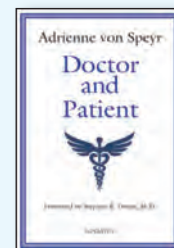
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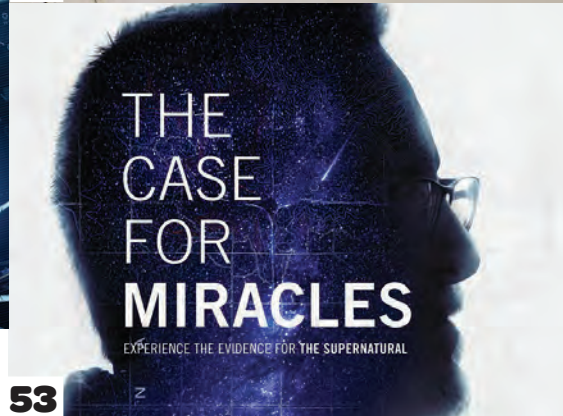
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## salvo n. (săl'vō)

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

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### Salvo Partner Organizations



## HIRED GUNS

**Terrell Clemmons** (pp. 7, 8, 10, 58, 62) is the Executive Editor of *Salvo*.

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**Denyse O'Leary** (p. 48) is the editor of *Mind Matters News* and a regular contributor to *Salvo*.

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**Rick Reed** (p. 6) is a retired secondary teacher of English and philosophy who challenged students to dive deep into the classics of the Western canon and to think and write analytically.

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**John G. West, PhD**, (p. 36) is author of *Endowed by Our Creator: The Bible, Science, and the Battle for America's Soul* (2026). He is Vice President of Discovery Institute and the Distinguished Scholar of American Government and Christian Civic Engagement at Cornerstone University.

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**Jonathan Witt, PhD**, (p. 44) is Executive Editor of Discovery Institute Press and a Senior Fellow with Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture. He is coauthor with Guillermo Gonzalez of the ID young-adult novel *The Farm at the Center of the Universe*.



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### Seeing Stars



Intelligent Design

An essay on Intelligent Design from *Salvo* #47 in Feature  
by Hugh Ross

**Hazy Early Earth Affirms the Bible's  
Account of Creation**





## INCOMING



a great source of knowledge, wisdom, and encouragement to me over the years in my roles as a Christian apologist, youth leader, and discipler. I cannot overstate how much the magazine has meant to me and to so many others. Thank you for the years of hard work, dedication to truth, and commitment to producing quality work that equips the saints, impacts the culture, and honors God, all for His glory.

—Laura Zifer

I so hate to hear this news. *Salvo* was one of my favorites. Very few periodicals have had the depth that you have.

—Roane Hunter

This is sad news indeed. I looked forward to each new issue.

—John Alexander

I have not been a subscriber to *Salvo* for long, but I have really appreciated each of the issues I have received. The value I found has helped me to become more effective in living out our call to contend for the faith (Jude 3).

—Jerry Klee

It is truly sad to hear that *Salvo* will be ceasing publication. I have always admired the quality and depth of content the magazine has consistently delivered. Even from far away in India, *Salvo*'s articles have deeply influence my thinking and have challenged and shaped the way I think about culture, faith, and contemporary society. Hearing that *Salvo* is ending feels like a real loss.

—Noa Lev

I am turning my attention toward *Touchstone* with renewed interest, but still not able to see what will replace *Salvo*. A time to look and walk ahead in faith and trust.

—Bruce Woodall, MD



### Fan Mail

It is so sad to hear of the retirement of *Salvo*. It was the only print publication I received. Thank you all for the labor of love for many years from so many hands and hearts and minds. I am richer because of *Salvo*.

—Fran Sciacca

I used to teach on the university level and that demographic needs to be reached with exactly what is in *Salvo*. I am sorry to lose this resource. I used it in my university classroom to stimulate discussion. I also passed on my issues to our youth minister, so he will be sad not to have this resource.

—Elizabeth Schaffer

I am a recent subscriber. I hold *Salvo* to be the best-written and most insightful of any conservative, orthodox Christian magazine published today. We desperately need its content, format, and messaging. It is the only periodical I read cover to cover. Thank you for manifesting the excellent gifts the Lord has granted to you!

—Eugene Newman

What a loss this is for many, especially readers like us who pass on the magazines and forward articles to others. There is no comparable journal out there that tackles the issues in such a readable fashion.



Because I am not very scientific, it was especially enjoyable for me to better understand the inner workings of the universe! We are able to be grandparents who know the times we live in due to reading *Salvo* in its entirety. I am totally bummed.

—Mary Veilleux

I just received *Salvo*'s next-to-last issue. Very, very sad news indeed. There is nothing out there with the hard-hitting, well-written, fully annotated articles on science, sex, and society. This is a tremendous loss to those of us who wish to be "prepared to give a defense for the hope that lies within us" on contemporary hot-button issues. *Salvo* has always been of great authoritative clarity and usefulness.

—Rev. W. H. Volland

I was shocked and saddened to hear that *Salvo* will be closing its doors. The magazine has been

# Going with God

**GOOD-BYE:** a concluding remark or gesture at parting;  
a taking of leave

by Rick Reed

**G**ood-bye is a word so often used that it has become a reflex for most English speakers. After all, it has been a part of the language since the late 16th century. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives as its first meaning “a form of address at parting; farewell.” The valediction began in the 1570s as *godbwye*, itself a contraction of “God be with ye,” a phrase that appears in Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labours Lost* in 1588 as “God be wy ye.” Etymologists cite other forms, including *God buy ye* (typically updated to “Good-bye” in many modern editions), as found in *Hamlet*, as part of the word’s evolution.

That Shakespearean usage is a prayer that God will accompany another in leave-taking and the journey thereafter. Implicit in the worldview is the belief that God takes a personal interest in our movements and interactions. Further, the speaker expresses the wish that God “buy” the hearers—that is, that God *redeem* them. (*Redeem* means “to buy back,” “to free from the consequences of sin” by payment of a ransom.) Considering it is addressed to the treacherous Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the words seem appropriate.

## Other Languages

In other European languages, the commendation to God of one

taking his or her leave is more obvious. The French *adieu*—derived from *a dieu (vous) commant*, “I commend (you) to God”—is also often used by English speakers. American English borrowed *adios* from Spanish speakers in the Southwest. *Adios* came from the Spanish *a dios vos acomiendo*, “I commend you to God.” The Portuguese and Gallican *adeus* and the Catalan *a Déu* offer the hearer another commendation to God. The Italian *addio*, as well, entrusts the hearer to God’s care.

Another word spoken at parting in Italy is *ciao*. While *addio* is used somewhat formally, especially when the parting may be for an extended period of time, the secular *ciao* is far more common.

It is unlikely that many in Europe know that *ciao* derives from a Venetian dialect word, *s’ciao*, meaning “I am your slave.”

The Germanic languages also use nontheistic terms at parting. Germans say *tschüß*, the Dutch *Dag*, Swedes *Hej då*, the Finns *hei hei*, and both Danes and Norwegians *Farvel*. These are all informal and secular. You might even be able to detect *farewell* in the last example. A Germanic language itself, English has retained *good-bye*, though the secular “farewell,” “so long,” “later,” and “see you” are probably just as common.

## Recalling the Origins

Some linguists explain the persistence of the theistic terms for *good-bye* by noting liturgical and other common religious expressions related to the predominance of Catholicism in those regions where citizens speak Romance languages—and of course, the Romance languages are all direct descendants of Latin, the language of the Catholic Church for over a millennium. However, the German *tschüß*, originally derived from the French *adieu*, no longer carries any religious significance.

Even *good-bye* has lost any obvious religious origins. *God* became *good*, probably in imitation of terms like “good day” and “good night.” However, even though unwittingly, the English speaker saying “good-bye” offers a prayer that God take the hearer into his care, either in the course of a journey or as the hearer pursues life where he or she remains. If we remember that theistic origin and occasionally say “God be with you,” perhaps we can begin to re-anchor our speech in a more theistic worldview.

That said, since this is my final column for *Salvo*, I wish you good-bye. God be with you. ☺





# Keeping It Real

## *Keep Making the Case with Confidence and Without Fear*

by Terrell Clemmons

**I**n 2007, I was an at-home mom moonlighting as a freelance Christian writer. It was the era of the “New Atheists,” as *Wired* magazine put it. Atheists had criticized theistic belief before, but according to the new narrative, the September 11 terrorist attacks had demonstrated that religion was not just factually wrong or misguided but that it embodied an existential evil. News media, the blogosphere, and major publishing houses featured strident, brash atheists promoting “science” and “reason” as the way of progress.

I had read Richard Dawkins’s *The God Delusion* (2006) and found his rationale for atheism remarkably flimsy, and I wanted to write an article that would equip Christians to meet this challenge. None of the outlets I approached were interested in an article on atheism. So I googled “apologetics magazines,” and that’s when I discovered *Salvo*. I rattled off an email to the editor, and my first article appeared in the Winter 2007 issue—*Salvo* 7, which was devoted to atheism and cheekily titled “Nietzsche is Dead.”

### Worldview Bedrock

I share this backstory because I think it exemplifies *Salvo*’s fearless willingness, nay, *eagerness* to address cultural issues from the bedrock perspective which holds that (1) truth exists, (2) it can

be known, and (3) adopting the biblical worldview is the best way to know it. Furthermore, if these tenets are true, then counternarratives can be rationally interrogated—with confidence and without fear. Ultimately, they can be deconstructed and shown to be false.

For 20 years, *Salvo* has not just critiqued and dismantled reigning ideologies, such as scientism, Darwinism, and (now) wokeism, but it has also delivered encouraging stories, incisive commentary, and sound reasoning to demonstrate, over all competing narratives, the supremacy of biblical theism, the natural family, science *not* beholden to naturalism, and the sanctity of every human life from conception to natural death. Arguing from, *ahem*, “science” and “reason,” *Salvo* authors have

shown that it is the biblical worldview that offers us the *real* way to progress.

### The Real Struggle

And it’s not through politics. Along with vaunting atheism as the “correct” stance, the New Atheists explicitly pushed left-leaning political secularism, even holding “Reason Rallies” on the National Mall in 2012 and 2016 to encourage the “atheist vote.” Well, the new atheism is now passé (even Dawkins has acknowledged Christianity as a social good), but the leftist forces have not let up for one instant. They have only become more strident.

Van Jones recently observed that America is not divided over one issue but rather over dueling narratives about reality. He’s right about that, but not in the way he thinks. He attributes the two sides’ differences to nothing more than siloed news sources and social media feeds. But the Scriptures tell us there is more going on than what we see. There is an ancient spiritual conflict playing out, and we all take part in it, for good or for ill, depending on what—or whom—we choose to worship.

That we may know and worship him properly, the Creator has revealed himself in many ways. As *Salvo* has done for 20 years, in this final issue our authors show how he has borne witness to his Being and character—in the natural world (“Endowed by Our Creator,” p. 36), in history (“An Exodus Mystery Solved?” p. 22), in the arts (“Art & Soul,” p. 50), and even in our own minds and consciences (“The Missing Melody,” p. 29).

Every generation is vulnerable to exploitation and deception (see pp. 17, 26, and 32), so I pray God be with you as you continue your journey of equipping yourself and others to contend for the faith with confidence and without fear. Thank you for being a part of the *Salvo* journey. ☺

## Abortion Reckoning

**A**bortion-pill usage has risen dramatically in the wake of *Dobbs*, and this has resulted in a new trend in post-abortion regret. In the past, decades might pass before a post-abortive mother would seek healing. With the abortion pill, it's different. "When the baby is expelled, it's just hitting women in a different way," said 40 Days for Life leader Mark Cavaliere. "With surgical abortions, they could point their fingers at that bad place and the abortionist that did this to them.... But the abortion pill essentially makes a woman her own abortionist and her own home the abortion facility." Aborting mothers are unprepared for the trauma of seeing their baby. "Do I flush the toilet? Do I keep the baby? How

do I keep the baby? Where do I take it? Can I bury my baby? They don't know. They're just in complete shock."

The sanitized, clinical, "between a woman and her doctor" rhetoric is utterly stripped away, and abortion can be seen more clearly for what it is. Certainly, it's unspeakably painful, but pro-life ministries are seeing beneficial consequences. Rather than spiral into a years-long descent into psychological scarring and emotional trauma (trajectories that often include years of promiscuity and repeat abortions), many women are seeking help right away. And

pro-life ministries are doing what they have always done—meeting them with tangible resources and gospel-centered love and support. "The most immediate result," writes Steve Karlen of 40 Days for Life, "is that the women who come forward sooner can encounter God's mercy without spending years or decades in the desert suffering needlessly." •



Sources: *Day 41: A Publication of 40 Days for Life* (Winter 2024–2025); <https://spuc.org.uk/use-of-american-pregnancy-resource-centres-has-skyrocketed-since-the-end-of-roe/>

## Ambitious Homemaking

**H**istorically, economic productivity and home life for most people were melded together in one *oikos*. (*Oikos* is Greek for "household" and is related to the

English "economy.") The Industrial Revolution radically changed that, but with technological innovations and a more globalized economy, some are finding ways to recenter work and family life around the home. The shifts bring

both opportunities and challenges.

To explore and encourage the beneficial aspects of this trend, the Institute for Family Studies and the Foundation of American

Innovation have launched The Third Oikos. Its first project will feature interviews with people who are living out their own expressions of work and home life, as parents, spouses, homemakers, and laborers from home but also as agents of hospitality and communal flourishing with others. The first interview profiles Jesse Genet, an entrepreneurial mother of seven living on a small, mostly off-grid ranch near Los Angeles. Jesse says people are surprised to discover that "having all these children is a choice I am enjoying."

The director of The Third Oikos is Nicole Ruiz, an "ambitious homemaker" with a background in technology. "What does the good life look like in the third oikos?" she asks. "I don't exactly know yet, but join me and let's figure it out." •



Sources: <https://ifstudies.org/blog/introducing-the-third-oikos-homemaking-reimagined>; <https://www.thirdoikos.com/p/what-is-the-third-oikos>



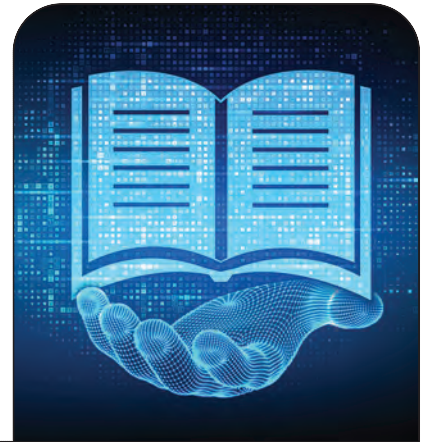
## A(I) is for Apologetics

Software engineer Jake Carlson grew up in China as the son of missionaries. In the 1990s, he saw how the internet was becoming an online forum with a decidedly secular bent, and he made a promise to God, as well as to himself, that he would one day build something to counter that. In 2023, he began work on The Apologist Project. The Apologist Project maintains a comprehensive online directory of curated apologetics resources (videos, books, articles, websites, podcasts, and more), along with a chatbot that draws from this huge corpus of data in response to questions.

Answers always include a list of references used to answer the question so that users can consult them for more information.

The chatbot, available free at Apologist.AI, is a tool for seekers and apologists, but bots can also be customized for embedding in a partner organization's websites. For example, a bot could be tailored to respond to questions related to Islam and then embedded in the website of a Muslim outreach ministry. Or one could be customized to draw only from the resources of a client organization (such as the Discovery Institute or Stand to Reason) and embedded in its website. The mission is "to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ through

the thoughtful, Spirit-led application of bleeding edge technology to help fulfill the Great Commission." Currently the chatbot can accommodate 192 languages. •



Sources: [ApologistProject.org](https://ApologistProject.org); [Apologist.com](https://Apologist.com); [Apologist.AI](https://Apologist.AI)

## Not Dead Yet

Western Civilization is in decline, but all is not lost, says Victor Davis Hanson. There are counterrevolutions. In Eastern Europe, they're happening in the post-Soviet states: Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and

Romania. In the U.S., it's the red states, some from the former Confederacy, but also Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho. People are seeing what's happening in Western Europe and in the blue states—the atheism and the nihilism and the unwanted ideas being censored in the name of hate speech or disinformation, says Hanson. Instead

of that, they're going back to a Judeo-Christian tradition with tolerance for other religions. Back to the nuclear family. Back to honoring the role of women, not just as professionals, but also as mothers of two, three, or four children. "There's nothing wrong with that," he says. "In fact, that's the linchpin of civilization." •

Source: <https://www.dailysignal.com/2025/12/30/the-west-isnt-finished-as-long-as-assimilation-starts-no>

## Pro-Choice Ed

School districts are being forced to grapple with difficult decisions as student enrollments

decline nationwide. *K-12 Dive* reports that school systems from Austin, Texas, to Atlanta, Georgia, to Broward County, Florida, are considering school closures or consolidations. Alabama's State Superintendent of Education projects needing 500–700 fewer teachers for the 2026–2027 school year, and in West Virginia, more than 70 public schools have closed since 2019. According to the Illinois Policy Institute, more than one in three desks in

Chicago's public schools are empty.

The declines are being attributed to shrinking populations, lower birth rates, and even disappearances of students with unknown immigration statuses. But *K-12 Dive* also notes the role of school voucher programs and other parental-choice measures. As states enact pro-choice education policies, parents have greater flexibility in directing the education of their children, and in many cases the tax dollars that will follow them. These are both wins for the next generation. •



Source: <https://www.k12dive.com/news/states-districts-grapple-with-declining-enrollment/804545>

## Data Activism

The information age began with the advent of the computer and the large-scale economic shift from manufacturing to information services. Then, as computers became more powerful, information began to be aggregated into data. Now, data is being activated into agenda-driven political tools. Case in point: “Trans Data Epistemologies: Transgender Ways of Knowing with Data,” an “academic” paper that espouses using data as a “tool of community care.” It’s littered with woke jargon, but a few phrases clarify the rationale. “Our participants repeatedly emphasized that actionable and useful data for community care was the utmost priority over true, accurate, or verifiable data.” As if they somehow

knew that prioritizing the *usefulness* of data over its accuracy sounds sketchy, they continued: “We do not mean to undermine the meticulous data work of our participants but to emphasize the desired outcome of community well-being of their data work. This aspect of trans data epistemology is consonant with the idea that data is for community care.”

In other words, it’s doing “good,” and that’s what matters. Trans “community care” includes such goals as securing insurance coverage for transgender surgeries or collecting gender identity information on the U.S. census because “we’re fighting for money.” Certainly there is a place for using data to inform advocacy, but wherever the “usefulness” of the data

is more important than its truth value, the “work” is nothing more than Machiavellian, end-justifies-the-means political maneuvering—which has never ended well for anyone involved. •



Source: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/20539517251381694>

## Gay Trendsetting

The drive to deconstruct all sex and marriage norms continues unabated, both at a bottom-up, municipal and top-down, cultural level. Earlier this year, an Olympia, Washington, city council

member proposed that the council consider a “Diverse Family Structure Nondiscrimination Ordinance” which would broaden the city’s non-discrimination codes to include “family or relationship structure” as a protected civil rights category. The proposal also requests that the council designate Olympia as a sanctuary city for “LGBTQIA2S+” people.

Meanwhile, the *Wall Street Journal’s* real estate section recently featured a lengthy article detailing the renovation of a 4,000-square-foot home for a Chicago throuple, three wealthy men who live together in an open sexual/romantic relationship. In trendsetting “lifestyles

of the beautiful” fashion, the article notes that the redesign cost more than \$400,000 and included a large shower and custom-made, three-person bed with a 96”x 96” mattress. “Real-estate agents are noticing more throuples and polycules buying homes together, often with everyone’s name on the deed,” the author comments, adding that a Denver real estate broker says she has seen a steady uptick in multipartner buyers treating shared ownership as both a romantic and financial move. The virtual home tour, which veritably drips with sensuous language—“soothing,” “a boudoir designed for a throuple,” “cozy, sexy, and tailor-made for gatherings”—casts the home and its owners as the essence of upscale, urban living. Note that this is not *Variety* or the *New York Times*, but the so-called “conservative-leaning” news source for business and finance •



Sources: <https://thepostmillennial.com/olympia-city-council-moves-to-expand-civil-rights-protections-to-include-polyamory>; <https://www.wsj.com/real-estate/luxury-homes/throuple-home-renovation-255a0db8>



## Relationship Chaos

A 2025 study conducted by Vantage Point Counseling Services found that just over half of American adults say they have some kind of relationship with an AI system. Relationship types included “Platonic Friendship,” “Business or Work Colleague,” “Therapist and Patient,” “Sibling,” “Parental,” and “Fitness Coach.” Some respondents did make a

point to clarify that they knew the relationships were not real. “I guess it’s a ‘friendship’ but I know it’s not sentient,” said one participant. But the results are still disturbing. Twenty-eight percent said they’ve had at least one “intimate or romantic relationship” with an AI. About 37 percent are not in any romantic relationship and are not seeking one, while another 34 percent say they are in one but are not being faithful in it. About 12 percent are “in a committed

relationship with more than one person consensually” (whatever that means).

If marriage and family formation are the backbone of a stable society, these survey results do not bode well for the future. •



Source: <https://vantagepointdallas counseling.com/research/artificial-romance-a-study-of-ai-and-human-relationship>

## Making Fatherless Children

More than 40 percent of adult women in the U.S. are single, and a growing number of them are choosing to become single mothers via IVF. According to CDC data, the number of unmarried

women in their 40s having children has risen by 250 percent since 1993. For many, IVF is their “Plan B,” but as their fertility horizons shrink, they are deciding to “move forward alone.” Rosanna Hertz, author of *Single by Chance*, *Mothers by Choice*, characterizes

their decision as “selfless.

Certainly, good mothering requires selflessness, but there is nothing selfless about choosing to “move forward alone.” The move is all about *what the prospective mother wants*, not about what would be best for her prospective child—like having both a mother and a *father*. •

Source: <https://www.npr.org/2026/01/12/nx-s1-5647761/ivf-fertility-motherhood-40s-cost-donor-decision>

## Healthcare Profits > Healthcare

Private equity (PE) firms have invested more than a trillion dollars in healthcare since 2013, and this has reshaped entire categories of care from hospitals to nursing homes to physicians’ offices. PE firms specialize in buying companies, restructuring them, and then selling them. “PE’s goal of acquiring quick financial gains is typically accomplished by assigning debt to the facilities and practices it buys, cutting labor costs, changing services to the most lucrative, upcoding diagnostic codes to raise prices, and merging, shutting down, or selling practices,” write the authors of a 2025 study.

Other studies indicate that PE

firms push more profitable services, while scaling back essential, but costly, services. For example, PE-owned dental offices “moved from diagnostic and preventive services to higher reimbursement restorative, specialty and surgical procedures.” Similar patterns have been documented in oncology,



cardiology, ophthalmology, and other specialties.

Note that none of the PE objectives serve patient well-being. In an article titled “Profits First, Patients Last,” Pamela Ferdinand argues that the PE model has resulted in stripped-down facilities, understaffing, unsafe conditions, and more medical complications and deaths. Consequences show up in everything from patient bedsores to delayed responses to a decimated ICU and “nurses stretching themselves to prevent harm in a system that no longer built in a margin for safety.... When private equity (PE) incentives collide with clinical care, patients—especially those who are sicker, poorer or harder to treat—are more likely to be killed or harmed.” •

Sources: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/40036910/>; <https://childrenshealthdefense.org/defender/profits-first-patient-last-private-equity-hurting-healthcare-rtk/>

by John Ellis

Johnson's philosophy, "Don't Die," forms the modus operandi by which he lives and claims the titles of both healthiest and most-measured man in the world. The latter title stems from his evaluation of as many as 75 biomarkers, including the biological age of each of his organs. Johnson sells a host of Blueprint-branded foods, vitamins, biomarker kits, and Don't Die clothing so others can emulate the existence that he himself quite literally embodies.

everything from his 90 supplements a day to his own hyperbaric oxygen chamber. He can do this because he sold the tech company he founded, Braintree, to PayPal in 2013 for a cool \$800 million. Nonetheless, considering the cost and notwithstanding the sensationalism of the documentary's subtitle, we might ask, *To what end, really?*

Johnson says he is pushing the boundary of the human *lifespan*—a not-unreasonable goal, depending on what he considers to be the

Perhaps all of this was simply a consequence of rebranding throughout filming, but one can't help but question Johnson's equivocation and, by extension, his intentions, much as blogger Rebecca Watson does when she characterizes Johnson as a grifter trying to profit off of humanity's innate fear of death. Johnson's popularity on social media may be some indication of his followers' existential trepidations, but I don't believe he is a con artist. Given his already inordinate wealth, the transparency of his biomarker data online, and his emphasis on instructive, albeit sometimes puerile, social media content, Johnson appears to care less about vitamin sales than about philosophical buy-in.

When I first began following Johnson, he struck me as a next-gen Tony Robbins or Joel Osteen. As chief ideologue of his own brand, he writes books espousing his philosophy, speaks at his own events (called "Summits"), and is by all accounts the preeminent guru of his message. Much like Robbins's philosophy on life management or Osteen's framing of Christianity as an avenue for



wealth, Johnson endorses “Don’t Die” as a holistic framework for health and lengthening lifespan. But since he often equivocates about it, it sometimes comes off as something surreptitiously more grandiose.

In late 2025, Johnson hired a CEO to handle day-to-day operations of Blueprint so that he could focus on promoting his philosophy. As he explained,

Every minute spent dealing with problems like “why a supplier shipped us something out-of-spec” (now stuck on a boat) is a minute not spent figuring out how to make Don’t Die the fastest-growing ideology in history, increasing our odds of survival and thriving....

My sole purpose in existence is the survival and thriving of the human race.

Much of Johnson’s personal story is revealed in *Don’t Die*. This brings me to what I believe drives his whole endeavor: Johnson wants to raise his brand of longevity to a *religion*. *Don’t Die* lends as much runtime to unearthing his pre-millionaire, tech-entrepreneur past as it does to his immortality-aspiring present. Less than halfway through, the story shifts into melancholy territory: Johnson’s impoverished childhood, his parents’ divorce and father’s criminality, as well as his own contentious marriage, divorce, and depression. Underlying this upheaval is his upbringing in, and subsequent rejection of, Mormonism, the existential framework through which he understood reality—as he says, “It gave me all the answers to existence.” It is also the framework from which he was happy to be liberated at age 33.

Nonetheless, abandoning one’s foundational understanding of reality, no matter how liberating it may feel, is likely to leave a void. It’s understandable that he



would turn to a health regimen, not only as a remedy for depression but also as a way to supply meaning to his life. He specifically says that his dedication to Blueprint developed out of his rejection of Mormonism.

### An Immortality Odyssey

A man suffering a mid-life crisis in the face of life’s complexity and tragedy is nothing new. Rarely, however, does anyone have millions with which to erect his own new brand of existential scaffolding. But Bryan Johnson did, and he is now promoting Blueprint and the Don’t Die philosophy as a biological means by which humanity may yet transcend its apparent impermanence. Indeed, underlying much of his commentary, and that of the longevity experts who appear throughout *Don’t Die*, is the suggestion of some forthcoming golden age in, well, anti-aging. In the time since *Don’t Die* came out, Johnson has only doubled down on such rhetoric. In one especially telling interview, he said, “We are on the verge of the most extraordinary existence in the galaxy.... My objective is not life

maximization, it’s species maximization.”

In similar interviews, Johnson frequently articulates his desire to use artificial intelligence to help maximize lifespan, promulgate a global movement, and determine how the human race will survive the rise of a potential superintelligence.

Listening to Johnson is akin to reading an Arthur C. Clarke novel—the initial subtext and eventual denouement is a renunciation of the Christian worldview in favor of a transhumanistic, neo-evolutionary trajectory

of human advancement, salvation even. Indeed, one can’t help but get the feeling that Johnson would collapse in elation were a monolithic artifact to land in his backyard.

### Chasing Salvation, but in the Wrong Place

Johnson’s chief obsession is avoiding death. “Death is our only foe,” he said on social media. But without a biblical framework for understanding life, he constructs temporal, physiological interventions to what is ultimately a spiritual problem. “Every religion is an attempt to reconcile with death,” he says.

But he is wrong about that. Christianity is *not* an attempt at reconciliation; it is the story of how death has been overcome. As 1 Corinthians 15:26 states, because of Christ’s death and resurrection, death is a defeated foe. Neither is *Don’t Die* a reconciliation with death; it’s simply an attempt at evasion. Johnson’s pursuit, though rooted in a legitimate existential yearning, is fundamentally misdirected due to his inability to grasp reality without the mind of Christ. ©





However, this emphasis on the sacred value of human life runs *far deeper*. Its origin traces to the Bible and the writings of early and medieval Christian theologians. As the late pastor Timothy Keller explains:

While it is popularly thought that human rights [including the right to life] were the creation of modern secularism over and against the oppressiveness of religion, the reality is that this concept arose ... not after the Enlightenment but within medieval Christendom. As Horkheimer in the 1940s and Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s recognized, the idea of human rights was based on the biblical idea of all people being created in God's image.

### *Imago Dei* & Incarnation

Two key biblical doctrines have shaped the Christian attitude to human life: the *Imago Dei* and the Incarnation. First, Christianity inherited the Old Testament tenet that God created man in his own likeness, granting him dominion over all animals, plants, and the natural world. Though man is inherently sinful in consequence of the Fall, the implication of the Genesis narrative is that human beings are the culmination of creation and are ultimately subordinate to no one but God. Man is *qualitatively* distinct and superior to other creatures. Each human being bears God's image. Second, God assumed human form in the person of Jesus Christ and sojourned among humans on earth for the sake of the redemption and salvation of the human race. By taking on a human body, God elevated human worth and sanctified the human body and material world.

Early theologians took note of the implications. Origen of Alexandria (c. 185–253) observed that God had become incarnated

# Life in the Balance

## *Christianity, Not the Enlightenment, Provided the Foundation for Human Rights*

by Tamer Nashef

**T**he sanctity of human life is woven into the fabric of the Western moral tradition. The West's high regard for human life is evident in the writings of Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and Thomas Jefferson. In his *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke writes that all human beings, as creations of "one omnipotent, and infinitely wise maker," possess an inviolable right to "life, health, liberty, or possessions." Likewise, Jefferson states in the Declaration of Independence that God endowed all humans with "certain unalienable Rights," including the right to "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Kant, in *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, proclaims that human beings have "intrinsic worth," adding that they must be treated "as an end" and "not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will."





in Jesus Christ “so that human nature may be divinized.” Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373) similarly maintained that God “deified men by becoming himself man.” Augustine of Hippo (354–430), whose theology has influenced Western thought for centuries, argued: “He who was God became Man in His effort to make godlike those who were men.” Discussing the impact of the Incarnation on the conception of human beings, the 20th-century medievalist Colin Morris assesses that God’s choice to become man is “an affirmation of human dignity which could hardly be surpassed.”

### The Rise & Fall of Human Valuation

Both *Imago Dei* and the Incarnation prompted Christian thinkers throughout the centuries to assert the intrinsic worth of human beings and to marvel at the dignity of the human body. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215) stressed the sacredness and supremacy of man over creation:

For think not that stones,  
and stocks, and birds, and

serpents are sacred things, and men are not; but, on the contrary, regard men as truly sacred, and take beasts and stones for what they are.

Echoing these sentiments, the theologian and mystic Gregory of Nyssa (335–c. 395) affirmed the uniqueness of man as created in God’s image:

The sky was not made in God’s image, not the moon, not the sun, not the beauty of the stars, no other things which appear in creation. Only you (the human soul) were.... Nothing that exists can measure up to your greatness.

Harking back to St. Paul’s statement that the human body is “a temple of the Holy Spirit” and anticipating Renaissance celebrations of the grandeur of the human body in art, Augustine in *The City of God* expresses fascination with human “appearance, and form, and stature.” He specifically points out the “marvellous nimbleness” of the tongue and hands, adding that all organs contribute to the body’s overall “beauty.”

The Christian esteem for human nature persisted into the medieval period, with the English scholar Adelard of Bath (1080–1152) who argued that man’s “gift of reason” sets him apart from beasts and compensates for his physical disadvantages. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), by common consensus the most important philosophical theologian of the medieval era in the West, hailed human beings as “the most perfect in all nature.”

The value Christian theology

The Christian views of human nature stand in sharp contrast with the degradation of man’s cosmic state in the thought of modern atheists, who describe the human race as “a curious accident in a backwater” and “a tiny twig on an ancient tree of life.”

places on human nature scaled further heights during the Renaissance, so much so that the German-Canadian theologian Jens Zimmermann interprets Renaissance humanism as an extension of *theosis*—the Christian idea, as expressed by Athanasius, that “God became man, so that man might become God.” As is typical for Renaissance scholars, the Italian diplomat Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459) placed humans at the center of existence:

The world and all its beauties have been first invented and established by Almighty God for the use of man [who]...rendered [it] much more beautiful, much more ornate and far more refined

In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, the Italian philosopher Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) exalts man as “the most fortunate living thing worthy of all admiration,” whose “rank” is “to be envied not only by the brutes but even by the stars and by minds beyond this world.” In like



Augustine of Hippo

manner, Mirandola's contemporary Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) went so far as to ascribe divine powers to humans, contending that "man possesses as it were almost the same genius as the Author of the heavens."

These exalted Christian views of human nature stand in sharp contrast with the degradation of man's cosmic status in modern atheist thought. British philosopher Bertrand Russell and American evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould described the human race as "a curious accident in a backwater" and "a tiny twig on an ancient tree of life," respectively. In the same vein, American theoretical physicist and Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg reduced human life to "a more-or-less farcical outcome of a chain of accidents." Richard Dawkins drew a somber picture of human existence, arguing that humans are nothing more than "machines for propagating DNA" in a universe where there is "no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference."

### From Theory to Practice

The Christian emphasis on the worth of human life was not a mere theoretical concept. It had a revolutionary effect, helping to end, or at least reduce the scale of, barbaric practices prevalent in the ancient world, such as the killing of unwanted infants and the ruthless gladiatorial games. Infant homicide was commonplace in the Greco-Roman world and other ancient civilizations, including India, China, and Japan. So common was the phenomenon of infant killing that the Greek historian Polybius attributed Greece's population decline to it.

Several ancient philosophers approved of this savage custom. In *The Republic*, Plato writes that state officials ought to dispose of "the offspring of the inferior, or of the better when they chance to be deformed." Even the Roman

philosopher Seneca, who otherwise held humanitarian views, wrote in a matter-of-fact tone that "unnatural progeny we destroy; we drown even children who at birth are weakly and abnormal."

However, early Christians defied mainstream norms and strongly condemned abortion and infanticide as murder. The *Didache*, an anonymous early Christian treatise dated from the late first to early second century, enjoins Christians "not [to] murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is begotten." Reiterating this stance, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, a non-canonical text dated to around AD 130, reads: "You shall not slay the child by procuring abortion; nor, again, shall you destroy it after it is born." Basil of Caesarea (330–379), also known as Basil the Great, branded women who aborted their pregnancies as "murderesses." Influenced by Christian morality, the Roman Emperor Valentinian formally proscribed infanticide and abortion in 374, the first Roman emperor to do so.

Nowhere is the Christian regard for human life more manifest than in the early Christians' fierce opposition to the Roman gladiatorial games. These "spectator sports" were extremely violent fights to the death between gladiators (often slaves, convicted criminals, or prisoners of war whose lives were deemed expendable) or between gladiators and wild animals. According to American historian William Stearns Davis, the games reflect "the pitiless spirit and carelessness of human life lurking behind the pomp, glitter, and cultural pretensions of the great imperial age."

Christians rejected and boycotted these games, much to the disapproval of Roman pagans. In his book *De Spectaculis* (*The Shows*), the early Christian author Tertullian (160–240) decries these contests, stressing that "nothing which is peculiar to the shows

has God's approval" and that "they were instituted entirely for the devil's sake." He writes that Christians should feel aversion to these games and calls on believers to refrain from attending them, as they corrupt the soul and evoke corrupting sentiments like "frenzied excitement" and "temptation."

The anti-gladiatorial attitudes of the early Christians eventually led the Christian Emperor Theodosius I to abolish these events in the East in the 390s while his son Honorius initiated the same step in the West in the early 5th century. In his analysis of the termination of gladiatorial contests, the 19th-century Irish historian W. E. H. Lecky says:

There is scarcely any single reform so important in the moral history of mankind as the suppression of the gladiatorial shows, a feat that must be almost exclusively ascribed to the Christian church.

### Grounded in Christ

Along with the Greco-Roman intellectual tradition, Christianity constitutes one of the pillars of Western thought, and as such, its values have provided the foundation for much of Western morality. While Greco-Roman philosophy, especially Stoicism, contributed to the evolution of Western morals, Christian theologians in many cases reshaped and improved upon pagan values as seen in their explicit rejection of common ancient practices such as infanticide, abortion, and gladiatorial contests. The West has drawn its reverence for human life *not* so much from ancient philosophers or post-Enlightenment secularists but from the biblical vision of humanity as created in the image of God and the conviction that the Creator consecrated human life by taking on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. ☉






# (Mis)Fire in the Streets

## *Antifa & the Battle for Young Souls*

by Emily Morales

**A**ntifa, short for “anti-fascist,” has resisted classification as a formal organization. It presents itself as a movement, or worse, a moral orientation—an approach that allows adherents to deny responsibility for actions while still benefiting from shared symbols, rhetoric, and tactics. Among the political and cultural left, Antifa is portrayed as a necessary line of defense against racism and authoritarianism, one whose confrontational posture is justified by moral urgency. Critics on the right view Antifa as a militant movement that practices intimidation, property destruction, and violence against ideological opponents and that readily deploys sweeping moral labels, branding a wide range of opponents as Nazis.

Most concerning is the movement’s growing appeal to young people, for whom Antifa functions as a formative subculture, shaping identity, morality, and political imagination. For parents, pastors, and mentors, the central question is not merely whether Antifa’s tactics are objectionable, but *why* the movement resonates so powerfully with youth—and what kind of alternative vision can responsibly counter that appeal.

### Communist Origins

The term “antifa” originates from

the German *antifaschistisch*. It first appears in *Antifaschistische Aktion*, the name of a militant front established by the Communist Party of Germany in 1932, a period marked by economic collapse, street violence, and intense ideological polarization. Antifaschistische Aktion explicitly positioned itself in opposition to Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist movement and its paramilitary forces, such as the SA.

Antifaschistische Aktion was not a broad coalition against authoritarianism in general. It was

a partisan, revolutionary project grounded in Marxist-Leninist ideology. It emphasized direct action, mass mobilization, and violent confrontation with political enemies, including not only Nazis but also liberal democrats and social democrats, who were viewed as obstacles to communist revolution. Unlike today’s Antifa, it did not disguise its organizational nature. It was openly known as a paramilitary front aligned with communist ideals, a fact that contributed to its swift dismantling after the Nazis came to power in 1933.

### Across the Atlantic

Nonetheless, its aesthetic, rhetoric, and moral framing persisted in Europe, particularly within leftist student movements, anarchist circles, and revolutionary socialist subcultures, and were often embedded throughout the Cold War within broader critiques of capitalism, Western democracy, and American influence. By the late twentieth century, these currents intersected with punk subcultures, radical antiracist movements, and revolutionary organizing, especially in Germany, the UK, and later the U.S.

In the American context, Antifa-style activism gained traction in the 1980s and ’90s through decentralized networks. The oldest known U.S. organization to adopt the Antifa label, *Rose City Antifa*, was founded in Portland, Oregon, in 2007 and remains active today. From the outset, American Antifa groups emphasized anonymity, black bloc tactics (all-black clothing), and leaderless organization—features which afford plausible deniability while frustrating law enforcement, media scrutiny, and legal accountability. Journalist Andy Ngo describes Antifa as a “phantom movement by design.”

### Tactics & Ideology

While some activities include protest, counter-protest, or political education, others are far more

## IN THE TRENCHES by Emily Morales

aggressive and include property destruction, intimidation campaigns, doxing of perceived opponents, and physical confrontations. Ngo cautions against dismissing Antifa as a mere “ragtag group of street hooligans,” arguing that behind their violence lies “a plan to destroy the nation-state, America in particular, to bring about a revolution that leads to their vision of utopia.” The 2020 George Floyd riots brought these dynamics into sharp relief. Activists used the moment to pursue broader revolutionary objectives, as cities experienced systematic property destruction, arson, and looting. Window-smashing featured prominently, signaling both rejection of private property and defiance of state authority.

Another defining feature of modern Antifa is its expansive moral labeling. Law enforcement officers, immigration officials, journalists, political conservatives, and even ideological moderates have been accused of “fascism” or likened to Nazis. Such rhetoric collapses all moral distinctions, transforming political disagreement into existential struggle, thus making violence appear justifiable

### Appeal to Youth

To understand Antifa’s appeal to youth, it is helpful to look beyond ideology to questions of identity and community. Research on radicalization consistently shows that young people are drawn to movements that offer moral certainty, collective belonging, and

immediate opportunities for action. Antifa satisfies all three.

The movement’s aesthetic of black clothing and anti-authoritarianism symbolizes rebellion and empowerment. Antifa provides what scholars call *prefigurative spaces*: “communities” in which participants attempt to live out in the *present* the world they wish to create in the *future*. These spaces offer coherence between belief and practice and reinforce identity through shared rituals, language, and confrontation. For young people uncertain about purpose, meaning, and belonging, such environments can be deeply attractive. Participation is not merely political; it is existential. Antifa becomes a source of community, personal significance, and moral clarity.

## -> Antifa Unmasked

In the wake of World War I and the Bolshevik revolution that followed, there arose in Europe, especially in Italy and Germany, two opposing political factions. The communists called for *worldwide* socialism (“Workers of the world unite!”), while the fascists preferred local (i.e., *national*) socialism. As Nazism (i.e., national socialism) gained currency in Germany, *Antifaschistische Aktion* was formed to engage in the conflict as a militant, openly *communist* front.

Today’s Antifa in America is its direct descendant in name, tactics, political ideology, and imagery; it even flies the same flag. But whereas the German communists did rage against real fascism, **today’s Antifa functionaries seem not even to know what real fascism is. Consider that in Antifa-dominated zones, one risks being charged as a fascist or Nazi for holding any of the following views:**

- > Traditional marriage is a social good.
- > There are only two sexes and two genders.
- > Unborn children have a right to life.
- > Born children should be protected from sexual predators.
- > Law enforcement serves a vital function.
- > Theft is wrong, including when the government does it.
- > Nations have a right to self-determination and to control their borders.
- > Communism is a bad form of government.





The danger is not only that they are drawn into unlawful or violent behavior, but that their moral imaginations become shaped by a framework which defines identity primarily through opposition. As activism replaces formation (whether moral, intellectual, psychological, or spiritual), critical thinking gives way to blind conformity.

### A Better Vision

For pastors, parents, and Christian mentors, the response to Antifa cannot be limited to denunciation. Young people are not primarily drawn to radical movements by their chaos, but by the promise of justice, meaning, and belonging. When Christian communities fail to offer a compelling vision



of purpose rooted in the gospel, alternative movements readily fill the void.

A robust biblical worldview affirms many of the moral concerns that animate young activists—opposition to injustice, care for the vulnerable, and resistance to abuse of power—while also insisting

that justice must be shaped by truth, love, and respect for human dignity. Identity grounded in Christ offers transcendent stability that political movements cannot provide, one not dependent on enemies, outrage, or perpetual conflict

Perhaps the heart of Antifa's attraction lies in the promise of prefigurative community. Christianity, however, is *inherently prefigurative*. The church is called to be a foretaste of the coming kingdom—a transnational/intergenerational community embodying justice, mercy, humility, and sacrificial love in the present. Christian leaders must intentionally cultivate spaces where young people can live out their convictions through faithful action: serving the downtrodden and laboring faithfully for the advancement of the gospel. These practices offer a vision of justice that builds rather than burns, and they demonstrate that obedience to Christ is not passive but profoundly active.

Our calling is not merely to counter radical ideologies, but to form souls and communities shaped by the gospel. The Christian worldview provides purpose, identity, and hope. When the church faithfully embodies the kingdom of God, it offers something no radical movement can sustain: a community rooted not in anger or fear, but in truth, love, courage, and enduring significance—all ordered toward the glory of God and the advancement of true justice. ☉

**Political conservatives, and even ideological moderates have been accused of “fascism” or likened to Nazis. Such rhetoric collapses all moral distinctions, transforming political disagreement into existential struggle, thus making violence appear justifiable**

The generation of Americans who sacrificed to liberate Germany and Italy from fascist dictators implicitly held to all the preceding statements. If anyone could rightly be called “anti-fascist,” they qualified. Today's American Antifa anarchists, however, rage not against fascism but against America's constitutional system of ordered liberty. They are historically ignorant, misguided, instrumentalized street thugs.

### Wisdom Must Be Shrewd

When exposed to their signs and rhetoric, keep in mind that when they hurl the epithets of “fascist” and “Nazi,” they're almost never talking about real fascists or Nazis. If you incline toward any—even just one—of these positions, they're talking about *you*.

Andy Ngo, author of *Unmasked: Inside Antifa's Radical Plan to Destroy Democracy*, has documented Antifa's tactic of baiting “enemies.” They will maliciously, sometimes violently, harass opponents in hope of provoking a useful reaction to which they can point and charge, “See, didn't we tell you these were violent fascists?” From that point, the propaganda war is on.

Jesus instructed his followers to be as shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. Discerning Christians will recognize this culture war as a proxy for spiritual conflict in high places. Do not be duped; do not be emotionally manipulated. And choose your battle tactics accordingly. •

## Severance Days

### *The Pandemic of Family Estrangement*

by Nicole M. King

**"F**amily estrangement has moved from the margins to the mainstream," writes Noelle Mering for *The Federalist*. The idea of going "no contact" with one's family was once a rarity—an action reserved for the most egregious acts of abuse or neglect. But no longer. Oprah recently held a forum for adult children and parents who had severed ties; the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *New Yorker* have all recently published essays on the rising trend of American adults who are estranged from a family member. The trend is real, and it's growing. According to an August 2025 YouGov poll, 38 percent of American adults consider themselves estranged from a parent, child, sibling, grandparent, grandchild, or some combination thereof.

A closer look at the poll data reveals some disturbing trends. Among those who report estrangement from a sibling, the most-common reasons cited were personality conflicts (29 percent), lies or betrayal (29 percent), and manipulative behavior (26 percent). For children estranged from a parent, the reasons were manipulative behavior (34 percent); physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (34 percent); and lies or betrayal (31 percent). And for parents estranged from their adult children, the reasons are most often lies or betrayal (24 percent), conflicting values or lifestyle (21 percent), and fallout from divorce (20 percent).

What lies behind this trend? Are family members becoming more abusive, manipulative, greedy, dishonest, etc.?

#### **Intentional Distancing**

Perhaps. But more likely, therapeutic culture, combined with a heavy dose of identity politics, has turned things that used to simply be tolerated, such

as Dad's tendency toward political jokes or Aunt Judy's position on vaccines, into "toxic" traits that merit severing ties. Writes Mering,

To understand this peculiar moment, it helps to situate this newer version of family estrangement within the latest iteration of identity politics, the logic of which invites us to recast all relationships as adversarial. Such black-and-white thinking is full of moral clarity but lacks moral complexity. It therefore tends toward excessive corrections that sacralize entire victim classes.

Many therapists don't help. Dr. Joshua Coleman, author of *Rules of Estrangement: Why Adult Children Cut Ties and How to Heal the Conflict*, writes that "therapists' perspectives often uncritically reflect the biases, vogues, and fads of the culture in which we live." In this age, those biases tend to be highly individualistic, aimed at personal fulfillment and happiness rather than at moral duty. "With the exception of parenting small children," he continues, "encouraging individuals to feel some sense of obligation or care for family members is not typically on most therapists' agendas."

For many, the pandemic exacerbated this behavior. *The New Yorker* highlights the journey of one young woman, Amy, from a seemingly happy daughter in a Christian household to "no contact" with either parent or any siblings. Covid-19 played a role in Amy's story. With the relationship with her parents already deteriorating, their refusal to be vaccinated as a condition for attending her wedding was the final straw. For families with somewhat better relationships, the pandemic may have served as a time to come together and take care of one another. For those fraught with strain, however, differing beliefs about the virus and how to respond to it were all issues ripe for powerful disagreements.

#### **Trauma: A Case of Concept Creep**

All this said, real reasons exist for one to sever ties with a family member. In some extreme cases, such as physical or sexual abuse, it is the healthy thing to do. But the current growing trend of estrangement reflects two realities. The first is best summed up in what a 2020 paper terms "The Creeping Concept of Trauma." "Trauma, in its broadest sense," wrote German pathologist Georg Eduard von Rindfleisch in 1884, "is any external attack which forcibly alters



the physical or chemical composition of a part or the whole of the body." The authors of the 2020 paper write that, compared to 1884, the "broadest sense" of trauma has become "a great deal broader," with such experiences as "uncomplicated childbirth, graduate school, media violence, or overheard sexist remarks" now being described as traumatic. The language we use to describe unpleasantness or hardship or difficult family members has changed, and so too has our reaction to it. We have become less willing to bear one another's burdens in the form of navigating complicated relationships or putting up with poor behavior.

Second, the growing trend of family estrangement reflects shifting views on what exactly it means to be a family. Coleman writes that seeing family ties as optional rather than obligatory is a decidedly new phenomenon:

Deciding which people to keep in or out of one's life has become an important strategy to achieve ... happiness. While there's

**The growing trend of family estrangement reflects shifting views on what exactly it means to be a family. Seeing family ties as optional rather than obligatory is a decidedly new phenomenon.**

nothing especially modern about family conflict or a desire to feel insulated from it, conceptualizing the estrangement of a family member as an expression of personal growth as it is commonly done today is almost certainly new.



## Family: A Case of Concept Decay

"Family" used to refer to blood ties that bore with them a sense of obligation and duty and often included shared property or interests. Now, "family" is something you create, based on personal beliefs and desires. Family relationships exist to make *you* happier.

The Bible has much to say about family duties. Children are to honor their parents (Exodus 20:12). Husbands are to love their wives, serving them as Christ served the Church, and wives are to submit to their husbands (Ephesians chapter 5). Parents are to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians chapter 6). Nowhere is there a caveat stating that these rules only apply as long as one's mental health isn't threatened, or only if Mom and Dad validate one's life choices, or only if everyone speaks nicely at Christmas dinner.

The "moral complexity" that Noelle Mering mentions is worked out exactly in such conundrums. Loving one's family might look like limiting time spent at a relative's house precisely to maintain the best possible relationship. Honoring thy father and mother might mean forgiving perceived injustices and moving on with the humility to accept one's role as a son or daughter. Nurturing one's children might mean creativity in navigating difficult relationships with grandparents, so as to allow those relationships to exist at all. Loving one's adult children might mean allowing space for disagreement, with prayer that a wayward child might return.

The relationships we have may not be the ones we want. But they are the relationships we are called to, and they are the places wherein we may eventually find richness and reward, even if only in the satisfaction of having done our duty. By the grace of God, preserving these relationships may also lead to true reconciliation. Also by the grace of God, they most certainly will contribute to our sanctification. ☉

## An Exodus Mystery Solved?

### *Amenhotep II: The Pharaoh of the Exodus*

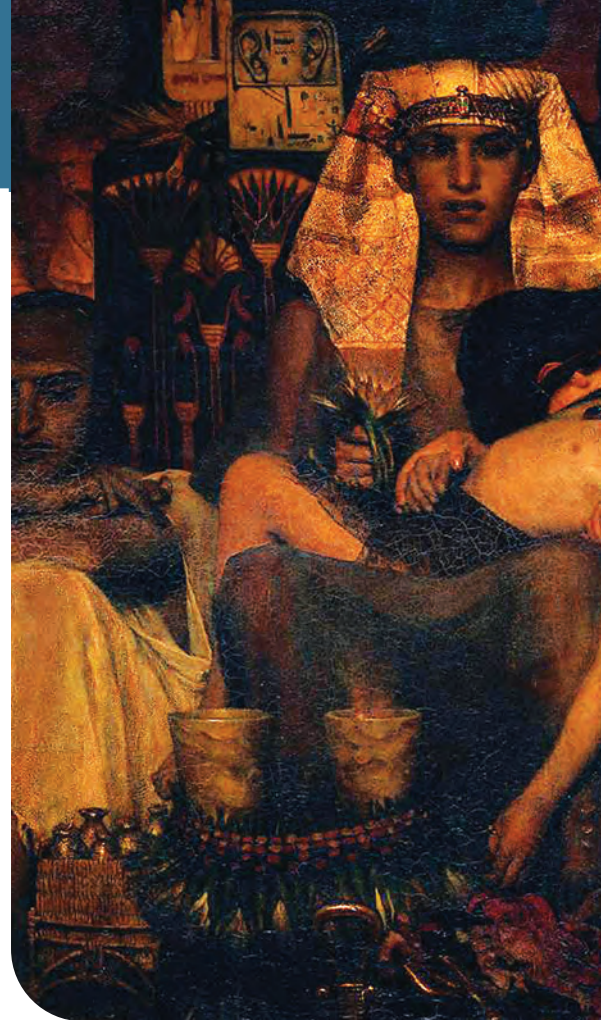
by Titus Kennedy

**T**he identity of the infamous pharaoh who chased Moses and the Israelites as they fled Egypt has been a mystery for centuries, debated in modern times by numerous scholars and dismissed as a fairy tale by others. Who was this pharaoh? The primary difficulty with connecting archaeological and historical material to the pharaoh of the Exodus is that his name is never specified in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> However, there are several clues that point to a specific period and person in Egyptian history.

#### Clues

The book of Exodus never names the kings of Egypt, using instead only the title Pharaoh. Yet this in itself is a clue, since “pharaoh” is derived from an Egyptian phrase meaning “great house” and only came into use for the king of Egypt during the 18th Dynasty.<sup>2</sup> This implies that the Exodus and the authorship of the book likely took place in the 15th century BC or later. In fact, this non-naming of an enemy ruler appears to be intentional; it is a convention attested in numerous texts of the period, and it explains why Moses (traditionally held to be the author of Exodus) did not include the names, while later books such as Kings and Isaiah give the personal name of various pharaohs.

Another important clue is that the pharaoh whose reign preceded the Exodus reigned for over 40 years. We know this because Moses, who fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian overseer, did not return until 40 years later, when the pharaoh seeking his life had finally died.<sup>3</sup> This narrows the field of candidates substantially, since very few pharaohs reigned for 40 or more years. Within the 18th Dynasty, only Thutmose III, who reigned for 54 years,

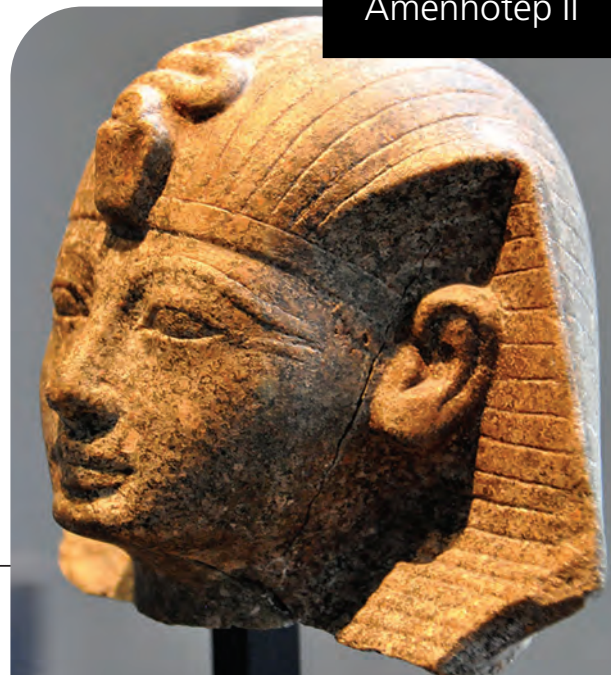


qualifies as the pre-Exodus pharaoh.<sup>4</sup>

Thutmose III was succeeded by his son Amenhotep II. It is implied that the Exodus pharaoh himself

was not a firstborn son, since he did not die in the tenth plague.<sup>5</sup> And indeed, Amenhotep II was not the firstborn, as he had an older brother named Amenemhat who had died about two decades

Amenhotep II







*Death of Pharaoh's Firstborn Son*

before Amenhotep II became pharaoh.

The final chronological clue concerns the approximate year of the Exodus. We can derive this from biblical passages that recount years and allow a reconstructed chronology. These include references to the 480th year prior to the 4th year of

recorded them accurately can be deduced from a study of numerous ancient temple dedication texts.<sup>7</sup> Since the fourth year of Solomon was ca. 967 BC, the pharaoh in power during the Exodus must have been on the throne around 1446 BC. In Egyptian history, this year falls early in the reign of Amenhotep II.<sup>8</sup>

## A Convergence of Data

In addition, there is inscriptional evidence from around 40 years after the early years of Amenhotep II for the nomadic Israelites wandering in the area east of Egypt and war and destruction afterward in Canaan.<sup>9</sup> This would be the expected timeline if the Israelites had fled Egypt during his reign, spent four decades wandering in the wilderness, and then entered Canaan to conquer and settle.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, there appears to be an initial convergence of data—a pre-Exodus pharaoh (Thutmose III) who ruled for over 40 years, a new pharaoh recently in power by about 1446 BC who was not a firstborn son (Amenhotep II), Yahweh worshippers wandering in the wilderness east of Egypt, and upheaval in Canaan 40 years later, all in an 18th-Dynasty setting.<sup>11</sup> However, these chronological and historical setting connections are not the only ancient evidence that ties Amenhotep II to the pharaoh of the Exodus.

Numerous incidents that occurred during the Exodus or as a result of it also have parallels with events in the reign of Amenhotep II. The earliest curious connection between Moses and this royal family took place decades before the escape from Egypt but had repercussions afterward. Not long af-

ter Moses was born, he was sent down the Nile river in a basket and picked up by order of the princess, who then decided to adopt him.<sup>12</sup> This “daughter of Pharaoh” was probably Hatshepsut, the only daughter of Thutmose I and Ahmose who survived past infancy and who eventually became a female

**Amenhotep II, as seen in his own inscriptions, appears to be a boastful, arrogant, and brutal ruler who tells sensational stories about his abilities and accomplishments. Certainly this pharaoh who claimed such feats would not admit to his slaves escaping and their God defeating the deities of Egypt.**

Solomon (1 Kings 6:1), 340 years prior to Jephthah (Judges 11:26),<sup>6</sup> 19 generations from the Exodus to Solomon (1 Chronicles 6:33–37), and observations of a new era for the Israelites beginning with the Exodus (Deuteronomy 1:3). That the biblical writers and other ancient authors counted solar years and

pharaoh.<sup>13</sup> Many years later, perhaps as retaliation for her adoption of Moses and by extension partial responsibility for the Exodus, Amenhotep II attempted to erase Hatshepsut from history by scratching out her name, defacing her images, and placing his name on many of her monuments,

including the famous Eighth Pylon at Karnak.

Other events in his reign that may coincide with the Exodus include the abandonment of the palace district at Avaris/Ramses ('Ezbet Helmi) and the disappearance of Semitic slaves from Pithom (Tell el-Retaba), perhaps because of the plagues and the departure of the Israelites.<sup>14</sup> The chaotic time of the plagues may even have been recorded in poetic form by an Egyptian during the 18th Dynasty whose name "Ipuwer" appears during the reigns of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III.<sup>15</sup>

The effects of and reactions to the Exodus also seem to appear during the reign of Amenhotep II and in the years following, as military campaigns grind to a halt and an expedition is launched to bring slaves, chariots, and weapons to Egypt. The previous pharaoh, Thutmose III, conducted 17 known military campaigns. His son Amenhotep II, however, conducted only one campaign prior to the calculated time of the Exodus and a second one in the year following it which was focused on capturing plunder. In his year-nine expedition, Amenhotep II went to Canaan and claimed to have returned with 101,128 prisoners, 1,032 chariots, and 13,050 weapons of warfare.<sup>16</sup> Although these are widely acknowledged as exaggerated numbers, Amenhotep II may have been attempting to recoup what he had lost in slaves, chariots, and weapons when the Israelites fled and his army and chariots were lost in the Sea of Reeds.<sup>17</sup> In the century following, there is an absence of military campaigns. Nor were the Egyptians able

to send any troops into Canaan to aid their vassals when the Canaanites were losing lands and cities to the "Habiru."<sup>18</sup>

Further, Amenhotep II, as seen in his own inscriptions, appears to be a boastful, arrogant, and brutal ruler who tells sensational stories about his abilities and accomplishments, as if he felt the need to compensate for failures. For instance, he claims that from his chariot he simultaneously fired four arrows that pierced through copper targets as thick as a man's palm, that he singlehandedly killed seven prince warriors and then mounted them on the bow of his boat, that he continued rowing a ship by himself after his 200 sailors were exhausted, that kings of various nations regarded him as their superior, and many other incredible feats. Although he may have been angry at his own gods and goddesses for abandoning him during a tumultuous period—even ordering the destruction of their images, including Amun-Ra—certainly this pharaoh who claimed such feats would not admit to his slaves escaping and their God defeating the deities of Egypt.<sup>19</sup>

The most shocking moment for the pharaoh, however, would have been the death of his firstborn son, who was supposed to become the next king of Egypt.<sup>20</sup> While the firstborn sons of other pharaohs died prior to ascending the throne, the situation with Amenhotep II is unique. His second-born son, who became Pharaoh Thutmose IV, commissioned a stele on which he recorded a fabricated story about the god of the Sphinx coming to him in a dream

Amenhotep II firing four arrows through a copper target







*Great Sphinx with the Dream Stele*

and promising that the kingship would be given to him.<sup>21</sup> This was clearly intended to give the impression of divine endorsement and to reassure the Egyptians that Thutmose IV was legitimate and that their gods were in control, even though the original crown prince had died as a child. Incredibly, this firstborn child of Amenhotep II, named Webensenu, was found buried inside the tomb of his father in the Valley of the Kings. His mummy, along with an inscribed canopic jar and burial statuettes bearing his name, indicates that the young prince Webensenu was interred in the pharaoh's tomb under special circumstances. Thus, the firstborn son of Pharaoh Amenhotep II died from unknown causes, was against convention buried in the king's tomb, and his younger brother claimed divine intervention as the reason for later taking the throne.

### Egyptian Corroboration

All of this circumstantial evidence points to Amenhotep II as the pharaoh of the Exodus, but one more important piece of data from Egyptian history helps to tie it all together. Manetho, an Egyptian

priest and historian who lived during the fourth–third centuries BC, wrote a historical account that preserves an Egyptian version of the Exodus. The account has only been passed down in fragments, but in the preserved sections he remarks not only about the exit from Egypt but also notes that the name of the king at this time was Amenhotep.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the only known Egyptian account from antiquity about the Exodus confirms the name of this ruler. All the information combined points to Amenhotep II as the infamous pharaoh of the Exodus. ☉

### Notes

1. E.g. "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel." (Exodus 14:8).
2. Inscription from the reign of Thutmose III found at the Temple of Armant.
3. Exodus 2:23, 4:19, 7:7; Acts 7:23–30.
4. Ramesses II ruled for 66 years, but he could not have been the pharaoh of the oppression because his successor, Merneptah, encountered the Israelites as the dominant people in Canaan in year five of his reign, meaning the Exodus could not have happened while he was king. Dedumose II, another proposed candidate for the Exodus pharaoh, actually subdued Egypt rather than chase a foreign group fleeing Egypt, and his predecessor, Dedumose I, only reigned for about seven years. Neither do any of the other proposed Exodus pharaohs, such as Thutmose III, Thutmose IV, Akhenaten, etc., fit all the various qualifications.
5. Exodus 12:30–31.
6. Judges 11:26 mentions 300 years, to which we can add the 40 years in the wilderness.
7. Titus Kennedy, "Temple Dedication and Construction Texts of the Ancient Near East with Elapsed Years: Implications for Long Duration Chronologies," *Religions* 15, no. 4 (2024): 408.
8. The exact chronology of ancient Egypt, including the New Kingdom and 18th Dynasty, continues to be researched and debated. For the 18th Dynasty, however, the difference in varying chronologies is only about 20–25 years.
9. Titus Kennedy, "The Land of the SAsw (Nomads) of yhwA at Soleb," *Dotawo: A Journal of Nubian Studies* 6 (2019); Titus Kennedy, "The Bronze Age Destruction of Jericho: Archaeology, and the Book of Joshua," *Religions* 14, no. 6 (2023): 796.
10. Deuteronomy 29:5; Joshua 5:6.
11. William Shea, "Amenhotep II as Pharaoh of the Exodus," *Bible and Spade* 16.2 (2003); Douglas Petrovich, "Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus-Pharaoh," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 17, no. 1 (2006).
12. Exodus 2:2–10.
13. David Hansen, "Moses and Hatshepsut," *Bible and Spade* 16.1 (2003).
14. Manfred Bietak and Irene Forstner-Müller, "The Topography of New Kingdom Avaris and Per-Ramesses," in *Ramesside Studies in Honour of K. A. Kitchen* 2011; Bryant Wood, "New Discoveries at Ramesses," *Bible and Spade* 21.1 (2008); Sławomir Rzepka, et al., "Egyptian Mission Rescue Excavations in Tell el-Retaba. Part 1: New Kingdom Remains," *Egypt and the Levant* 22/23 (2012/2013).
15. Titus Kennedy, "Ipuwer Versus the Exodus Plagues," *Bible and Spade* 35.1 (2022).
16. The Memphis Stele of Amenhotep II.
17. Exodus 14:28–30.
18. See the Amarna Letters that request assistance from Egypt against the Habiru (but troops are never sent).
19. Western Karnak Stele of Amenhotep II.
20. Exodus 12:29–30.
21. The Sphinx Dream Stele.
22. Manetho, *Aegyptiaca*, preserved in Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.228–234. Amenophis is the Greek rendering of the name Amenhotep.

## Closer to Perfect?

### *Advanced IVF & Embryo Screening*

by Bryan Just

**A**s of 2024, about two percent of U.S. births were the result of IVF. An estimated 13–17 million children have been born worldwide using the technology since it was first introduced in 1978. As part of the process, preimplantation genetic testing (PGT) is often used to identify the healthiest embryos for transfer in order to give the greatest chance for a successful birth. This has had the added effect of giving parents some additional control over their children—to choose, for example, a male or female embryo.

Until recently, most PGT was concerned only with serious diseases and conditions. But in 2025, some companies started advertising new, more advanced forms of IVF and genetic screening. With the tagline “Have your best baby,” Nucleus now offers a service called IVF+ that analyzes more than 2,000 “factors,” which it claims “can shape the health and well-being of your future child.”<sup>1</sup> Nucleus calls this “genetic optimization with a human touch,” and the website shows how parents can use the data to compare their embryos and select which ones to transfer. Similarly, Orchid advertises that its Whole Genome Embryo Screening helps clients “have healthy babies” and “mitigate more risks with the world’s most advanced whole genome screening for embryos.”<sup>2</sup>

Noor Siddiqui, the CEO of Orchid, says, “Sex is for fun; Orchid and embryo screening is for babies.” She believes IVF and intensive screening will become the norm for all pregnancies—they will be seen as parents taking maximum care and love for their child. “It becomes about stewardship ... how do I make a responsible choice for my family?”<sup>3</sup> Why would parents have a child that could have pediatric cancer if, through screening, that suffering could be prevented?



### Commodifying Children

There are numerous causes for concern about the promises made by companies such as Nucleus and Orchid. Their stated intentions of helping families have healthy babies and giving prospective parents as much information as possible sound noble, but they are contributing to the commodification of children. Instead of treating each child as a gift to be freely received, they are turning children into consumer products while encouraging prospective parents to think first of themselves and their

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own desires, rather than to accept their children as they are and value them for their own sake. As the Nucleus website says, once the testing process is complete, you can then “choose the best embryo for you.”

Siddiqui’s comment that these technologies simply represent parents showing a “maximum amount of care and love” is insulting. Of course parents want the best for their children. However, the implication is that those parents who choose to conceive naturally, or who are unable or unwilling to shell out thousands of dollars to her company, love their

children less. We should flatly reject the idea that the best way parents can show love for their children is to have them conceived in a lab and screened during their first days of life.

Furthermore, there is evidence that trying to determine a child’s future through genetics might actually be detrimental, both to the child’s mental health as well as to the parent-child relationship. As Emi Nietfeld wrote in *Wired* about so-called “designer babies,” “The kids feel like walking science experiments [and] the parents are disappointed in how their progeny turned out.”<sup>4</sup> These negative effects were being seen even before the advent of the advanced PGT now being advertised.

## A False Premise

Though companies like Nucleus and Orchid offer more comprehensive testing and claim that they help parents have healthier babies, it should be emphasized that they do not offer treatment for any diseases but merely provide parents with data and “choices.”

Parents who purchase their services are not making their child(ren) healthier. When they are looking through a group of embryos, they are ranking children who already exist in the earliest stage of life. They are merely choosing which ones will receive the opportunity to grow and develop and which ones will be frozen or discarded without ever being afforded that chance. It might be that parents who utilize these services will have healthier children than those who do not, but this is not the result of improving babies’ health. The unchosen embryos still exist; they are simply never being given an opportunity to develop. This is eugenics in its most basic form—ranking human life based on fitness (or mere preferences like sex or hair color) and then eliminating the ones deemed inferior or unwanted.

Each of the embryos created in the IVF process represents a distinct, nascent human life. The very wealth of information that advanced IVF offers only reinforces this point. If testing is about sex, eye color, and hair color, along with potential height, weight, and disease profiles, how can we not see these as individual human lives?

## A Return to Barbarity

Siddiqui and those like her who push IVF and genetic testing see it as the future of human childbearing, believing it will usher in a new era of parental choice and reduce disease and illness. These lofty goals, while they sound progressive, in reality harken back to pagan Rome, where the

**The quest for control merely trades one set of anxieties for another, because with choice comes responsibility—and these choices about what kind of children to have were not ones that parents were ever meant to make.**

*paterfamilias*, or father of the family, had the right to determine which children would be allowed to live. If he felt that a child was sickly, or was the wrong sex, or that the family could not afford another child, it was his prerogative to declare that the child should be exposed to the elements and left to die. In a famous Roman letter, Hilarion, writing to his pregnant wife, instructs her that if their baby is a boy to keep it, but if it is a girl to “cast it out.”<sup>5</sup>

Exposing a newborn to die seems barbaric to us today, but prenatal genetic testing effectively allows us to do the same thing; we simply do it before the child is born rather than after. Advanced IVF is a new, technological way to participate in the same practice by allowing parents an expanded range of characteristics to consider when selecting their next child. While testing was once limited to serious illnesses, parents are now being encouraged to make their determination based on calculated potentials for a wider variety of conditions, as well as many more nebulous “heightened risk factors.” They might not endorse the ancient practice of infant exposure, but they are nonetheless picking and choosing which children to welcome into their home and discarding those who do not measure up.

## Two Ploys

To resist the eugenic mindset that lies behind much of advanced genetic testing, it is helpful to identify two of the marketing hooks that companies like Nucleus and Orchid use to draw parents into it. The first is *fear*. On Nucleus’s list of benefits for carrier screening (carrier screening looks at the parents’ genomes to identify genetic disorders they carry and could pass along), the number one reason put forth in favor of screening is to relieve anxiety; the fifth reason is for the peace of mind it can give.

Prospective parents are frequently full of anxiety about how their children will turn out, and so genetic testing is marketed as a way to alleviate fear and anxiety.

There are certainly benefits to understanding one’s genetic risk factors, and there are good reasons why some parents might take advantage of the analyses, such as giving time to prepare for a child with a disability. Testing itself is not the problem, nor is gaining knowledge about one’s children. But fears about having a less-than-perfect child should not drive parental decision-making and should never result in the destruction of embryonic human life.

The second marketing hook is *control*. Given the fears and anxiety prospective parents experience, the service is put forward as a way parents can take greater control over their own reproduction: Do we want a boy with a higher chance of developing diabetes but also a higher IQ, or would we prefer a

girl with a low risk of developing breast cancer but a heightened risk for autism? Or do we prefer her sister, who has a higher risk of both, but will be a few inches taller and have blue eyes like her mother? Advanced IVF purports to put parents in the driver’s seat. They get to pick which embryo is “best for them.”

However, prospective parents should wrestle with the fact that no matter how well they plan or how much technology they use, many aspects of their children’s lives will remain outside of their control. Our genetic code is only one part of who we are. The control promised by genetic screening is an illusion. Even the most advanced testing in the world cannot guarantee any given outcome for a child. Also worth noting is that the quest for control merely trades one set of anxieties for another, because with choice comes responsibility—and these choices about what kind of children to have were not ones that parents were ever meant to make.

## Gifts, Not Products

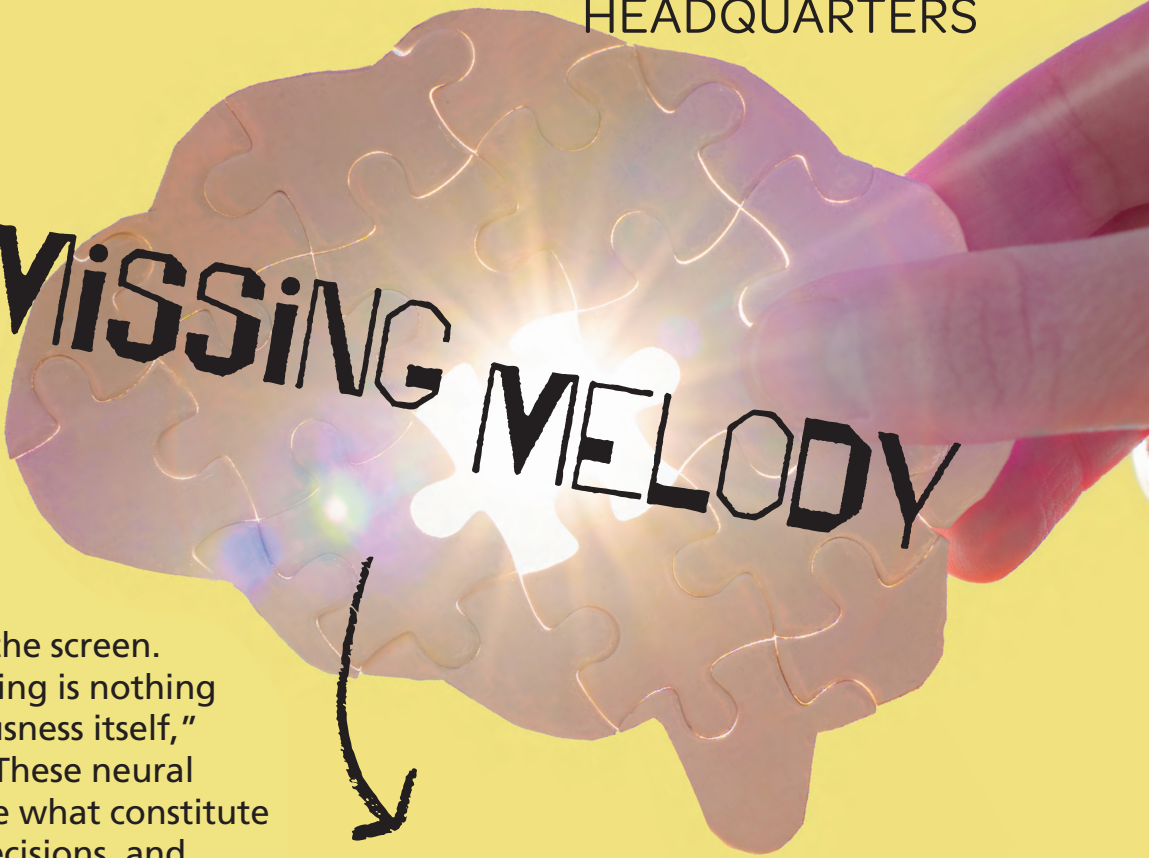
The fears and anxieties of prospective parents are very real. And, it must be acknowledged, the diseases the testing is meant to screen out can be devastating to whole families. But the costs of turning human procreation into a technological process are also destructive. The eugenic mindset that says certain lives are not worthy of life has wreaked havoc throughout history and needs to be rejected. Likewise, the consumer-driven mindset that says parents should have maximum control over their reproduction, to the point of determining which children will be welcomed into the family, is, at base, pure selfishness. It is putting the parents’ desires ahead of the needs of their vulnerable children.

Early Christians were known for not only rejecting abortion and infanticide for themselves but also for saving and adopting children who had been abandoned. Their actions helped to change societal attitudes towards children. Like those early Christians, we too need to avoid seeing children as a reproductive project to be shaped according to our own desires. We need to recover a vision of children as gifts to be freely received. We do not need to plan our reproduction in a lab to show love for our children. We love them by fully accepting them as the gifts that they are. ☺

### Notes

1. MyNucleus.com/IVF (accessed Jan. 2, 2026).
2. OrchidHealth.com (accessed Jan. 5, 2026).
3. “Silicon Valley Wants to Optimize Your Children’s Genes,” *Interesting Times with Ross Douthat* (Aug. 7, 2025).
4. Emi Nietfeld, “Designer Babies Are Teenagers Now—and Some of Them Need Therapy Because of It,” *Wired* (Dec. 11, 2024).
5. Charles Camosy, “We’ve Seen ‘Designer Babies’ Before,” *UnHerd* (Aug. 26, 2025).





# THE MISSING MELODY

In a well-appointed university lecture hall, a neuroscientist confidently projects colorful brain scans onto the screen. “What you’re seeing is nothing less than consciousness itself,” she announces. “These neural firing patterns are what constitute your thoughts, decisions, and feelings.” The audience nods appreciatively at this seemingly self-evident truth of our age—the mind is merely what the brain does; a biological computer is running sophisticated algorithms on electrochemical hardware.

## HOW THE MECHANISTIC MODEL EXPLAINS AWAY THE SYMPHONY OF HUMAN NATURE BY JUAN MERCED

This materialist paradigm has become the default framework through which modern culture views human nature. It undergirds everything from pharmaceutical approaches to mental health to AI research that promises to create digital consciousness. It’s a powerful narrative, one that has produced remarkable technological advances. Yet for all its apparent scientific credibility, it suffers from a profound philosophical blindness—one that impoverishes our understanding of what it means to be human.

### The Mechanistic Reduction

The contemporary model of mind treats human beings as essentially complex machines. In this view, our thoughts, feelings, moral judgments, and

even spiritual experiences are merely the output of neural computations, the deterministic results of genetic programming and environmental inputs. In this model, free will becomes an illusion generated by our brain to make sense of behaviors that were determined by prior causes. Consciousness itself is reduced to an epiphenomenon—a side effect of physical processes that evolved because it somehow conferred survival advantages.

This mechanistic model has reshaped how we think about fundamental human questions. Depression is no longer seen as a complex experience involving meaning and values, but primarily as a “chemical imbalance” to be corrected with pharmaceuticals. Criminal behavior is increasingly framed as the result of neurological abnormalities rather than moral failure. Even love—perhaps our most profound human experience—is reduced to neurochemical reactions evolved to ensure genetic propagation.

The allure of this paradigm is obvious. It offers the promise of technical control—if human problems are merely mechanical malfunctions, then we need only develop the right technical interventions to fix them. It also conveniently eliminates the messy questions of moral responsibility, purpose, and meaning that have vexed humanity throughout history.

**CONSCIOUSNESS.** Consider consciousness—our subjective first person experience of being in the world. Despite decades of intensive research, neuroscience has made remarkably little progress in explaining how physical processes in the brain could possibly give rise to subjective experience. This is what philosopher David Chalmers famously called the “hard problem of consciousness.” We can map neural correlates of conscious states with increasing precision, but this doesn’t explain why there is any inner experience at all. The gap between objective brain processes and subjective experience remains as wide as ever.

**REASON.** Or consider the human capacity for reason. If our cognitive faculties evolved merely for survival value rather than truth-seeking, why should we trust them to accurately represent reality? As philosopher Alvin Plantinga has argued, naturalism seems to undermine itself—if our minds are merely the product of non-rational evolutionary processes optimized for reproductive success rather than truth, then we have no reason to trust the rational arguments for naturalism itself.

**MORALITY.** Most fundamentally, the mechanistic model cannot account for human moral experience. We instinctively recognize moral truths that transcend cultural conditioning. We perceive the inherent dignity and worth of persons. We experience moral obligation as something that makes claims on us which are independent of our desires or cultural programming. These features of moral experience point beyond mere biological adaptations to something transcendent.

## Lost in Translation

But what if this model, for all its scientific sophistication, fundamentally mischaracterizes human nature? What if it mistakes the instrument for the musician, the canvas for the artist, the book for the author? **Consider what is lost when the entirety of the human experience is reduced to mere products of material forces.**



## The Christian Alternative

The Judeo-Christian tradition offers a radically different understanding of human nature, one that better accommodates the fullness of human experience. In this view, we are not merely complex machines but beings created in the image of God, possessing intellect, will, moral agency, and spiritual capacity.

The biblical account doesn’t deny our biological nature—indeed, it affirms our embodiment as essential to our humanity. The human person is understood as an integrated unity of body and soul, a psychosomatic whole. Our brains and bodies are integral to our experience and identity, but they don’t exhaust what we are.

This perspective offers a more coherent account of consciousness, intentionality, reason, and morality. Consciousness isn’t a puzzling byproduct of physical processes but reflects our nature as beings created by a conscious, personal God. Our capacity for reason reflects the rational order of creation and our creation by a rational God. Our moral sense reflects the moral nature of reality itself, grounded in the character of God.

Far from being anti-scientific, this view actually

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provides a more coherent foundation for science itself. If the universe is the product of a rational mind and we are created with minds capable of understanding it, then the remarkable correspondence between mathematical concepts and physical reality makes sense. If our cognitive faculties were designed for truth-seeking rather than merely for survival, then we have reason to trust them in scientific inquiry.

## Experiential Evidence

But is there any evidence for this richer view of human nature beyond religious authority? **Consider several features of human experience that resist mechanistic reduction:**





**INTENTIONALITY.** First, there's the phenomenon of intentionality—the "aboutness" of our thoughts. Physical processes in themselves aren't "about" anything; they simply are. Yet our thoughts and perceptions are inherently representational, pointing beyond themselves to their objects. How can purposeless physical processes generate states that are intrinsically meaningful and extrinsically directed?

**FREE WILL.** Second, consider the problem of free will. We experience ourselves as agents who make genuine choices, not merely as passive observers of determined neural processes. Our entire moral and legal framework presupposes this reality. The mechanistic view must ultimately dismiss this universal human experience as illusion—an intellectually unsatisfying position that few can consistently maintain in practice.

**ABSTRACT REASONING.** Third, there's our capacity for abstract reasoning and grasp of necessary truths. Mathematical and logical truths aren't contingent features of the physical world but are necessary principles that transcend physical reality. How could a purely physical brain, shaped only by evolutionary pressures for survival, grasp truths that transcend the physical and contingent?

**TRANSCENDENCE.** Finally, there's the persistent human longing for transcendence, meaning, and purpose. Across cultures and throughout history, humans have sensed that there is more to reality than the material world, that our lives should amount to something of lasting significance. The mechanistic view must write this off as a quirk of our evolved psychology—yet this universal human intuition stubbornly persists despite aggressive secularization.

## The Perils of Reductionism

The stakes in this debate extend far beyond academic philosophy. When we reduce humans to sophisticated biological machines, we undermine the basis for human dignity and rights. What grounds human equality if we are merely collections of atoms whose value is determined by our capacities? What happens to moral responsibility if our choices are merely the determined outcomes of prior physical causes?

We're already seeing the consequences in our approach to vulnerable human life. Prenatal human beings are increasingly treated as disposable tissue when they fail to meet arbitrary criteria of personhood. The elderly and disabled face growing pressure toward euthanasia when their lives are deemed to lack sufficient quality. Human embryos are created, manipulated, and destroyed for research purposes with minimal ethical restraint.

The mechanistic paradigm also impoverishes our approach to mental health. While the biological dimensions of conditions like depression and anxiety are real and important, treating these conditions as mere brain disorders fails to take into account their existential, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Many people suffer not from disordered brain chemistry but from lives devoid of meaning, purpose, and genuine connection—problems no pill can solve.

## Reclaiming Human Nature

A renewed appreciation for the Judeo-Christian understanding of human nature doesn't require abandoning the insights of modern neuroscience.

Brain science has made valuable contributions to our understanding of how physical processes influence our mental lives. But we must resist the reductionist impulse to claim that these physical processes are all that exist.

What's needed is a more integrative model that acknowledges both our embodied nature and our transcendent capacities. We are neither merely souls nor sophisticated machines, but embodied souls—beings who exist at the intersection of the material and spiritual dimensions of reality.

This fuller vision of human nature has profound implications. It affirms that every human life possesses intrinsic dignity and worth, regardless of capacity or circumstance. It validates our deep intuition that we are moral agents responsible for our choices, not simply the passive products of genetics and environment. And it suggests that our persistent spiritual longings are not pathological delusions but are authentic responses to a reality that transcends the material world.

The mechanistic model of mind represents modernity's attempt to explain human nature without reference to God. But in stripping humanity of its transcendent dimensions, it leaves us with a diminished self-understanding that cannot account for the richness of human experience. As we navigate the ethical challenges of an increasingly technological future, we need a vision of human nature adequate for understanding the full symphony of human experience—not just the mechanical notes, but the profound music of what it means to be created in the image of God. The Judeo-Christian tradition offers us just such a vision. ☉

# Lives on Roulette

WHAT ONE MOTHER WISHES  
SHE'D KNOWN BEFORE SHE USED IVF

by Amanda Witt

**"Hi! What your name?" said an exuberant, curly-headed toddler as I approached her front door.**

**"I'm Mrs. Witt."**

Her face fell. "I want Amanda," she said sadly. "Amanda bringin' us supper 'cause we had a baby."

Her dad, laughing, relieved me of one of the pans I was carrying. "This is Amanda Witt," he explained. "That's her whole name."

The toddler danced ahead of us to the house. Another little girl, about six years old, twisted around her father's legs like a cat. A ten-year-old boy held the door open. He nodded politely and pointed at the couch, where his new baby brother slept in his great-grandma's arms.

Three of these four children were products of in vitro fertilization (IVF).

## THINKING IT THROUGH

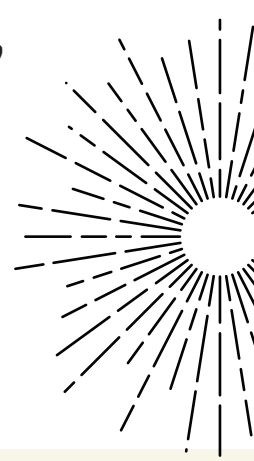
**"Don't get me wrong,"** Ruby says, after her husband and the three older children have departed for sports practice.<sup>1</sup> "I love my kids. I do. But I wish we'd thought things through before we did IVF."

She carefully lowers herself onto a couch, still

sore from her C-section. "After our first son, I had two ectopic pregnancies, so I couldn't ever get pregnant again. We were just chillin' with our one, and then Peter's mom said we should look into IVF, and it turned out that even though it's really expensive, Peter's insurance would cover it. So we did it, even though we didn't really know anything about it. It was sort of taboo back then, I guess. People didn't talk about it."



**"SO WHEN THE DOCTOR SAID I WAS GOOD TO GO, WE JUMPED RIGHT IN. WE NEVER EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT IT, AND WE SHOULD HAVE. EVERYONE SHOULD. SERIOUSLY—PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE TO TAKE A CLASS."**



Ruby is more than willing to talk. She's a woman with a calm demeanor, but she talks about IVF with great urgency.

"We did the consult and everything was great," she says, eyeing her newborn son. "Everything about me is completely healthy, my eggs, everything. It's just that my fallopian tubes had burst. So when the doctor said I was good to go, we jumped right in. We never even thought about it, and we should have. Everyone should. Seriously—people should have to take a class."

She was talking not only about the complicated physical process, but also about the ethical ramifications and difficult decisions.

## THE PHYSICAL PROCESS

**Physically, here's what happens.** After the initial consultation, the woman might be put on birth control pills to regulate her cycle. Then, when the doctor decides it's time to proceed, she begins giving herself hormone injections. These injections cause multiple eggs to mature in her ovaries, rather than just the one egg that usually matures with each menstrual cycle. The number of injections varies, but generally women receive 10–15 injections over the course of 8–12 days in one IVF cycle. (In the US, a cycle is one round of egg retrieval, loosely corresponding to one menstrual cycle.)

About 10 percent of procedures are cancelled after hormone stimulation but before egg retrieval, either because there seems to be inadequate egg production, or because of the onset of ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome.<sup>2</sup> It's often mild, but it can lead to severe abdominal pain, blood clots, kidney failure, and even death. This syndrome affects three to six percent of women who undergo IVF.<sup>3</sup>

Even when all goes well, this phase isn't pleasant. The hormones used to stimulate egg production tend to cause physical discomfort, bloating, and fatigue, as well as mood swings and irritability. None of that's fun for the woman, and her discomfort—combined with the stress of trying to get pregnant at great expense and with a whole team of people staring at her—can put quite a strain on her relationship with her partner.

Then she is directed to give herself a "trigger injection" to prepare the eggs for collection. She fasts for at least six hours, goes to the clinic, and is anesthetized while the eggs are retrieved using a needle. The average number retrieved is 8–15 per cycle.

The eggs are fertilized with sperm and then watched for several days to see if they successfully divide and grow. Sometimes during this phase testing is done to screen for chromosomal disorders, genetic anomalies, even sex preference. Embryos that don't grow, or that don't meet the approval of the doctor or the parents, are discarded.

About five days after egg retrieval, one or more embryos are transferred to the mother's uterus. The remaining embryos are frozen. Generally the woman continues to receive hormones to encourage implantation and to support pregnancy. Nevertheless, IVF often fails. Women with fertility issues often have underlying health problems that aren't corrected—and that may be exacerbated—by the hormonal injections. Age is a factor as well. Women under 40 who undergo six or more IVF cycles have about a 65 percent chance of becoming pregnant. But because IVF is so hard on the body, most fertility specialists recommend women undergo no more than three to four cycles of egg retrieval.<sup>4</sup>

In Ruby's case, after hormonal stimulation the doctor collected thirteen eggs. Those eggs were then fertilized with her husband's sperm, and the resulting embryos were monitored. Six were slow-growing



and were discarded, leaving seven that were considered viable.

One at a time, those embryos have been transferred to Ruby's uterus. It took three tries before her first daughter was born; then it took another two before her second daughter.

"That one took on the first try," Ruby says, nodding at the baby. "And he's perfect. They use the ones they think are healthiest first, but he's perfect. And now we have one embryo left, still frozen. We could end up with five kids."

She turns toward me, her eyes growing round. "But it could have been thirteen."

## "LEFTOVER" BABIES

"I can't get my head around that," she continues. "Thirteen kids! They collected thirteen eggs, and we didn't even think about what that meant. I don't know why we didn't even think about it, but we didn't. And now we have one more left."

"I admire you for following through," I tell her. "I know a woman who adopted three snowflake babies—she carried them all to term.<sup>5</sup> Their parents ..."—I paused, searching for a more tactful word than the one that leapt to mind.

Ruby shrugs and says it. "Yeah, their parents abandoned them. But those are your choices. You can take all the embryos yourself, no matter how many there are. Or you can make them available for adoption, or you can donate them for medical research, or you can discard them. And there's no way I'm going to throw away my babies or let them be experimented on. And I can't even feel right about giving them up for adoption—they're Peter and me, they're our children, we chose to make them. How can I give them away?"

She laughs wryly. "I didn't realize that until our first daughter was born. When I was holding her, it hit me: all of those frozen babies are our children. I don't think it hit Peter as soon as it hit me. I told him, we have to have them all. We can't leave them there, frozen. We can't hand them over to someone else. They're our kids. And he agreed."

## ALTERNATIVES TO IVF

by Amanda Witt

**P**erhaps because IVF can be quite lucrative for fertility specialists, many suggest it first or even present it as the only option. But there are other options.

Some women choose to freeze their unfertilized eggs. IVF practitioners say that freezing eggs gives women more flexibility than freezing embryos (if their partners change, for example). Freezing eggs may also skirt some moral and ethical implications—if, for instance, the eggs eventually are discarded.

But eggs don't freeze as well as embryos do. It usually takes at least 15 frozen eggs to produce a single successful embryo. Producing that many eggs is a stretch for most women, even with hormone injections, thus making multiple rounds of egg retrieval necessary.<sup>1</sup> And when the eggs are thawed and fertilized, multiple embryos are still created—so at that point all the same ethical considerations remain.

NaPro (short for natural procreative technology) is another option. Here, doctors seek to diagnose and treat the root causes of infertility, allowing couples to conceive naturally. It was pioneered by a Catholic physician (the Catholic Church considers IVF morally unacceptable), but there's nothing explicitly religious or ideological about NaPro's methods. It simply looks at each woman as an individual with her own particular health and fertility issues, and it focuses on restoring her body to full health and functionality. IVF, on the other hand, is the proverbial hammer that sees everyone as a nail.

Madeleine Kearns, who now has a daughter thanks to a NaPro specialist, interviewed half a dozen other women who also successfully bore children using this method.<sup>2</sup> Most of them "had been offered IVF but didn't want it," Kearns writes. "Many of them said they felt frustrated by doctors who apparently didn't think it necessary to look into their 'unexplained infertility.'"

One woman had undergone three rounds of IVF and had successfully borne a son, "but when she and her husband began thinking about having another child, she knew she

couldn't bear going through IVF again."

"It was kind of traumatizing," she told Kearns, "to beat your body so hard, and it was a lot of money.... It's just so stressful. You're tied to this schedule, it feels like your body's been hijacked by your doctor and forced into performing in a way that really isn't designed." NaPro, by contrast, was more humane. "NaPro requires an understanding that your body isn't a machine."

Of course, NaPro can't help everyone. It couldn't have helped Ruby, with her history of ectopic pregnancies that destroyed her fallopian tubes. But it can allow a surprisingly high percentage of women to become mothers naturally. The clinic that treated Kearns boasts a success rate of 60–80 percent after 18 months of treatment. NaPro is also far less expensive than IVF, and far easier on the woman's body.

And it avoids the quagmire of moral quandaries inherent to IVF. •

### Notes

1. "Freezing Eggs vs. Freezing Embryos: The Pros and Cons," *One Fertility*.

2. Madeleine Kearns, "What I Went Through to Meet My Daughter," *The Free Press* (Jul. 19, 2025).



## HAUNTED FOR LIFE

**Ruby's in a good situation** to follow through with that last embryo. She has a loving and involved husband who is able to support a big family—though he is retraining in order to increase his earning power. She has the help of family and friends, and she has a network of support at church. She's strong and in good health.

Even so, Ruby worries. "I've had four C-sections," she says, resting a protective hand on her belly. "The first was an emergency C-section after 36 hours of labor, and then the doctors advised against a VBAC [vaginal birth after C-section]. So now I've had four. My ob-gyn doesn't want me to do another because of the scar tissue from the others. But I'm going to do it. It's not ideal, but I can do it. I have to. But thirteen? I couldn't have had thirteen C-sections."

She meets my eyes, her face grim. "And then I'd have felt sad and guilty because my babies were out there waiting, and I couldn't bring them home. I'd have been haunted for the rest of my life."

I'm pretty sure she feels haunted already.

## BABIES IN WAITING

**Ruby's biological clock is ticking**, but most doctors advise waiting two years after a C-section before getting pregnant again. Any number of things could happen during that time.

Ruby could have a health crisis and be unable to carry another child. Peter could lose his job and their insurance coverage, making them unable to afford the remaining procedures. Ruby and Peter could get divorced. In their case it seems unlikely, but because it frequently occurs with IVF, some fertility specialists advise couples to talk to a lawyer before freezing embryos, to spell out what will happen if the marriage ends.

One of them could die. In theory Ruby could still carry that last baby after her husband's death, but if Ruby died, what would Peter do? Would he choose one of the options they've already rejected—throwing out their last baby, handing him over for medical research, or giving him away to strangers? Would Peter remarry and ask his new wife to carry his deceased wife's child? Would he wade into the murky and ethically treacherous waters of paid surrogacy? Or would he punt, leaving their youngest child in frozen storage while he moved on with his life, growing older while his child remained ageless in cryostorage?

Life is unpredictable. The future is always uncertain. This is true for all parents. But with IVF the unpredictability is built into the process. Having babies

stored up for potential use later on is a feature, not a bug.

The only way to eliminate this unpredictability is to fertilize a small number of eggs and implant all the resulting viable embryos immediately. But doing that would reduce the woman's overall shot at having any baby at all. It's better, most decide, to increase their odds of success, even if that also increases the odds that one or more children will be left in suspended animation in a clinic freezer.

And so IVF parents end up gambling with their children's lives—the very lives they were desperate to create in the first place.

No wonder Ruby seems haunted by her last remaining baby.

## PUMP THE BRAKES

**Later, when I ask Ruby if I can share her story**, her face lights up. "I'd love that," she says. "Too many people just rush into this. Every time people ask me about IVF, I tell them to pump the brakes. And that's not what they want to hear."

"Because they want a baby so badly," I say, and Ruby nods.

"People who are desperate for a baby don't want to dive deep and think about the issues involved," she says. "They want to stay superficial just skim along on the surface and end up with a child. But the issues are still there, and they're going to come back to bite you. They don't vanish just because you refuse to think about them ahead of time."

Then she raises an additional issue, one we hadn't discussed before: some studies are now suggesting that children who were frozen as embryos may have health problems later in life.

"I'm researching that now," Ruby says, her face darkening. "There may be nothing I can do, I might just have to really watch my kids for health problems, but it makes sense that being frozen would affect you at a cellular level, and that's concerning. It means the way they were conceived could follow them their whole lives."

Then she pauses. "Don't get me wrong," she says again, looking me in the eye. "I love my children. I do. But I really wish we'd thought this through." ☹

### Notes

1. Names have been changed to protect privacy.
2. Halle Tecco, "What Does a 'Round' or 'Cycle' of IVF Even Mean?," *Medium* (Jan. 5, 2021).
3. "Ovarian Hyperstimulation Syndrome," *MedlinePlus* (Aug. 23, 2023).
4. Erika, "How Many Cycles Should I Plan For?," *Reproductive Resource Center of Greater Kansas City* (accessed Sep. 8, 2025).
5. "Snowflake babies" are children who were adopted as frozen embryos.

# Endowed by Our Creator

## Intelligent Design at America's Founding

by John G. West

**O**n July 4, the United States will celebrate the 250th anniversary of its Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that “all men are created equal” and “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.”

The Declaration's words are majestic and inspiring. What many Americans may not realize is just how much they owe to an intelligent design understanding of the universe. In their proclamation of a Creator, America's Founders drew on a rich philosophical and theological tradition that grounded belief in a Creator in our observations of nature.

*The Senate shall chuse their other Officers, and also a President pro tempore*

### The Ancients

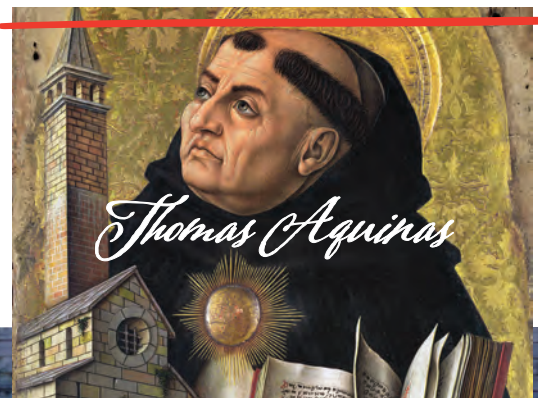
**M**ore than two millennia ago, pagan thinkers such as Cicero already argued that nature supplies evidence of a Creator:

Can any sane person believe that all this array of stars and this vast celestial adornment could have been created out of atoms rushing to and fro fortuitously and at random? Or could any other being devoid of intelligence and reason have created them? Not merely did their creation postulate intelligence, but ... intelligence of a high order.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible taught the same: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands” (Psalm 19:1) and “since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” (Romans 1:20).

### Medieval Thinkers

**E**arly Christian thinkers made similar arguments,<sup>2</sup> as did the Catholic and Protestant Christian thinkers of later eras. Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) argued that when “things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end,” they show that “some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed toward their end; and this being we call God.”<sup>3</sup> Centuries later Protestant Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) wrote that “the elegant structure of the world serv[es] us as a kind of mirror, in which we may behold God, though otherwise invisible.”<sup>4</sup>





“I hold (without appeal to revelation) that when we take a view of the Universe, in its parts general or particular, it is impossible for the human mind not to perceive and feel a conviction of design, consummate skill, and indefinite power in every atom of its composition.”

—Thomas Jefferson

## Early Modern Scientists

The rise of modern science in the 16th and 17th centuries reaffirmed this consensus. Scientists and theologians, Christians and deists alike, thought that the discoveries of science were revealing further evidence of a Creator to whom we owed our lives and capacities.

Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), one of the greatest scientists who ever lived, declared that our “most beautiful” solar system “could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being”<sup>5</sup> and argued that “the best argument” for an omnipotent and omniscient God “is the frame of nature & chiefly the contrivance of the bodies of living creatures.”<sup>6</sup>

English philosopher and cleric Samuel Clarke (1675–1729) was a friend of Newton. In his book *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, Clarke offered a full-throated argument that as natural science advanced, the case for atheism retreated. “The deeper Men inquire into Things, and the more Accurate Observations they make, and the more and greater

Discoveries they find out ... the stronger” the argument grows for God.<sup>7</sup> Clarke wrote that if the ancient physician Galen with his crude knowledge could find evidence of intelligent design in the human body, “what would he have said, if he had known” about the latest discoveries in anatomy and medicine?<sup>8</sup>

John Ray (1627–1705), a pioneering English botanist, wrote *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation*, which underwent multiple editions and claimed,

There is ... no more palpable and convincing argument of the existence of a Deity, than the admirable art and wisdom that discovers itself in the make and constitution, the order and disposition, the ends and uses of all the parts and members of this stately fabrick of heaven and earth.<sup>9</sup>

Physician and poet Richard Blackmore (1654–1729) penned a seven-part poem “to demonstrate the Existence of a God from the Marks of Wisdom, Design, Contrivance, and the Choice of Ends and Means, which appear in the Universe.”<sup>10</sup>



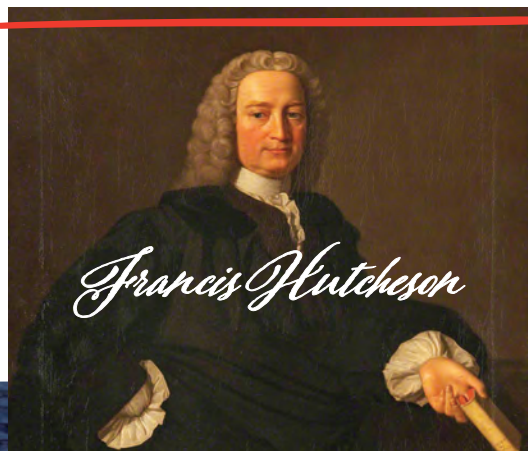
“Is not the supposition unnatural and improbable—that the rational and moral world should be abandoned to the frolicks of chance, or to the ravage of disorder?”

—James Wilson

## Theologians

Leading theologians took a similar view. Calvin argued that “astronomy, medicine, and all the natural sciences” were “designed to illustrate” the proofs of God’s existence.<sup>11</sup> Anglican Bishop Joseph Butler (1692–1752) argued that “to an unprejudiced mind, ten thousand thousand instances of design [in nature], cannot but prove a designer.”<sup>12</sup> French Catholic Archbishop François Fénelon (1651–1715) wrote a book arguing that “All Nature shows the Existence of its Maker.”<sup>13</sup>

The writings of Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746) were influential on a number of America’s Founders. Hutcheson saw the evidence of intelligent causation throughout nature, from “the order, grandeur, regular dispositions and motions, of the visible world” to “the several classes of animals and vegetables [that] display in their whole frame exquisite mechanism, and regular structure, evidencing counsel, art, and contrivance for certain ends” to “the structure of our own nature and its powers.”<sup>14</sup>



## America’s Founders

In line with these ideas, notable signers of the Declaration of Independence such as John Witherspoon, James Wilson, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson all saw evidence for God the Creator in nature.

Witherspoon explained that one way we can know God exists is by “contemplating the universe in all its parts, observing that it contains many irresistible proofs that it could not be eternal, could not be without a cause; that this cause must be intelligent.”<sup>15</sup>

According to James Wilson, God formed man “with wisdom and design,”<sup>16</sup> and

*when we view the inanimate and irrational creation around and above us, and contemplate the beautiful order observed in all its motions and appearances; is not the supposition unnatural and improbable—that the rational and moral world should be abandoned to the frolicks of chance, or to the ravage of disorder?*<sup>17</sup>

In other words, if the “beautiful order” exhibited by inanimate nature reflects God’s intelligent design, how much more so should the rational part of creation (man) be subject to God’s design and care?

Benjamin Franklin created his own private liturgy for use in worshipping God. The section on the adoration of God had him affirming that nature testifies to its Creator:

*Thy Wisdom, thy Power, and thy GOODNESS are every where clearly seen; in the Air*



## Full Circle

Within a few generations of the Declaration, the rise of Darwinian biology challenged the Founders' consensus about the intelligent design of nature.

The good news is that science itself is now pointing back to the reality of intelligent design. As philosopher Stephen Meyer points out in *Return of the God Hypothesis*, by revealing the exquisite fine-tuning of physics, chemistry, and biology for life, science is once again proclaiming convincing evidence of a Creator.<sup>21</sup>

We have returned to the state of affairs of the Founders' own day, when Thomas Jefferson could talk of theists "pointing 'to the heavens above, and to the earth beneath, and to the waters under the earth'" to argue for "a first cause, possessing intelligence and power; power in the production, & intelligence in the design & constant preservation of the system."<sup>22</sup> ☉

and in the Water, in the Heavens and on the Earth; Thou providest for the various winged Fowl, and the innumerable Inhabitants of the Water; Thou givest Cold and Heat, Rain and Sunshine in their Season, and to the Fruits of the Earth Increase.<sup>18</sup>

Franklin's private liturgy included a section where he instructed himself to read selections from the writings of natural philosophers and theologians John Ray, Richard Blackmore, and Archbishop Fénelon.<sup>19</sup>

Thomas Jefferson likewise believed that the discoveries of natural science provided a rational grounding for belief in God as Creator. Writing to John Adams in 1823, Jefferson declared, "I hold (without appeal to revelation) that when we take a view of the Universe, in its parts general or particular, it is impossible for the human mind not to perceive and feel a conviction of design, consummate skill, and indefinite power in every atom of its composition."<sup>20</sup>

What was some of the evidence from nature Jefferson had in mind? He continued:

The movements of the heavenly bodies, so exactly held in their course by the balance of centrifugal and centripetal forces, the structure of our earth itself, with its distribution of lands, waters and atmosphere, animal and vegetable bodies, examined in all their minutest particles, insects mere atoms of life, yet as perfectly organised as man or mammoth, [and] the mineral substances, their generation and uses.

### Notes

1. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, II.xliv.115, trans. H. Rackham (1929), 233.
2. See John G. West, *Stockholm Syndrome Christianity* (2025), 56–58; *Design in the Bible and the Early Church Fathers* (2009); *The Patristic Understanding of Creation: An Anthology of Writings from the Church Fathers on Creation and Design*, eds. William A. Dembski, Wayne J. Downs, and Father Justin B. A. Frederick (2008).
3. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Question 2, Article 3, translated by The Fathers of the English Dominican Province, second and revised edition (1920).
4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter XX, Section 16, translated by Henry Beveridge (1989), 51.
5. Isaac Newton, "General Scholium" from *The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1729), *The Newton Project* (Jun. 2009); also see Vincent J. Torley, "Newton on Intelligent Design," *Uncommon Descent* (Mar. 14, 2013).
6. Isaac Newton, "Draft of the 'Hypothesis Concerning Light and Colors,'" *The Newton Project* (Jun. 2011).
7. Samuel Clark[e], *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, 2nd ed. (1706).
8. Clark[e], *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, 178.
9. John Ray, *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1777).
10. Richard Blackmore, *Creation. A Philosophical Poem. Demonstrating the Existence and Providence of a God. In Seven Books* (1715).
11. Calvin, *Institutes*, 51.
12. Joseph Butler, *Analogy of Religion*, in *The Works of Bishop Butler*, ed. David E. White (2006), 299.
13. François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon, *A Demonstration of the Existence and Attributes of God* (1720).
14. Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy* (1755).
15. John Witherspoon, *An Annotated Edition of Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, edited by Jack Scott (1982), 96.
16. James Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, in *Collected Works of James Wilson*, edited by Kermit L. Hall and Mark David Hall (2007), 1:506.
17. Wilson, *Lectures on Law*, 1:504.
18. Benjamin Franklin, "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion," November 20, 1728, *National Archives: Founders Online*.
19. Franklin, "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion," note 7 and accompanying text.
20. Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, April 11, 1823, *National Archives: Founders Online*.
21. Stephen C. Meyer, *Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries that Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe* (2021).
22. Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, April 8, 1816, *National Archives: Founders Online*.







# Universal Design

## The Multiverse Fails to Eliminate a Creator

— by Hugh Ross —

Virtually all scientists who've studied the features of the universe—on any scale from most immense to most minuscule—would agree with astrophysicist Paul Davies: “the impression of design is overwhelming.”<sup>1</sup> Disagreement arises, however, over whether this exquisite fine-tuning referred to by Davies represents a mere *impression* or, rather, a clear indication of *actual* design. Are we here because our existence was intended?



Scientists who reject the notion of a cosmic Creator often appeal to an idea called the “multiverse.” It has been defined in various ways, but the most popular view is that an infinite diversity of universes must exist, each with physical properties different from all the rest. Over time, by mere chance, at least one of these universes emerged with all the precise characteristics that allow for—and result in—our existence. According to this view, no outside intervention was required to account for us or anything else.

During my years of research and writing about cosmic attributes precisely required for life, especially human life, I began to anticipate the day when an appeal to infinity might arise. Throughout the 1970s and '80s, scientific evidence for cosmic fine-tuning increased at such a rapid rate as to fluster those who resisted belief in a transcendent, personal Creator. It occurred to me that the rising evidence for exacting and pervasive fine-tuning for humanity's existence was becoming so strong that nontheists would see no option other than to credit the multiverse. Within less than two decades, what I anticipated came to pass, but does it really offer the desired escape?

### —What Is Infinity

Infinity is not just a large number. It is a number beyond any number that anyone can conceive. Thus, infinity plus infinity equals infinity. Infinity times infinity equals infinity. Infinity to the infinity power to the infinity power equals infinity. In other words, an appeal to infinity can explain anything one would like it to explain.

Theoretical physicist Paul Steinhardt pointed out that this popular notion of the multiverse allows for all possible outcomes. From the standpoint of reason, if a hypothesis can explain everything, then it really explains nothing. No experiment or observation could verify or falsify it.

### —Multiverse Explains Too Much

To illustrate the emptiness of appealing to the multiverse as a way around the necessity of a Creator, let me offer this simple scenario. In an infinite number of universes, an infinite number of planets could possess all the physical and chemical features of Earth. On this infinite number of Earth-like planets, an infinite number of birch-like tree species could exist, each one shedding thin pieces of white bark. At least one of those trees could shed thin white bark pieces exactly like rectangular sheets of paper. An infinite number of these white bark pieces could fall upon soils containing chemicals that would stain them with ink-like markings.

Over time, as an infinite number of such bark pieces falls on an infinite number of distinct soil samples, at least one set of the bark pieces could possess markings identical to all the paragraphs, equations, photos, diagrams, and tables in the 4,250,000+ research papers published by all the research scientists on Earth. Thus, this scenario could explain the existence of all the scientific research papers supposedly produced by all the world's research scientists. In other words, the multiverse produced these papers!

The same reasoning summoned to suggest that no transcendent power and no divine Mind accounts for the cosmos or for us can also be used to eliminate credit for all human design and all human discovery. However, no rational scientist would ever dare to suggest that human designs and human minds are nonexistent. So, the appeal to a multiverse to explain away divine fine-tuning in nature is philosophically inconsistent and unreasonable.

Reason calls for the use of the same standard when testing the reality of design, whatever or whomever its source. If one accepts human designs as real based on physical evidence, then one must likewise accept the reality of divine designs based on their physical evidence.

## —All Size Scales

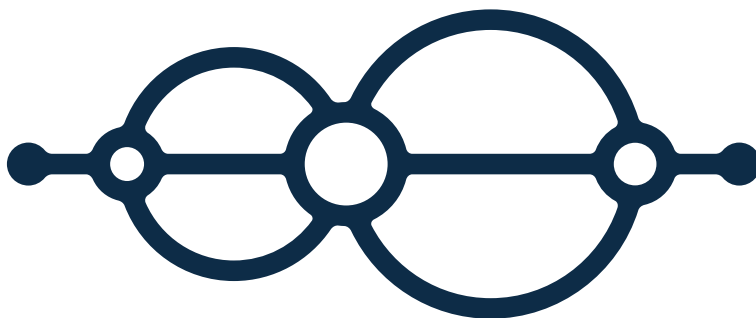
Scientists see overwhelming evidence for purposeful design that makes life, and especially human life, possible on all observable cosmic size scales. Not only does the universe as a whole reveal purposeful design, but every cosmic component does as well. Astronomers observe exquisite designs that make it possible for humans to exist and thrive in the cosmic web, in the superclusters of galaxies, and in the Laniakea supergalaxy cluster in which we humans dwell. They see it in the Virgo cluster of galaxies and in our Local Group of galaxies at the edge of the Virgo cluster. They see more than 200 design features for our existence in the Milky Way Galaxy and in the Local Arm of our galaxy. They see it in the Local Bubble.<sup>2</sup> They see it in the Local Fluff.<sup>3</sup> They see it in our solar system. They see it in the Sun, the Moon, and Earth. They see it in the other seven planets and in the five asteroid/comet belts in the solar system. They see it in Earth's surface environment. Biologists see it in the plants, animals, and microbes. Chemists see it in molecules. Physicists see it in atoms and fundamental particles. Everywhere scientists investigate, at every size scale,

they see overwhelming and pervasive evidence for exquisite fine-tuning

The accumulated quantity of design evidence has proven proportional to researchers' technological capabilities. As scientists' instruments continue to extend and refine our ability to make detections and accurate measurements, evidence for design continually mounts. In many cases, it grows exponentially. This progressive increase in design evidence is occurring at all observable size scales. The more cosmic details astronomers discover, the more design evidence for the benefit of human existence they uncover. Likewise, the more details astronomers discover about galaxies, stars, and planetary systems, the more design evidence they detect. This accumulation of design evidence is also occurring among geologists, paleontologists, ecologists, microbiologists, molecular biologists, and particle physicists as they expand the databases in their respective scientific endeavors.

## —All Time Scales

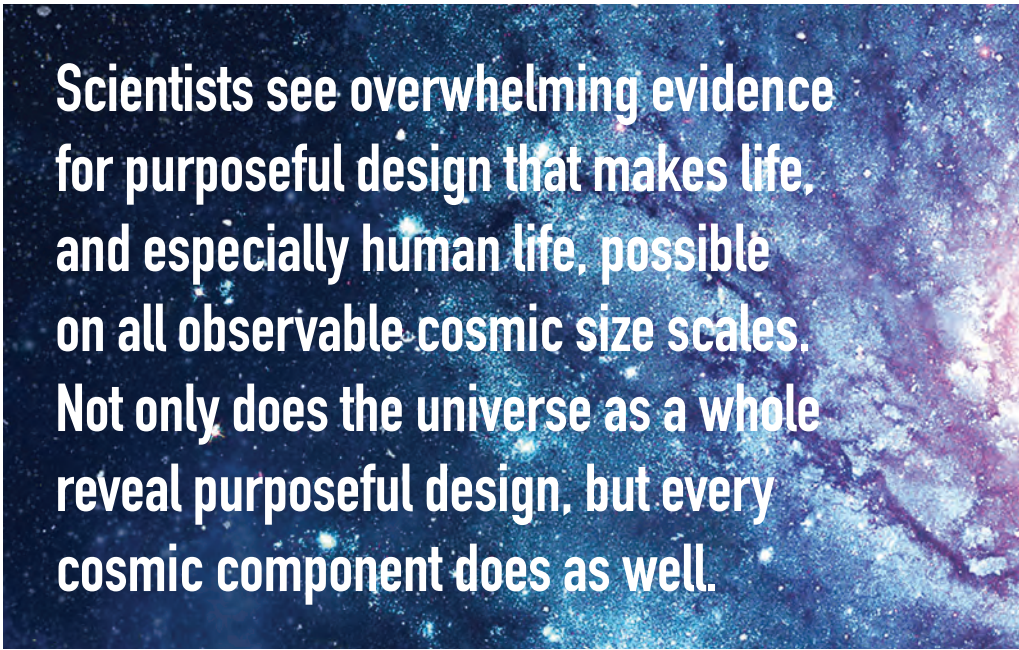
Because light travels at a finite, measurable speed, the more distant the objects astronomers observe, the farther back in time those objects existed. That is, as astronomers look farther and farther



away, they witness the conditions of the universe at earlier and earlier times in cosmic history. They note that through time, the universe has been prepared, step by step, to make possible a place for human beings to exist and thrive. Such detailed and complex preparation for the future needs of a future species of life represents the signature of an intelligent, purposeful, powerful Planner, not the workings of random physical interactions.

In his book *The Cosmic Blueprint*, Paul Davies raised this question: "If new organizational levels just pop into existence for no reason, why do we see such an orderly progression in the universe from featureless origin to rich diversity?"<sup>4</sup> In his book *Disturbing the Universe*, physicist Freeman Dyson





**Scientists see overwhelming evidence for purposeful design that makes life, and especially human life, possible on all observable cosmic size scales. Not only does the universe as a whole reveal purposeful design, but every cosmic component does as well.**

close examination of this coin would be warranted, even after only a dozen “heads” and zero “tails.”

Betting on the multiverse would be like assuming that if an infinite number of ordinary coins were flipped infinitely many times and always came up “heads,” at least one of them would eventually come up “tails.” Even the boldest of gamblers would likely choose to examine,

wrote, “The more I examine the universe ... the more evidence I find that the universe in some sense must have known we were coming.”<sup>5</sup>

## —The Question of Testability

Most scientists and philosophers agree that the multiverse is not a testable hypothesis, due to the soundness of Einstein’s theory of general relativity. According to this theory, the space-time surface of the universe in which physical observers exist cannot overlap the space-time surface of any other possibly existing universe(s). Such an impossibility implies that no matter how many universes may exist, we cannot gain any knowledge about their features. Even if a Causal Agent manufactured an infinite number of universes, humans are capable of discovering meaningful information about only the universe in which they live. On this basis, many or most scientists have begun to acknowledge that any discussion about the multiverse reaches beyond the boundaries of science. Such discussion falls within the realm of speculative metaphysics.

Despite our incapacity to detect other possibly existing universes, at least one practical test can be applied to the plausibility of the atheistic version of the multiverse. It’s a gambler’s test, a coin-flipping experiment. If a thousand consecutive flips of a coin come up “heads” every time, who’d be inclined to bet “tails” on the next flip? Most people would want to examine the coin, realizing that it must have been designed to come up “heads” every time. A

as closely as possible, a sample coin before making a “tails” bet. Even if the coin appeared ordinary, with “heads” on one side and “tails” on the other, the gambler would do well to check the coin’s weight distribution. If this detailed scrutiny revealed that the coin had been tampered with, specially designed to land only “heads” up with every toss, the betting would reasonably end there.

If ongoing research had shown steadily increasing indications that life, particularly human life, requires less fine-tuning and tolerates a wider range of variables for survival than first considered, such results would tend to favor nontheistic models of the universe or multiverse. If, on the other hand, investigators of the only observable universe can examine it in greater detail over hundreds of years and consistently see increasing, exponentially accumulating indications of its precise design for life’s existence and survival, especially for humanity’s needs, what would the most reasonable conclusion be?

A review of all available—and still increasing—research data emphatically favors this conclusion: A purposeful, powerful, and caring Designer initiated and crafted the universe to provide a time and a place for humanity’s thriving. ☉

### Notes

1. Paul Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint: New Discoveries in Nature’s Creative Ability to Order the Universe* (1988): 203.
2. The Local Bubble is a magnetized cavity of exceptionally low-density gas extending 160–640 light-years in all directions from the Sun.
3. The Local Fluff is comprised of small, diffuse interstellar clouds of warm, low-density gas and dust near the Sun. The Local Fluff resides in the much larger Local Bubble.
4. Davies, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, 141.
5. Freeman J. Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (1979): 250.

## Regarding Genius

### *Bioengineers on the Ultimate Engineer*

by Jonathan Witt

**A** favorite talking point of intelligent design critics is that the theory of intelligent design (ID) is a science-stopper: You encounter something mysterious in nature; you shrug and attribute it to God. End of story, end of research, end of science. I have covered the various problems with this shopworn talking point more than once in this space. Here I want to present the latest body of evidence against it: the 2026 book *Ultimate Engineering: An Engineer Investigates the Biomechanics of the Human Body*, by ID proponent Stuart Burgess, an award-winning British inventor, bioengineer, and professor of engineering design. The book has already garnered more than a dozen endorsements, some from distinguished life scientists.

#### Predicting Poor Design: A Poor Prediction

Burgess has held two research fellowships at the University of Cambridge, and his design credits range from a bicycle gear system for three gold-medal-winning Olympic track-cycling teams to a patented invention indispensable to the success of the European Space Agency's largest satellite. He begins his book by noting that Darwinism predicts a living world crowded with standard designs. He then asks, Is that what we find in nature?

His unequivocal answer: not even close. In making the argument, he gives a variety of examples from different creatures but focuses most of the book on various parts and processes in the human body. In chapter after chapter he presents examples of how the latest science reveals that our bodies

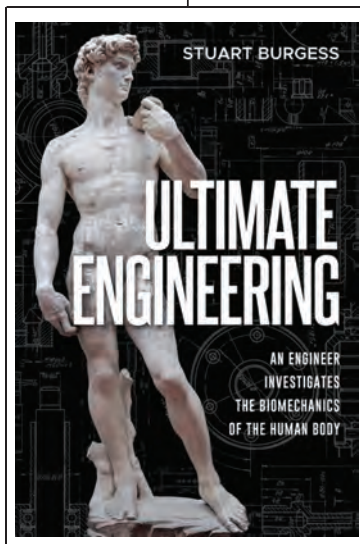
contain biological designs so advanced they are at the limit of the possible. He discusses the foot and ankle; the wrist; the fingers; the spine; and many other elements of the human body.

He also deals realistically with the fact of aging and disease, including genetic disorders, but he notes that such issues often involve degradation over time, whether in the individual organism as it grows old or in a species as its DNA is passed on across numerous generations. As he points out, all engineered systems in the natural world experience wear and tear over time, and none are wholly free of glitches, no matter how brilliantly designed.

What is remarkable is (a) how resistant our genetics have been to degradation over so many generations, thanks to exquisite error-correction systems at the cellular level, and (b) how much mileage and stress biological structures such as our joints can take when used prudently—far more than

any human-designed replacement. No, our bodies are not immune to injury, especially not when forced into activities they weren't designed for (picture two football players colliding at a combined approach speed of 30+ mph). But again, no engineered system is, no matter how marvelous.

One topic Burgess covers might be familiar to you, since it made an appearance in the Fall 2023 issue of *Salvo*. There I described Burgess's important insight into the recurring pentadactyl (five-digit) limb pattern among animals, which led to a peer-reviewed scientific paper. Darwinists have long argued that the repeated pattern indicates common evolutionary descent reproducing a suboptimal pattern. But Burgess showed that the pentadactyl design represents a masterful engineering trade-off between strength and flexibility/dexterity, precisely what





one could expect of a smart designer reusing an optimal design pattern.

## Scientific Fruitfulness

Burgess also turns the tables on the Darwinists by showing how the design framework is proving scientifically fruitful while the modern evolutionary framework is in many cases proving to be the science stopper.

His own career illustrates the point. He has published some two hundred peer-reviewed papers, many of them highlighting insights from masterful biological designs for application to engineering and bioengineering. He has received many design awards for his work, including the top mechanical engineering award in the UK. As he argues in the book, his success has come not despite his ID perspective but because of it. "My intelligent design framework was crucial to my success," he writes. "If I had followed the evolutionary paradigm, I doubt I would have won any of those prizes, because it would have stifled my research."

He then gives multiple examples. His intelligent design perspective, for instance, convinced him that the human foot was likely a highly sophisticated arched design superior to the best prosthetics. He researched the possibility and was proven correct. "I went on to develop an advanced bioinspired

arched robotic foot," he writes. "Had I believed [Darwinists] Nathan Lents and Jeremy DeSilva that the human foot is a poor design, I would have been put off even investigating the human foot and lost that research opportunity."

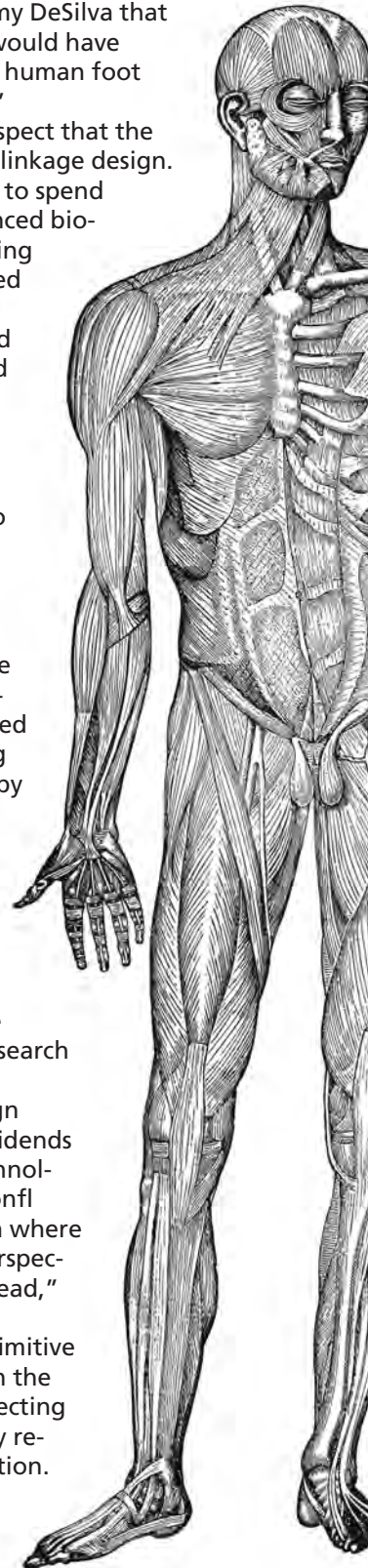
His ID perspective led him to suspect that the human knee featured an advanced linkage design. This also proved correct. "I went on to spend twenty-five years researching advanced bio-inspired knees for robotics, overseeing PhD students in the work and funded by various grants," he says. "If I had believed Lents that the knee is a bad design, I might never have bothered to investigate the knee joint and would have missed this great research opportunity."

Burgess's design perspective also led him to broader insights into biological design. "My design perspective led me to realize that multifunctioning in biological systems, such as the human throat, far from being ill-considered, allows for more compact designs that afford numerous benefits," he notes. "This inspired me to write a review paper showing how engineers would do well to copy

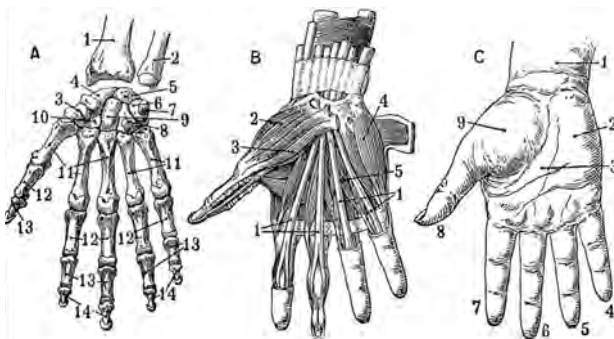
the multifunctioning strategy found throughout biology. If I had listened to Abby Hafer [another Darwinist], who insisted that the human throat is a bad design, I might have missed this important research opportunity."

His intelligent design framework also paid dividends in the field of drone technology. "My work on dragonfly flight is yet another area where my intelligent design perspective stood me in good stead,"

he says. "According to evolutionary theory, dragonflies are relatively primitive creatures, having arrived so early on the scene. However, I studied them expecting to find sophisticated design, and my research benefited from that expectation. My work on dragonflies led to the development of a unique design of a microdrone that was reported in *New Scientist*, the popular international science magazine."



**Burgess makes a compelling case that to ignore the reality of optimal design in nature, and to stubbornly attribute designs in biology to a series of mindless evolutionary accidents, is what has impeded the science of biology and bioengineering.**



## Biomimetics

Burgess makes a compelling case that to ignore the reality of optimal design in nature, and to stubbornly attribute designs in biology to a series of mindless evolutionary accidents, is what has impeded the science of biology and bioengineering.

He is part of a burgeoning field wherein researchers take their knowledge of the many advanced engineering designs in biology and use them to make fresh technological breakthroughs—a field known as biomimetics. True, many of them pay lip service to Darwinism and may truly believe in the theory, but when doing successful biomimetics work, they necessarily adopt as a working method of inquiry the idea that the biological systems under investigation are optimal or near-optimal engineering systems, which they then set out to reverse engineer.

## Separating Fact from Fiction

Burgess acknowledges that the Darwinian mechanism has a real if limited applicability for certain cases of microevolution. (Polar bears descending from brown bears is a case of microevolution.) And, of course, the framework has proven fruitful in generating imaginative stories of how various animals and biological features supposedly arose during evolutionary history, stories that form the basis for a seemingly never-ending stream of published scientific articles. But as Burgess documents, even some evolutionists have conceded that these stories often are little better than those of Rudyard Kipling's beloved but plainly fictional *Just So Stories* for children (e.g., "How the Leopard Got His Spots," "How the Camel Got His Hump").

There are so many scientific papers that give lip service to evolution that it can be difficult to separate the substantive scientific fruit that Darwinism really does yield from what it's wrongly credited with producing. How fruitful is the Darwinian paradigm, really? Philip Skell, a member of the United States's most prestigious science organization, the National Academy of Sciences, investigated that question and published the results in *The Scientist*. His findings are worth quoting at length:

My own research with antibiotics during World War II received no guidance from insights provided by Darwinian evolution. Nor did Alexander Fleming's discovery of bacterial inhibition by penicillin. I recently asked more than 70 eminent researchers if they would have done their work differently if they had thought Darwin's theory was wrong. The responses were all the same: No.

I also examined the outstanding

biodiscoveries of the past century: the discovery of the double helix; the characterization of the ribosome; the mapping of genomes; research on medications and drug reactions; improvements in food production and sanitation; the development of new surgeries; and others. I even queried biologists working in areas where one would expect the Darwinian paradigm to have most benefited research, such as the emergence of resistance to antibiotics and pesticides. Here, as elsewhere, I found that Darwin's theory had provided no discernible guidance, but was brought in, after the breakthroughs, as an interesting narrative gloss.

In the peer-reviewed literature, the word "evolution" often occurs as a sort of coda to academic papers in experimental biology. Is the term integral or superfluous to the substance of these papers? To find out, I substituted for "evolution" some other word—"Buddhism," "Aztec cosmology," or even "creationism." I found that the substitution never touched the paper's core. This did not surprise me. From my conversations with leading researchers it had become clear that modern experimental biology gains its strength from the availability of new instruments and methodologies, not from an immersion in historical biology.<sup>1</sup>

*Ultimate Engineering* quotes Skell on this point, but Burgess spends more of his energies on the positive case for intelligent design. The birth of science itself, he notes, depended on the fathers of the scientific revolution seeing nature as the rational work of a rational Creator, as a created order with underlying laws that they had some hope of discovering. He then elaborates on the present context:

The intelligent design perspective, while distinct from theism, is both encouraged by, and encourages, an openness to theism. And this is good for science, because a theistic perspective—particularly Judeo-Christian theism—anticipates and expects advanced and sophisticated design in nature. This expectation encourages one to search out the purpose of various mysterious biological features rather than throwing up one's hands and assuming bad design.

## Not Alone

While the focus of this article has been on Burgess's new book and his groundbreaking work, he has company. Brian Miller, research coordinator and



senior fellow with Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture, reported in late December on just a few of the exciting scientific breakthroughs guided by what he terms a "comprehensive and actionable theory of biological design."

One such breakthrough undercuts what has long been regarded as an unassailable stronghold of neo-Darwinian theory, microevolution by random mutation. Many of the small-scale changes observed in biology, it turns out, "are better explained within an engineering framework than by the standard evolutionary model," Miller writes, adding that ID researchers "have identified multiple systems that enable organisms to monitor environmental conditions and respond through targeted adjustments." He continues:

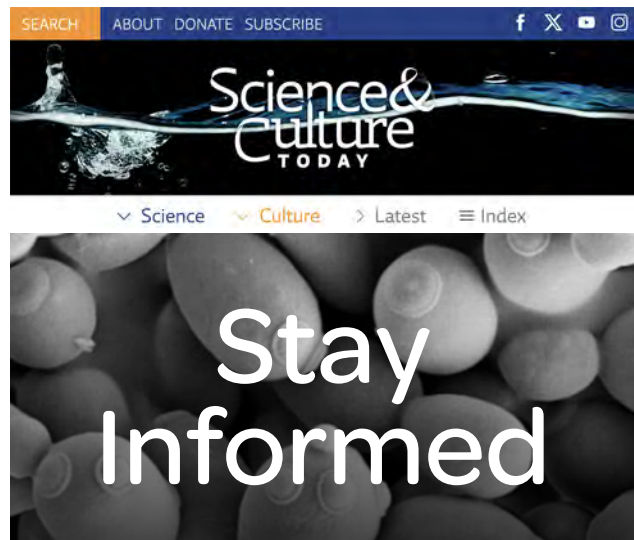
These systems employ features typically associated with engineering, including sensors, control logic, and pre-programmed responses. Even genetic variation appears to exhibit planning and foresight. Mutations are not entirely random; they are often biased toward changes more likely to yield beneficial outcomes. Moreover, the genome's informational architecture supports the segregation and rapid dissemination of advantageous genetic profiles within populations. Taken together, these findings suggest that anatomy, physiology, genome architecture, and genetic variation have been engineered to enable adaptation that is much faster and more effective than would be possible through undirected processes.<sup>2</sup>

Such research isn't restricted to out-and-out ID researchers, Miller is careful to acknowledge, but he says that the work of the ID researchers "is producing deeper insights because [they] are not constrained by assumptions that preclude design-based explanations and because they bring a fuller range of engineering tools and concepts to their analyses. This research is expected to yield multiple publications over the next two years."

Miller's article goes on to list other specific breakthroughs by ID scientists. There isn't space here to even summarize it all. I encourage Operation ID regulars to read the whole thing, to pick up a copy of Burgess's *Ultimate Engineering*, and to stay abreast of the fast-moving developments in the field of intelligent design. ☺

#### Notes

1. Philip Skell, "Why Do We Invoke Darwin?," *The Scientist* (Aug. 28, 2005).
2. Brian Miller, "Year in Review: Demonstrating the Power of the Intelligent Design Framework in Biology," *Science & Culture Today* (Dec. 22, 2025).



by Jonathan Witt

**This is the final Operation ID, but intelligent design research and the efforts to overturn Darwinism and pseudo-scientific materialism continue apace. Discovery Institute's Center for Science & Culture (CSC) provides some great resources for staying abreast of these developments. The simplest way is to become a regular reader of the *Science & Culture Today* news site (formerly *Evolution News & Science Today*). To have top articles from there delivered to your inbox, sign up for the weekly email newsletter *Nota Bene* or the monthly e-missive *Faith and Science Update*.**

Podcast lovers should check out *ID the Future*. For videos related to ID, subscribe to the "Discovery Science" YouTube channel, which features animations and lectures for everyone from youth to college students to moms and dads and scientists. Discovery Institute also offers conferences and talks around the country, the biggest one being the annual Dallas Conference on Science & Faith.

Upper-level college students, graduate students, and professors may wish to apply to the annual all-expense-paid CSC Summer Seminar, taught by top ID researchers, including Michael Behe and Stephen Meyer. *Salvo* senior editor Casey Luskin helps run the seminar. The weeklong event is currently held at a beautiful venue near Colorado Springs.

**To investigate these options, or to watch for announcements of new ID books and films, visit [Discovery.org/id/](http://Discovery.org/id/).**

# Awake at the Last

## *A Scientist Examines Terminal Lucidity*

by Denyse O'Leary

**O**ne of the many mysteries around death is the way people who have been lost for years to dementia or to a ravaging illness can suddenly become quite lucid shortly before dying. Alexander Batthyány, a psychology researcher at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Budapest, offers an example in his 2023 book, *Threshold: Terminal Lucidity and the Border of Life and Death*, of a family who went to see a grandmother, apparently lost to dementia, faithfully every day. Then one day,

At first, we just didn't trust our eyes and ears. But then my grandmother looked at us one by one (all five of us). Her large, beautiful eyes were perfectly clear. The haze of oblivion, of apathy, the "dead gaze" had given way to an expression of limpid vitality. Like bright water. I cannot think of a better image. She who hadn't recognized us for a year, who hadn't even reacted when we visited her, addressed every one of us by name.

As is so common in these situations, she died that night.

### Research Begins

Batthyány first began to research this area because of a similar experience with his own grandmother:

On the one hand, that whole episode was wonderful; on the other, it was heartrending, because I (in fact, I now believe both of us) sensed at the time that this gift of spending time together, if only on the phone, would be transient, and the conversation our last. It was.

When he started soliciting reports for study, he was surprised by the number he received, and he ended up directing an international study. Other scientists want to know more too. In 2009, the first peer-reviewed articles on terminal lucidity, as it came to be called, began to appear in journals.

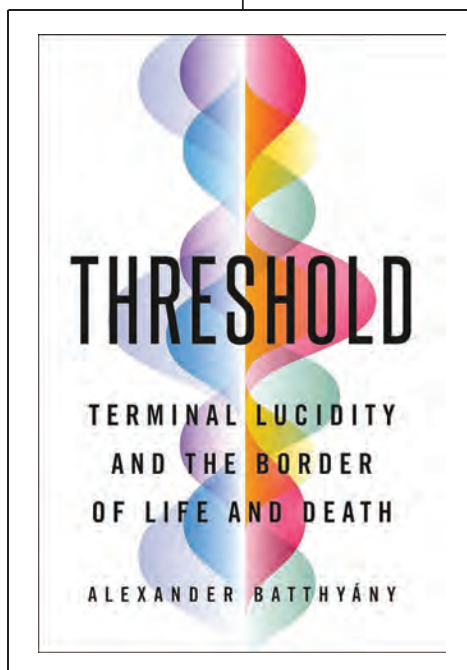
But, as a careful scientist, he wanted to know more.

In his own research, Batthyány found that, while the episodes were brief (ten minutes to a couple of hours), 78 percent of patients showed "clear, coherent, and just about normal verbal communication." But how? The approach of death should (and usually does) result in even more diminished capacities. How can years of dementia suddenly reverse themselves? No physiological explanation is available for the many cases on record.

The terminally lucid person can even be *more* lucid than usual, deepening the mystery. Batthyány writes,

Further analysis of these reports shows a result I hadn't initially anticipated: many indicated that the

patient was aware that he or she had been in a cognitively impaired state before the lucid episode, and that a significant number of







cognitive psychologist Steven Pinker. Pinker sees it all as wishful thinking:

When there is desperation to commune with a loved one, any glimmer of responsiveness can be interpreted as lucidity, exaggerated with each recall and retelling. What Mr. Murray doesn't report is documentation of any objective indicator of intelligence in these patients, such as a neurological battery or a test of verifiable autobiographical details.<sup>1</sup>

Batthyány was taken aback by Pinker's gaslighting and the way he waved away masses of evidence. He responded:

Contrary to Mr. Pinker, grieving relatives aren't the only ones reporting cases of terminal lucidity. In the international study I led, many instances were corroborated by physicians, nurses or hospice staff. Our findings are consistent with a 2024 scoping review compiling dozens of clinical reports, and with Sandy MacLeod's 2009 prospective study. These stories aren't sentimental hogwash; they are clinical observations from structured care environments.

Mr. Pinker invokes brain complexity as a kind of explanatory wildcard. But complexity cuts both ways: The intricate coordination of neural circuits is exactly what widespread cortical and hippocampal atrophy destroys

patients seemed to know that their lucid time window was not going to last. Some even spoke explicitly about their impending death and used the remaining time to bid farewell to their family, friends, and caregivers.

He is not trying to debunk or explain away terminal lucidity so much as understand more about its nature. That new nonmaterialist approach is beginning to make waves.

## An Unlikely Convert

Sociologist Charles Murray is best known for his books, *Losing Ground* (1984), *The Bell Curve* (1994), and *Coming Apart* (2012), all of which are controversial—and definitely secular—books of social analysis. But in 2025, he wrote *Taking Religion Seriously*. There—on the way to becoming a Christian—he noted Batthyány's work:

Many episodes of terminal lucidity occur for people who have not uttered a word or exhibited any recognition of family members for many months or even years, and yet the evidence of lucidity is often incontrovertible, demonstrating the patient's possession of detailed memories, their ability to engage in logical conversation, and the return of personality characteristics. It is difficult to reconcile these facts with the materialist position that consciousness cannot exist independently of brain function.

When Murray aired the topic at the *Wall Street Journal*, he provoked an acid reply from famed

**Batthyány found that, while the episodes were brief, 78 percent of patients showed “clear, coherent, and just about normal verbal communication.” But how?**

in advanced dementia. If these systems are irreversibly degraded, we wouldn't expect terminal lucidity to occur. Yet it does.<sup>2</sup>

The mystery remains. But it is clearly not a mystery that can be resolved by an application of 20th-century materialism. The decline of that approach to life can be seen now even in its boldest assertions. ☹

### Notes

1. Steven Pinker, “Charles Murray's Unscientific Case for the Soul,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Oct. 29, 2025).
2. Alexander Batthyány, “Setting the Terminal-Lucidity Record Straight,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Nov. 5, 2025).

# Art & Soul

## *A Tribute to the Master Playwright*

by Anthony Esolen

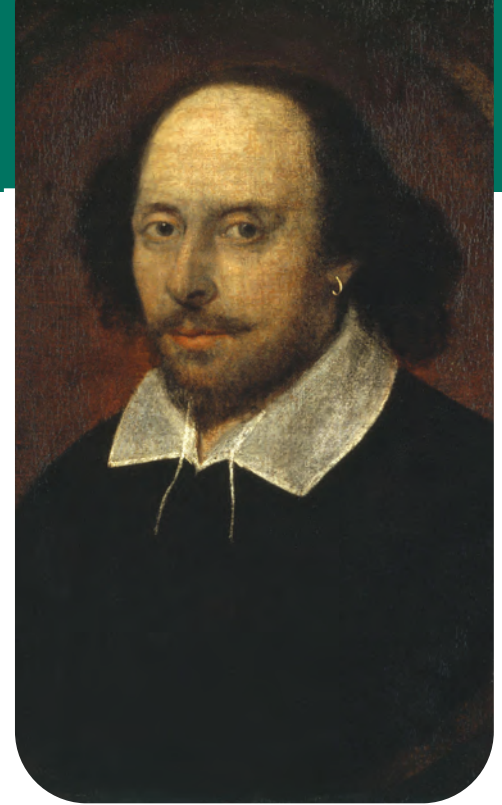
In this, my last article for *Salvo*, I wish to speak about the undisputed king of English drama, Shakespeare. I speak not to self-styled experts, but to all readers of *Salvo*, particularly to teachers, homeschoolers, and young people ill-served by what they have been taught of Shakespeare in schools and colleges.

### Text

I'll begin with the basic consideration, the text. From my nearly 50 years of experience as a student and a professor, I say that the best text, by far, is *The Complete Signet Classic Shakespeare*, edited by Sylvan Barnet and published in 1972. It is pleasant to the eye. The full names of the characters are given in capitals: PROSPERO and MIRANDA, not *Pros.* and *Mir.* It is hard to underestimate how such a simple thing aids the dramatic imagination as you attempt to see the character in action. Difficult words, phrases, and clauses are glossed at the bottom of each page, keyed to line numbers, without any distractions in the text itself.

The pages are large, with double columns, so you have a view of quite a lot of the speech and action at once.

Most illuminating are the general introduction and the introductions to each play by critics of erudition, dramatic sensibility, and poetic understanding—all written *before* our current strains of political dermatitis and obsession. By contrast, I find that if an edition of a classic text is published after 1985, it is more likely than not that the introduction and the notes will be at least inadequate, possibly misleading, even pernicious.



### Procession of Characters from Shakespeare's Plays





Now that you have the text, you must keep in mind that Shakespeare intended his lines to make literal and grammatical sense. Occasionally, because of some fault in the first published texts, a line may be corrupt, but the glosses will alert you to that and provide a likely reading. Otherwise, assume that if you do not grasp the literal meaning, you do not grasp anything at all. Be patient. Do not be like too many actors and directors I have seen, who hope that mugging and shouting and wild stage business will compensate for the failure of anyone on stage or in the seats to understand what the lines are saying. Your patience will be rewarded.

## Drama

Remember that you are not reading a poem or a short story, but a script. Shakespeare did not write as a poet for other poets to read at leisure while they sip their wine and nibble at their crumpets. He was himself not only a writer (and theater manager, company chief, producer, and director, all in one) but an actor, and doubtless one of great power: we believe, for example, that he himself played the part of the Ghost of Hamlet's father in *Hamlet*, a performance upon which the tenor of the tragedy hinges.

Let that same Ghost show what I mean by this alert. How do you play him? Is he prompted by justice or revenge? Does he come from Hell (and of

course he would deny it if he did)? Or is he one of the saved, in Purgatory? What does he want? What is he willing to destroy to accomplish it? When he warns Hamlet, "Nor let thy soul contrive / Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven," is he animated with genuine care for the woman who may well have

**Once you begin to understand how Shakespeare works, how everything in a play is related to everything else, it will be as if you had awakened into another world, which is somehow your own world, but with colors and lights and shadows and music you had only been vaguely aware of before.**

conspired with his brother to murder him? Or is he, by indirection, sowing an evil thought in Hamlet's mind? How shall the actor deliver those lines? When he takes his leave, what does he imply about his state of being? "The glowworm shows the matin to be near," he says, "And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire." The adjective is startling. The pale glow of the firefl is as nothing compared with the fire



of—which place? Why call attention to the fires? Is it sadness? A felt need to spur Hamlet to act? A sinister desire to infect his imagination, to unseat his reason?

## Action

Always try to imagine what the actors are doing. Where are they? Is anyone on the upper level of the stage? If so, why? How are the lines to be delivered? What, if anything, are the silent figures doing while *someone else* is speaking? I have seen the Earl of Northumberland, in the BBC's old production of *Richard II*, undercut the king's self-pitying abdication speech by one idle motion of a finger, applied between his eye and nose. What does Shylock do when Portia says, "The quality of mercy is not strained"? When she utters that line, does she do it oratorically, or with special emphasis directed at that one man, as if to say, "Sir, you have mistaken the matter. Mercy cannot be compelled. You must free yourself of your attachment only to law and the law's demands."

## Subtleties

Though Shakespeare never flattered his audience to court popularity, he did aim to please. You may have heard people say he included bawdy material merely for the unsophisticated "groundlings"—those who could not afford a seat, so they stood or sat in the pit before the stage. Don't believe it. Shakespeare was a genius and could accomplish three or four objectives simultaneously.

The same is true of so-called "comic relief." Do not fall for that dodge. Of course, since he was a master showman, Shakespeare well knew how to vary the mood of a performance from scene to scene, but you must never suppose that the comedy within a tragedy or a romance is not also there for more profound dramatic, moral, intellectual, and even theological purposes. When the Porter with his bad hangover takes his slow way to open the doors to Macbeth's castle, we laugh at his bumbling delay and his wit; but pay attention—all that he says about equivocation and self-deceit applies to Macbeth and his fiend-like queen.

When the drunken Caliban conspires with the butler and the jester to kill Prospero and seize the island, we compare what they are planning to what their social superiors have done in Italy, and to what the villainous Antonio and Sebastian are plotting to do now—Sebastian, to murder his brother the king, just as Antonio betrayed and supplanted his own brother, Prospero.

Comedy can tear away the veil from evil that takes itself so seriously. A drunken Porter can sober up as the day advances, but Macbeth will sup with horrors worse and worse as his life hastens to its deserved destruction.

## Other Worlds

Once you begin to understand how Shakespeare works, how everything in a play is related to everything else, it will be as if you had awakened into another world, which is somehow your own world, but with colors and lights and shadows and music you had only been vaguely aware of before.

So fascinating is such a world, you will want to find similar networks of meaning in other works of literature. You will find them in ancient, medieval, and Renaissance art and literature; in Baroque music; in the novels of such mythmakers and sweeping storytellers as Tolkien, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Dickens, and Fielding. Much of the literature of the last hundred years will seem flat by comparison, like unsalted crackers.

## Theology & Soul

This difference will strike you the more powerfully, because it springs not only from *how* Shakespeare composes, but from what he composes *about*. He is, by far, the most theological of English playwrights and by far the most conversant with Scripture, which he cites and echoes far more frequently than any of his contemporaries.

The Christian faith not only provides him with an angle from which to view his material. It is often itself the constituting power of a play, the soul that brings the work of art into being and life. It is not just that the title *Measure for Measure* echoes the Sermon on the Mount. The whole play is an examination of justice and mercy, of law and redemption from the bonds of that law, of the right ordering of a society under law, and of clemency for those who fall afoul of the law.

Similarly, it is not just that Shakespeare wrote a play, *Cymbeline*, about the legendary British king who happened to be on the throne when Christ was born. The whole play is about a light that is to enter a dark world, about rising from sleep and death.

*King Lear* is set in pagan Britain, before the birth of Christ, but somehow it is also set in a world that is longing for Christ. "O dear father," says the faithful Cordelia, not knowing whom she anticipates, "it is thy business that I go about."

## Wonder

Most of all, be delighted. Fall in love with Bach, and you love him forever; you will find that he always has more to give, more profound feelings you had not suspected, more intricacies of beauty, more insight into the sacred. It is the same with the art of Michelangelo.

It is the same with Shakespeare. Go forth, then, and be prepared for wonder. ☺





# Exploring the Miraculous

*A Conversation with Lee Strobel*

by Bob Perry

**W**hen he was 12 years old, Lee Strobel dreamed that he was making a sandwich in his kitchen when a luminous angel suddenly appeared to him. The angel explained how wonderful and glorious heaven would be. Strobel was still a few years away from becoming the hard-core atheist who would deny God's existence altogether, and he assured the angel that he was going there.

"How do you know?" asked the angel.

"I've tried to be a good kid. I've tried to do what my parents say. I've tried to behave. I've been to church."

"Those things don't matter," the angel replied.

Strobel was flummoxed. He didn't know how to respond. The angel let him suffer for a few minutes before assuring him, "Someday you'll understand."

Sixteen years later, sitting in a Chicago-area movie theater, Strobel heard the Gospel message of grace for the first time. His mind flashed back to the memory of the

dream and the angel whose words he hadn't understood. "Someday" had arrived.

In his book, *The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Supernatural* (now made into a movie), Strobel asks if his experience would qualify as a miracle. He leaves the answer to the reader. Our conversation took us beyond the question of whether miracles really happen and into the anti-miraculous mindset our culture has inculcated into all of us.

**Americans seem to be embarrassed by the idea of the**

**supernatural in general and of miracles in particular. Why do you think that is?**

I think a lot of American Christians want to be respected. So, it's okay if my neighbor knows I'm a Christian. It's okay if he knows I go to church. But I'm not into any of that weird stuff like miracles or demons or angels or crazy stuff like that. We're a little embarrassed by it. We think it's a little wacky. It's a little—what's the word?—"mystical." We get a little uncomfortable with that. We're Americans, doggone it. We want facts, we want data, we want evidence.

I was talking to one well-known theologian about this, and he said, "I could drive down a road, look at the cars in the parking lot of a church, and tell you whether they believe in the miraculous."

I said, "Really?"

He said, "Yes, there is a socioeconomic component to this. The poorer people seem more dependent on God, more open to supernatural intervention in their lives. A lot of successful people think, 'No. I've got the Mercedes. I got the Porsche. So, yes, I need God, but I don't need any miracles in my life.'"

You see that in the movie, because my companion is a guy who grew up in a Pentecostal home where there was an anticipation of miracles. And I grew up as an atheist who didn't believe in miracles. So as we go through the movie, we come to the topic from two completely different perspectives on miracles.

**You talked about Dr. Roger E. Olson and the fact that, whether they recognize it or not, many American Evangelicals have relegated the supernatural and miraculous to the past (biblical**

times) or to other places (mission fields), rather than see them as ever-present possibilities in their lives. He said that when African and Asian students see Western evangelicalism for the first time, their assessment is “total dismay.”

Yes, I guess it’s along the same lines as the idea that we don’t feel like we *need* miracles, whereas people like that do. We’ve got hospitals. We’ve got doctors. Why do we need miracles? We have medical care. They don’t. They’re thinking, “We need miracles because if we get sick, we could die.”

My buddy, Mani Sandoval, who was in the movie with me, grew up in poverty in South Central L.A. He said, “We needed miracles to survive. We needed God’s hand in our lives just to get by.” I didn’t need that. I came from an upper middle-class upbringing. We were comfortable, so the supernatural became a backburner kind of topic for us.

**Do you think the difference could also be related to what Christian Smith called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) in American Christianity—the idea that God is just a psychological helper we use to make us feel good but that he is effectively absent from us? Could our views on the miraculous stem from that?**

Yes, I think that could be part of it. You see some churches that really push that therapeutic perspective, and the Bible is about helping us feel better and helping us be happier. But there’s a lot more to it than that. I think that might lead to kind of back-shelving some of these beliefs in supernatural things. I wrote a book recently called

*Seeing the Supernatural*, where I documented a lot of supernatural things that I think are unmistakable, and I think a lot of people have the same reaction just to that.

**In the film, you mention both the skeptic Michael Shermer and the Christian philosopher Doug Groothuis. Both experienced significant tragedies. Shermer’s girlfriend was paralyzed in a car accident, and Groothuis’s wife Becky suffered with aphasia for years and eventually died. Both men prayed for miracles of healing. Neither one got the miracle they prayed for, but they had completely different responses. They’re both thoughtful, smart guys. What do you think the difference there is?**

I think there’s a difference between surrender and giving up. You know some people, when faced with prayers that don’t seem to be answered, surrender to God. That is to say, “God, you are supernatural; you are sovereign. You see things and know things that I don’t know. You want the best for me ultimately. And I’m going to trust you, even in the midst of not seeing an answer that I want in this situation right now.”

Other people give up—more like, “Yeah, I’m done. You didn’t come through for me. I’m not coming through for you.” It’s kind of a *quid pro quo* thing. That’s what happened with Michael Shermer, who’s become a friend of mine. When there was no answer to the paralysis of this wonderful young woman he had been in love with, he just sort of washed his hands of the Christian faith. Rather than surrender, he chose the giving up route. I think as we look in Scripture, we see that miracles were not automatic in the New Testament either.

I do not believe that miracles are distributed equally around the globe. We tend to see miracles clustering in places where the gospel is just breaking in.

Our theology tells us that God will heal all his people. The question is, “When?” I believe for many, it won’t be until heaven. When you look in the Bible, you see that Jesus didn’t do many miracles in Nazareth. We see in Matthew how the disciples are given the authority to heal, and then seven chapters later, they can’t heal an epileptic boy. We see how Paul had a buddy named Trophimus who got sick. Did Paul heal him? No, Paul went off on a missionary journey! Paul himself didn’t have his thorn in the fles healed. So, it wasn’t automatic for him, then, either.

This struck me as something strange the other day—I thought, “What if God were to grant every prayer for immediate healing, right now, for everyone on the planet who prayed for it?” And I realized we couldn’t do science. Science is based on predictability. There’d be no predictability.

**One of the other topics you talked about was that some Christians believe in the cessation of spiritual gifts and of miracles. Do you see those as separate topics?**



I do. What I find is that there are a lot of people who call themselves cessationists. But when you really get into it with them, they do not deny the possibility that God continues to do miracles. They are skeptical, or don't believe, that he continues a spiritual gift along those lines of healing or whatever. And I understand that. I can see that division, and I can see a debate on that. But I think the evidence from science, from medicine, points toward miracles that are still taking place today. I think God is still in the miracle business. Whether he continues to give a spiritual gift along those lines, that can be debated among Christians, but that's kind of another issue.

**Another thing about miracles is their apologetic value. In his Gospel, John talks about all the things Jesus did “so that [we] may believe” (John 20:31). So miracles should not only be a part of what we believe but are also an apologetic tool that God gives us for that purpose.**

It's interesting. I do not believe that miracles are distributed equally around the globe. We tend to see miracles clustering in places where the gospel is just breaking in. And often, these are places where people are illiterate. You can't just give them a Bible. They can't read it. And yet, they respond to the supernatural power of God. One scholar told me he believes that up to 90 percent of the growth of the church in China is based on people who have themselves been healed or who know someone who's been supernaturally or miraculously healed.

Then we have Mozambique. It fits the four characteristics author Tim Stafford claims are shared by places where there are outbreaks of the supernatural:<sup>1</sup>

1. Most of the people are illiterate.
2. There is no cultural framework for theological concepts like sin and salvation.
3. Medical care is limited.
4. The spirit world is very real to the people.

Candy Gunther Brown, a professor at Indiana University who earned her PhD from Harvard, did a study on prayer in remote areas of Mozambique which showed that something was going on supernaturally in response to prayer. It was then replicated in southern Brazil, another place where the gospel was just breaking in. Her study was published in the *Southern Medical Journal*, a leading peer-reviewed medical journal.<sup>2</sup> So, this is scientific data. It seems to suggest that something amazing is taking place. When you see that the average person who was prayed for in Mozambique had improvements of more than 50 decibels in hearing threshold and a tenfold increase in visual acuity, how else do you explain it?

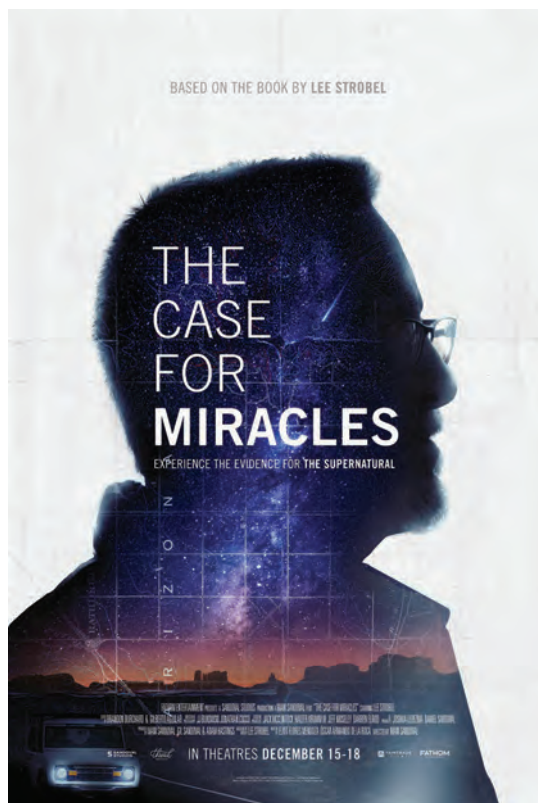
**Do you think it's ironic that we claim to believe in a supernatural Christianity but that we want scientific proof for the miracles we hear about?**

We do tend to be that way, you know. But many people don't need it. My wife didn't need it. My wife heard the gospel, and it registered

BASED ON THE BOOK BY LEE STROBEL

## THE CASE FOR MIRACLES

EXPERIENCE THE EVIDENCE FOR THE SUPERNATURAL



in her heart. She received Christ and her life was transformed. I took two years to look at the scientific evidence for creation and fine-tuning of the universe, and so forth, and especially the evidence of the miracle of the Resurrection before I could bend my knee to Jesus.

So people are different. I think a lot of people have what I call a spiritual sticking point, an objection or a question or a doubt that holds them up in their spiritual journey. And I think a main role of apologetics is just to help people get past that sticking point so they can continue to make progress toward God. ☺

### Notes

1. This definition comes from the chapter in Lee Strobel's book that covers this topic. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Miracles* (2018), Chapter 7.
2. "Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Proximal Intercessory Prayer (STEPP) on Auditory and Visual Impairments in Rural Mozambique," *Southern Medical Journal* (Sep. 2010).



# Self-Helpless

## *Therapy Culture & the Virtue Vacuum*

by Sara Miranda

**W**alk into any bookstore today and you'll be greeted by displays promising to transform your life. With titles like *Manifest Your Best Self* and *Empowering Yourself Through Inner Child Healing*, the self-help industry has ballooned into a multi-billion-dollar enterprise.

Yet for all the therapeutic chatter about personal growth and emotional wellness, something essential seems to be missing from the cultural conversation about human flourishing. Buried beneath layers of psychological jargon and pop philosophy platitudes lies a profound question that modern therapy culture seems incapable of answering: *What, exactly, are we supposed to be growing toward?*

This isn't merely an academic puzzle. The therapeutic mindset has become the water in which we swim, shaping everything from parenting philosophies to corporate leadership training to public policy debates. It promises liberation from shame, trauma, and dysfunction while offering tools for authentic self-expression and emotional health. These aren't inherently bad goals. But in its rush to eliminate suffering and

maximize emotional comfort, modern therapy has evacuated human life of its moral content. The result is a peculiar kind of spiritual anemia: we're encouraged to become our "best selves" without any clear sense of what goodness actually entails.

### Flattened Human Experience

Consider how therapeutic language has colonized moral vocabulary. We no longer speak of sin and virtue, but of "toxic behaviors" and "healthy choices." Character defects are medicalized as psychiatric "personality disorders." Moral failures are reframed as "trauma responses" or "maladaptive coping mechanisms." Evil becomes "hurt people hurting people."

Something profound has been lost. This framework reduces the rich, complex drama of moral life

to mere symptom management. In therapeutic parlance, guilt and shame are almost universally viewed as pathological—unhealthy holdovers from repressive religious upbringings or dysfunctional family systems. The goal is to eliminate them through various forms of self-acceptance and emotional processing.

But this analysis misses a crucial distinction: guilt can be either appropriate or inappropriate, depending on whether it corresponds to actual moral wrongdoing. When someone feels guilty for stealing or lying, that guilt should serve as an internal moral compass pointing toward the need for repentance and restoration. Attempting to "process away" true guilt masks the symptom while ignoring the underlying problem. The same flattening affects our understanding of other moral emotions.

### The Self as Ultimate Authority

Most problematic is therapy culture's elevation of individual authenticity as the highest good. Being "true to yourself" has become the cardinal virtue. This creates a curious paradox. Therapeutic culture promises freedom from external constraints while subjecting people to the tyranny of their own fluctuating emotions and desires. If authenticity means expressing whatever feels true to you in the moment, there's no principled way to distinguish between noble impulses and destructive ones. The therapeutic self becomes an empty vessel—expressive but without direction to that expression, empowered but without purpose. It's growth without a goal, freedom without *telos*. This might explain why rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide continue climbing despite unprecedented access to therapeutic resources. When the self becomes its own final reference point, it inevitably collapses under the weight of that responsibility.



## The Ancient Alternative

The classical and Christian traditions offer a strikingly different approach to human flourishing. Rather than beginning with the self and its immediate experiences, these traditions begin with objective questions about human nature and destiny. What does it mean to be human? What purposes are we designed to fulfill? What kinds of character traits and actions lead to genuine thriving, and which lead to degradation and misery?

The classical virtue tradition, stretching from Aristotle through medieval Christian thinkers to modern philosophers, understood that human flourishing requires the cultivation of specific excellences of character. Courage, justice, temperance, prudence, compassion, humility, integrity—these were not arbitrary cultural constructs but reflections of human nature's deepest needs and highest possibilities.

The Christian tradition added a crucial theological dimension: these virtues aren't merely natural excellences but are reflections of God's own character. Human beings are called to virtue not just because it leads to human flourishing (though it does) but because we're created in the image of a supremely good God. This framework provides a clear vision of what we are meant to grow toward. The goal isn't simply to feel better about ourselves but to become the kind of people we were created to be.

## Recovering Moral Formation

None of this means rejecting everything we have learned about human psychology. The insights of modern psychology about trauma, attachment, cognitive patterns, and emotional regulation contain genuine wisdom that can support moral formation.

But psychology works best when it serves virtue rather than replaces it. Understanding why someone struggles with anger

can inform how he or she might cultivate the virtue of self-control. Recognizing patterns of anxiety can support the development of courage and trust. Processing wounds can remove obstacles to practicing forgiveness. The key is maintaining the proper hierarchy: psychological health serves moral formation, which serves the ultimate goal of being conformed to God's image. When that hierarchy gets inverted—when feeling good becomes the ultimate goal and virtue becomes merely instrumental—the whole project loses its moorings.

This also means recovering a more robust understanding of human nature. Therapeutic culture tends to assume that people are basically good and that problems stem from external factors or biological imbalances. The Christian tradition offers a more complex picture. Human beings are created in God's image and possess genuine dignity and capacity for good. But we're also fallen creatures whose natural inclinations can be disordered. We need not just healing but transformation and to cultivate virtue through discipline, practice, and divine grace.

## The Properly Examined Life

To recover this vision of human excellence requires asking different questions. Instead of "How can I feel better about myself?" we might ask, "What kind of person am I called to become?" Instead of "How can I express my authentic self?" we might ask, "How can I cultivate the virtues that reflect God's character?" It would mean taking seriously the moral dimensions of psychological struggles and recovering practices of moral formation: confession, repentance,

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spiritual disciplines, accountability relationships, and communities committed to mutual moral encouragement.

Most importantly, it would mean recovering a sense of human dignity rooted not in self-acceptance but in divine calling. We were created for goodness itself. We're called to excellence not as a therapeutic technique but as a form of worship.

Therapy culture promises much but delivers little because it has forgotten the most important truth about human nature: our Creator's objective for our lives on this earth is not our happiness but our holiness. The remarkable thing is that when we pursue holiness, happiness often follows as a byproduct. But when we pursue happiness directly, we find neither happiness nor holiness.

In a culture desperately searching for meaning, it's time to rediscover what previous generations knew: the examined life most worth living will be one that is examined in light of those excellences worth pursuing. ☉



# A Fortunate Collapse

*How One Man's Desperate Doubt Project Led to Fearless Faith*

by Terrell Clemmons

**D**evin Squeri froze in his closet, gripped with terror. At age forty-nine and a half, it had suddenly hit him that he was getting older and would eventually die. Thoughts of a dreadful vortex of nothingness stretched out before him, and he was powerless to prevent succumbing to it. Every tick of the clock reinforced the futility of fighting against the inevitable.

It's not that Devin was an atheist. No, he was a long-time church member, a regular usher, in fact, on aisle three at his church's 10:30 service. But he was not the man of steadfast faith he appeared to be. Sometimes he would get emotional during a worship service, but that was not for joy or love for God but from agony. He desperately wanted the peace that was supposed to come with faith, but his soul was wracked with doubts. To all appearances, everyone else was rock solid in their faith. Why was he alone

plagued by relentless doubts?

For 30 years, he had lived in a tenuous relationship with the faith, holding back questions that had begun percolating in adolescence. Is Christianity all a sham? When we die, do we and our loved ones dissolve into the cold, meaningless void? Is all of reality reducible to physical matter and energy? Does God even exist?

## Unasked Questions

Devin saw no way out of this crisis of faith. He'd grown up in

a nominally Catholic family and learned the basics of the New Testament, Bible stories, and catechism. But in practice, it was all long on ritual and short on scriptural teaching. More important, at least for him, it was utterly devoid of reasons to believe any of it was *true*. The Bible was put forth as an authority unto itself and beyond question. When he was in fourth grade, his brother advised him to answer every question with "because God loves you." That "worked" for a while, but it also led him to see religious education as shallow, little more than memorizing platitudes.

By his mid-teens, he started to wonder about basic questions. How can we know that the Bible is true and authoritative in the first place? You can't just say the Bible is true because the Bible claims it's true—even as a teen, he knew that logic didn't work. Whether it was real or only his perception, the taboo on asking hard questions gave way to a kind of unspoken agreement: the church would sign off on his being a member of the flock



in good standing, and in return he wouldn't look too deeply under the covers.

But the unasked questions never went away. His doubts were mostly scientific in nature, starting with the conflict between materialism vs. the biblical worldview, but there was also the conflict between the claims of evolutionary biology and Genesis and the question of whether there existed evidence to support the reliability of the Bible. Devin went on to earn degrees in physics and math, disciplines in which things are quantifiable and measurable, matters in which a certain amount of evidence is required to justify and sustain belief. The assumptions of the secular world said that the Bible had certainly been mythicized and could not be taken seriously. Optimistically, it was a well-meaning collection of fables pushing a moral narrative. Pessimistically, it was a man-made method of control for the masses. What was the truth, and where could it be found?

The seemingly irreconcilable clash of worldviews simmered along the periphery of day-to-day life for years. He sought help in his home church, but to no avail. Then he sought help from four more local churches. None were equipped to engage with his questions. Worse, no one even seemed to think that the questions could be engaged from an intellectual or worldview standpoint. When you ask about the reliability of the Bible, answers that quote Scripture miss

the mark. One pastor counseled him to pray with his wife for 40 days; another suggested he "decide to believe," and still a third said, "You can't understand the mysteries of God." All were well-meaning, but the encounters only reinforced his mounting suspicion that the Christian worldview offered no answers beyond appeals to authority and mystery.

To make matters worse, Devin felt tremendous guilt. On one hand, who was he to question God? But on the other hand, if the whole thing is a sham, it was high time to stop being a dupe and face the bleak truth: life is meaningless and death is the end—but the

thought of that kept him bound in a state of terror.

Standing in his closet on the verge of panic, Devin made a courageous decision. He would face the fear. He was all but certain Christianity was a house of cards poised to collapse under scrutiny, but he would give a hearing to

the reasons for and against it and accept the result.

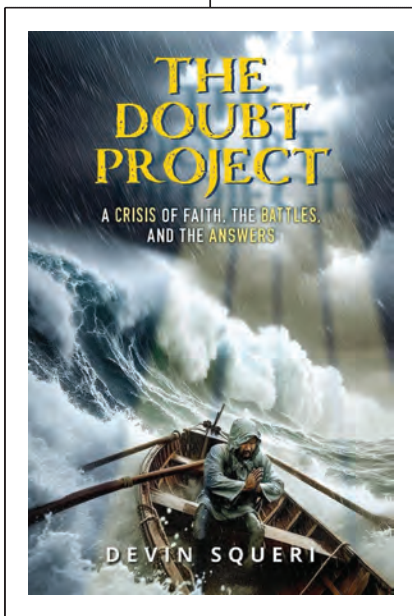
### The Doubt Project

The internet is a mixed blessing—rich in sound apologetics and also rife with confident, self-appointed experts out to deconstruct the faith. He spent the better part of the next two years reading, listening to podcasts, watching videos, and attending gatherings where various views were presented.

After a grueling two-year battle, Devin began to find some clarity. As he systematically worked through his intellectual questions from multiple angles, the lines of evidence he discovered began to have a synergistic effect on the emotional doubt and, eventually, his will.

The first few months were taken up with what he would later call "mental flailing." He would read or hear something new; then in the process of checking it out, a new rabbit trail would branch off in three more directions to the point where he was ricocheting from one resource to another but making no progress in understanding.

One night, in the midst of another spin session, he stumbled upon "proof" that Christianity was a made-up religion because Jesus was a Jewish rehash of the Zoroastrian deity Mithras. The purported similarities were striking: Mithras had been born on December 25 of a virgin surrounded by shepherds. He'd had 12 companions or disciples; had performed miracles, including raising someone from the dead; had been called the Way, the Truth,



and Light, as well as the Good Shepherd; had died as a sacrifice for others and risen after three days.

Devin sat at his computer in a cold sweat. If Jesus is a copycat Mithras, then it was all over. Christianity is false. But instead of succumbing to the panic, he took a breath and decided to research the story. Who was this Mithras? What he found was illuminating. Mithras had *not* been born of a virgin but had emerged from a rock. Mithras did *not* have 12 disciples, but there had been a pictograph of him surrounded by the 12 signs of the zodiac. He had *not* raised anyone from the dead, nor did he sacrifice himself to bring world peace. But he did once fight a bull.

*What? That's how you're tying this together?* Devin was furious, and the moment turned out to be pivotal, as he later reflected in *The Doubt Project: A Crisis of Faith, the Battles, and the Answers*, his first-person account of his journey toward solidified faith:

I was fully prepared for mental anguish as I walked this path, but I was not prepared for ludicrous conspiracy theories given as legitimate objections. I had mistakenly assumed that questions were raised by kindred spirits seeking truth, not from agenda-driven people wielding secularist hammers desperately seeking a nail.

As he ferreted out the story of Mithras, one by one, the purported similarities toppled like lightweight bowling pins. It turned out that there had been some borrowing of details, but it had been the pagans who had appropriated Christian symbols and applied them to Mithras, not the other way around. The part about shepherds, for example, first appeared in Mithraism about 100 years *after* the Gospels had been written.

### Going Methodological

At this point, Devin started applying basic principles of logic to the quest—look at the arguments, look at the evidence, poke for holes in each side, and see which claims hold water. He started writing things down, beginning with his areas of doubt. He identified and examined his own biases. While he conceded that he wanted Christianity to be true, he also recognized that he had uncritically accepted some materialistic premises, such as “Christianity and science are incompatible,” “supernatural events don’t really happen,” and “enlightened, intelligent people are atheists.”

He knew how to work a problem, and as he started organizing his thoughts on paper, the questions became problems to be worked. Complex concepts could be broken down into smaller, digestible parts and worked through piece by piece. As new questions arose, instead of allowing himself to be whipped into another frenzy, he simply added the item to a list and kept working the overall project.

### Three Types of Doubt

Devin writes about three types of doubt: intellectual, emotional, and volitional. As his project bore on, he became aware that he had strains of all three. In many ways the intellectual doubts were the easiest to address, and many were laid to rest as he found satisfying answers to questions through good apologetics resources. The emotional doubt was more complex. For Devin, it stemmed from fear that Christianity was false and the implication that life ends in nothingness. But that fear began to subside as he became more assured intellectually. Volitional doubt is a matter of the will—a situation in which one does not want Christianity to be true. Often it stems from a desire, conscious or unconscious, to preserve a lifestyle

contrary to the moral demands of the faith, but in Devin’s case, it came from a different place:

In a sneaky twist, it was my ego and not a lifestyle choice that was the root of my volitional doubt. Being the master of my domain and in full control of my life was preferable to having to submit to God. Understanding the magnitude of God’s work, such as in things like the fine-tuning of the universe, helped me realize God’s majesty.

The fine-tuning argument puts forth the precisely calibrated laws of chemistry and physics as evidence for an intelligent designer. For a math and science geek like Devin, the data can be jaw-dropping.

### Gaining Heaven

After what he calls “a grueling two-year battle,” Devin began to find some clarity. As he systematically worked through his intellectual questions from multiple angles, the lines of evidence he discovered began to have a synergistic effect on the emotional doubt and, eventually, his will.

But the collapse was nearly all-consuming. He neglected the software company he’d founded in his twenties, and it eventually folded. He also lost some relationships, but he credits his wife Paige with faithfully shouldering immense burdens while he hacked his way through his personal existential jungle. While he still mourns the loss of his company, he says the spiritual collapse was the best thing that ever happened to him: “Without it, I would have continued in a lukewarm, distant relationship with God, never confronting the questions that kept me at arm’s length and frankly, never truly believing.... It’s worth losing the riches of the world to gain the kingdom of heaven.” ☉





# Stayin' Alive?

## A Review of *Why Religion Went Obsolete: The Demise of Traditional Faith in America* by Christian Smith

by Joshua Pauling

**P**erhaps you've noticed the vibe shift over the past few years surrounding Christianity. Some well-known intellectuals and celebrities have joined the historic Christian faith. And the steady trickle of public conversions is mirrored in a growing undercurrent of young people searching for meaning in the traditional religions their parents eschewed. Some have called it a quiet revival, others, a surprising rebirth of belief in God.

But how do these welcome trends relate to the larger and longer trends of religious decline? Enter Christian Smith, a legend in the world of religious studies and social science, to clear the fog. Smith is best known for coining the term "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" to describe the religious beliefs of many Americans in the early 2000s. *Why Religion Went Obsolete* offers similar depths of insight and turns of phrase.

### Religion Obsolete?

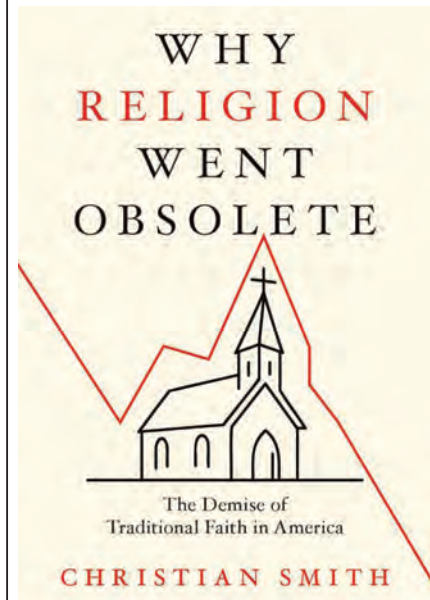
Smith provides clear definition of both terms. By *religion*, he is referring to "religious groups that have existed for multiple generations; that have established practices, doctrines, organizational structures, and cultures that are solidified in authoritative texts; and that would not be considered fringe, or 'alternative' by the mainstream population." And when something is *obsolete*, it's not necessarily that it no longer works; it's that it no longer serves the role it once did because of innovations and cultural changes. For example, vinyl records and movie genres like Westerns still "work," but there is a subjective feel of obsolescence in both.

Religion faces a similar fate. Family structures, economic conditions, moral intuitions, and technological structures have changed in such a way as to make religion seem a quaint relic that no longer serves the central purpose it once did in many people's lives:

Religion became a species struggling mostly unsuccessfully to reproduce itself in a profoundly altered ecosystem featuring scarce resources and fierce competitors. Young people were coming of age in the face of new outlooks and opportunities for meeting their functional and existential needs. Religion's title to whatever piece of life's goods that it has once "owned" was disappearing. That spelled its obsolescence.

Smith puts this change in the late 20th century, noting how the cultural patterns were already in place—and once they start, they are hard to reverse.

He goes on to present meticulous studies and expert commentary. There are gems



throughout. I found "Religious Self-Destructions" especially helpful because it is tempting to point at cultural forces outside the church and avoid self-reflection. To be sure, self-reflection can go too far, but there are demonstrable areas where the church didn't help its own cause and further contributed to religion's decline through "a series of self-inflicted wounds": scandals, mission drift, and the weaknesses of "me and God" spirituality, to cite a few examples.

### Stick to the Permanent Things

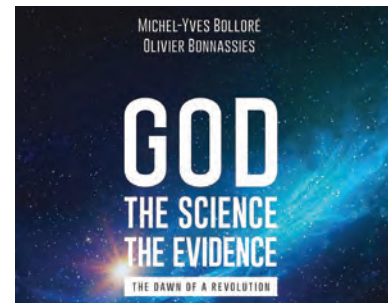
Anyone who tackles this book will end up with a much deeper understanding of the nuanced and complicated—even paradoxical—role of religion today and will find help regarding how better to meet our moment with what will never be obsolete: truth that challenges cultural conceptions, goodness that is intriguing and stable, and beauty that awakens the soul. For religion to survive and thrive it must stick to the permanent things and transcendental mysteries.

Because when we try to make it palatable or trendy, when we try to dress it up to fit the culture or please people, we are ensuring our own obsolescence. ☺

## God, the Science, the Evidence: The Dawn of a Revolution by Michel-Yves Bolloré & Olivier Bonnassies

A century ago, elite consensus held that science had rendered belief in God irrational. No more, say these French scientists. This compendium presents a sweeping array of evidence from cosmology to biology to Jewish history to

morality and conscience showing how “reason has come full circle,” “materialism is an irrational belief,” and “science is now God’s ally.” It’s quite accessible for the lay reader, though slightly marred by a handful of unnecessary nods to Darwinism.



## False Messiah: Darwinism as the God That Failed by Neil Thomas

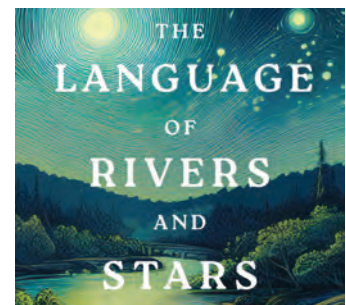
In *Taking Leave of Darwin* (2021), Thomas, a long-time agnostic who specializes in logic and rhetoric, weighed the works of the pro- and contra-Darwin factions and concluded that intelligent design offers the more reasonable explanation for life and its diversity. *False Messiah*

follows up by examining from a cultural and sociological perspective how the Darwin story nonetheless prevailed. The title is an allusion to failed Enlightenment hopes for an all-encompassing materialist theory of everything—a “project [that] has been forced into a reluctant retreat.”

## The Language of Rivers & Stars: How Nature Speaks of the Glories of God by Seth Lewis

Humanity alone marvels at the wonders of the natural world, which speaks a language “more lovely than a feeling.” Seth Lewis says this is because Creation has “real meaning, direction, and intention. It is telling us truth we really need to

know.” Part devotional meditation and part guidebook through Creation, this little gem will inspire you to ponder aspects of our world from angles you may not have considered before. Ideally, it will help you look *through* nature and better know her Creator.



## Hide Your Children: Exposing the Marxists Behind the Attack on America's Kids by Liz Wheeler

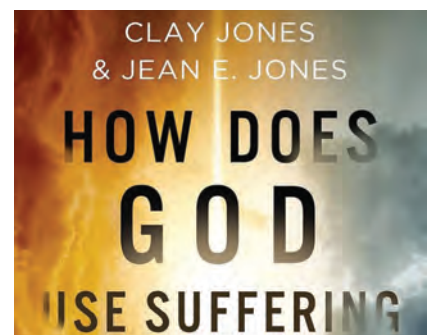
For nearly a century, the Left has been working to infiltrate, subvert, and reengineer America’s institutions—and they are now destroying our children. *Hide Your Children* is a “red pill” primer on this stealth war for people of conscience willing to fight this good

fight. Part One is heavy: the new Marxists are not well-meaning opponents with whom we share bedrock principles; they will more likely escalate the conflict than retreat. Part Two charts a way back to our Constitutional moral, spiritual, and legal heritage of ordered liberty.

## How Does God Use Suffering for Our Good?: Living with Hope While Making Sense of Life by Clay & Jean E. Jones

Suffering is not accidental to the Christian life; it is integral. The Scriptures provide counsel on how not only to endure difficulty but to *overcome* through it. When we have a robust understanding of the glory that awaits us, say the Joneses, we can rejoice

in what God is accomplishing and “overwhelmingly conquer.” Historically, it has been comparatively easy to be a Christian in America, but that is changing. This book will help you cultivate a more full-orbed theology of suffering *for good*.







### Life Worth Living: Averting the Canadian Euthanasia Crisis

Canada legalized euthanasia in 2016, and an estimated 90,000 Canadians have since died with physician assistance. This film examines how a society once known for its peaceable politeness has rapidly capitulated to cold, state-sanctioned killing. Values

such as “autonomy” and “individualism” have played a role, but the testimonies of surviving loved ones and advocates for life-affirming alternatives also reveal a bureaucracy increasingly primed to prescribe death as a medical treatment for illness and infirmity

### The Remnant: The Last Christians of Denmark

Filmmaker Matt Eng profiles a small group of Christians living intentionally faithful lives in one of the most secular regions in the world. These are not cult members but are simply Millennial Christians who take the faith seriously. One family lives on a farm.

Another member is a work-from-home professional. One couple even relocated from Iceland to protect their children from secular indoctrination. This film will inspire you to seek out and cultivate intentionally Christian community wherever you can. Available free on YouTube.



### Hiding in Plain Sight: America's Trafficking Epidemic

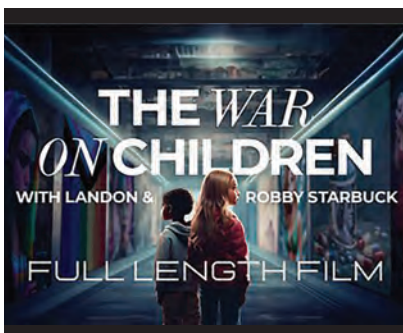
In 2023, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children received more than 36 million reports of suspected exploitation. Tactics include fake social media profiles, “Romeo pimps” posing as boyfriends, and AI-modified or nudified

photos being sold online or used for sextortion. Many predators get their start in porn and degenerate from there. This is hard-hitting and filled with urgent information for parents and adolescents. Available free at DailyWire.com.

### Truth Under Fire: The Framing of Charlie Kirk

Charlie Kirk, 18-year-old founder of Turning Point USA in 2012, used politics as an on-ramp to talking about Jesus. He told people to get married and follow Jesus. He deliberately went into settings tooled to make students afraid to speak against reigning

ideologies, and his logic consistently prevailed over opponents until one of them silenced him. This Epoch TV film reflects on his mission and the information warfare and media malfeasance that framed him as a Fascist and Nazi against all evidence to the contrary.



### The War on Children

There is an attempted cultural revolution underway that operates both in the open and in the shadows, says Robby Starbuck. It aims to destroy the U.S., and our children are the primary point of attack. This film examines the all-out assault being waged through corporations,

finance, advertising, government, Big Tech, social media, and more. Though made just before the 2025 “vibe shift,” this film nonetheless exposes how the corrupting influences run deep and will not give up without a fight. This is important viewing for every parent and conscientious citizen.



# The Good Gift

## *The Truth & Beauty of Creation*

by James M. Kushiner

**S**alvo was created 20 years ago, largely to publish evidence against the great origin myth of the modern age, whose core tenet holds that in the beginning there was nothing—and that nothing (and no One!) made the heavens and the earth: it all just happened by chance.

To counter this quasi-religious faith, which is based in materialism and includes total adherence to Darwinism, a school of Intelligent Design theorists coalesced in the 1990s. ID posits that an unbiased study of the cosmos and the life it holds reveals intricate complexities and fine-tuning of conditions necessary for life that argue against any of it coming into existence as the result of chance.

### Exceedingly Good

This disagreement between theists and materialists is about observable physical realities. But ID points to something beyond matter as well: Mind. Mind is something we experience every day: the personal, conscious—dare we say, spiritual—“self.” Moreover, the world is more than a physical artifact designed by a cosmic Mind. William A. Dembski, one of the pioneers of ID, ended his article “Signs of Intelligence: A Primer on the Discernment of Intelligent Design” with this claim:

The world is a mirror representing the divine life.  
The mechanical philosophy

was ever blind to this fact. Intelligent design, on the other hand, readily embraces the sacramental nature of physical reality. Indeed, intelligent design is just the Logos theology of John’s Gospel restated in the idiom of information theory.

It’s Personal. In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*), “and the Word was God.... All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1–3). *Logos* means more than a mere word; it is reasoning itself, purposeful communication.

When Creation was completed, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” In both the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old Testament, the words for very are best rendered “exceedingly,” while the word for good also means “beautiful,” “delightful.” Creation didn’t just “work” like a functional machine—it was also incredibly wonderful and beautiful, planned and executed for a purpose. To assert that neither

Mind nor Wisdom has anything to do with our world is to chalk it up to blind chance. But the opposite of Wisdom is *foolishness*, which has long been attributed to those who say, “There is no God.”

ID research continues to refute the claims of Darwinism and its devotees. We hope that the cumulative weight of evidence will eventually bury Darwinism for good.

### Discoverable Excellencies

Perhaps the tide is turning away from materialism toward faith. Today, many young people are investigating traditional Christian beliefs and practices and joining biblically minded churches in encouraging numbers. They are seeking, in the words of Saint Paul, whatever is “true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable,” everything that is “excellent and worthy of praise.”

Paul knew that whatever is excellent is discoverable—knowable and not a matter of personal preference or determined by subjective “values.” Beauty is there to be discovered. That which is worthy of praise is part of the real and fixed moral universe. It will endure because it is God’s creation, brought into being by his Word, which will never pass away.

You, dear reader, are here for a reason. Your life is a gift because there is a Life-Giver. Be confident, in both word and deed, all that is good, true, and beautiful. These will endure. For in the end, as Scripture says, “The mouths of liars will be stopped.”

Thank you for joining us on this journey. Carry on! ☺

—I am grateful to those who have given Salvo their time and talent, especially Terrell Clemmons, Jerry Janquart, Anita Kuhn, cofounder Richard A. Moselle, Bobby Maddex, Casey Luskin, Thomas Buchanan, Bob Perry, Amanda Witt, longtime contributors Nicole King, Denyse O’Leary, Hugh Ross, Jonathan Witt, and so many others.



THE GAME  
EVERYONE  
IS TALKING  
ABOUT!

C. Darwin's  
Game of

**LIFE**

FAMILY  
FUN FOR  
ALL  
AGES!

# WILL YOU SURVIVE IT?

Take turns rolling the 12 dodecahedron dice  
to accomplish increasingly difficult combinations.

**Can you get all twelve numbers to turn up in one roll?**

**CONGRATULATIONS! YOUR ADVENTURE BEGINS!**



**BANG!** LIGHTNING  
STRIKES THE POND!



WHAT ARE THE  
ODDS!? **YOU'VE  
REPLICATED  
YOURSELF!**



YOU'RE OUT OF THE  
**pRIMORDIAL SOUp!**



YOU'VE GOT A NEW  
POWER! **TIME TO  
LEG IT!**



**SIMIAN SUCCESS!**  
NOW THINGS WILL  
REALLY GET HAIRY!



**YOUR MONKEY'S  
GONE  
NEANDERTHAL!**  
BUT DO YOU HAVE  
THE TOOLS TO  
REACH THE NEXT  
LEVEL?

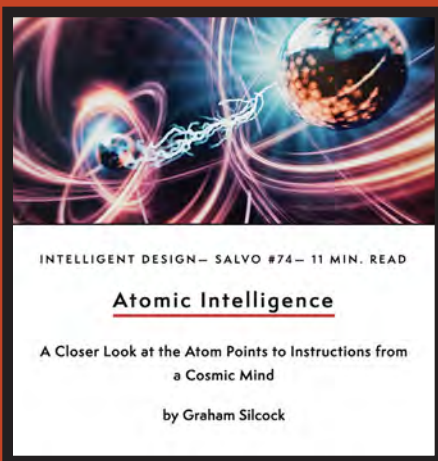
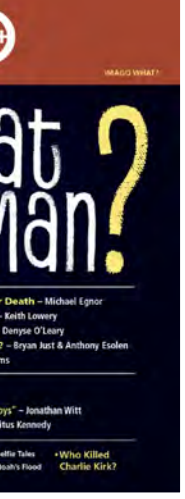


**YOU'VE REACHED  
YOUR FINAL FORM!**  
DARWIN HIMSELF!



YOU BOARD THE H.M.S.  
BEAGLE A HERO AND  
WIN THE GAME! **ON TO  
ENGLAND TO RETIRE IN  
STYLE IN YOUR VICTORIAN  
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