

FIG Leaves

Volume 10 Issue 2

February 2001

February Meeting

Jerry Reiter will speak to the Free Inquiry Group on February 27th, at 7:00, at the Vernon Manor Hotel. The topic will be "Real Live Murder Mystery Inside the Far Right" about his book titled *Live from the Gates of Hell*, which is reviewed by Tom Flynn below.

Don't miss Jerry's March 1st speech for U.C. Skeptics and FIG about "Religion and Sexual Politics." The timely discussion of the new Bush Administration's roles in handling these key areas will be from 6 to 7:30 p.m., in room 821 B Rieveschel (attached to Brody Tower). There will be a DINNER and Talk immediately after the March 1st speech at 8 p.m. at Lenhardt's (151 W McMillan - inexpensive and good - free parking and an easy walk from campus). We will discuss "The Great & Exciting Future of Humanism" including what humanists and skeptics can do with a little imagination. In anticipation of Jerry's appearance, we have the following review of his October presentation at Princeton University:

"Princeton University Students Moved by Humanist Speaker" written by Jeff Wolf, co-founder of Common Sense, Princeton's secular student group. On October 19, Jerry Reiter came to Princeton to speak about his harrowing experiences inside the violent anti-abortion movement. Jerry's visit to Princeton was a surprising and enthusiastic success. Allow me to explain.

We've had some good speakers come to Princeton since we began our Campus Freethought group last year, but none were like Jerry. One reason for this is that Jerry did not deliver a lecture to his audience; he was a "tale swapper," that is, one heck of a storyteller. It's a Herculean task to

(Continued on page 2)

True Life Murder Mystery Inside the Far Right

by Tom Flynn

Live From the Gates of Hell: An Insider's Look at the Antiabortion Underground, by Jerry Reiter (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2000). ISBN 1-57392-840-2. 264 pp. Cloth \$26.

This is a page-turning "true crime" thriller: former broadcast news reporter Jerry Reiter helped prevent a potential mass murder plot to disrupt a national pro-choice gathering in Pensacola, Florida. It's also a vivid first-person history of the radical antiabortion movement during the years in which abortion doctors David Gunn, John Britton, and Barnett Slepian and several others were assassinated.

Reiter experienced much of that history first-hand. Covering the Pensacola, Florida, trial of Gunn's killer, Michael Griffin, Reiter penetrated the anti-abortion underground because prior to his hiring as a reporter, he himself had been a Christian right activist. He was one of the first

(Continued on page 2)

Inside

Rationally Speaking

Massimo Pigliucci Page 3

January Meeting Review

Page 4

Charles Darwin

A Poem Page 5

FIG Leaflets

Page 6

Sexual Freedom

Sex and God: Is Religion

Twisted? Page 7

The Scalpel and the Butterfly: the war between animal research and animal protection

Book Review Page 9

Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters

Book Review Page 10

Membership Renewal Form Renew NOW if you haven't already!

Page 11

Events

February Meeting

Jerry Reiter

Real Life Murder Mystery Inside
the Far Right

Tuesday, February 27, 7:00 PM

At the Vernon Manor Hotel,

Continental A Room,

to the right of the lobby,

400 Oak Street, Cincinnati

March Potluck Dinner

Tuesday, March 13, at 6:30 PM,

Wilma Mankiller

First Female Chief of the

Cherokee Nation

Monday, March 19, 2000,

7:30 PM

Women's City Club (co-sponsored

by FIG), Plum Street Temple

See Helen Kagin or Martha

Ferguson for tickets.

(Continued from page 1)

keep college students awake during any talk, let alone one that happens at 8 PM during mid-term week. But Jerry did it with gusto and verve.

Within five minutes of meeting Jerry, I could tell he had a rare knack of connecting with people. He had a group of students singing along with his original humanist songs, and once he was up on the podium Jerry was respectful to those in the audience who were religious while explaining why he had left his conservative Christian faith to become a secular humanist. It was a highly dramatic story and filled with funny anecdotes as well. In short, Jerry's stories and empathy with the audience were so effective that some religious believers present were visibly moved. You could see them struggling with their own beliefs. I recognized the look on their faces because I had gone through my own doubts like that.

As he spoke I realized something that had been eating away at me for some time. Why, I wondered, had I never been, before now, sincerely excited about and proud to be a part of the humanist movement? Before that night, there always seemed to be something missing for me, and it took Jerry Reiter to show what. I have believed for the last three years that humanism was the worldview for me, but I had never been emotionally attached to it. Jerry encouraged his audience to enjoy themselves and made them feel like his friends, and because he was the representative of humanism, his audience began to associate their enjoyment with those ideas. Remarkable!

Jerry Reiter, if given the opportunity, will be the bright future of humanism. If we wish to spread the values and ideas of humanism far and wide, and break into the mainstream (and some, justifiably, do not), then in addition to our intellectual ideas, we humanists must communicate with people the way Jerry did through stories, songs and humor that help people feel comfortable enough to set aside their old beliefs, and help our humanist groups feel energized and exuberant.

This condensed article is reprinted from the November, 2000 Campus Freethought Alliance national newsletter.

HELP! We need people willing to host potlucks. If ~~you could open your home to our usual crowd of 15~~ to 20 fascinating people on the 2nd Tuesday in the month, please contact Bob Riehemann at (859) 491-7219.

(Continued from page 1)

members of the Christian Coalition in its formative stages, and later found himself inside the secret headquarters of Operation Rescue National, both events happening because his pastor was Paul Schenck, tied to so closely to Pat Robertson that Schenck later became the administrative director of the ACLJ, Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice (the Biblical way).

Among others, Reiter met Paul Hill, who just a few months later would kill abortion doctor John Britton and a security guard and wound Britton's wife. Reiter documents show links between Paul Hill and televangelist Pat Robertson, both before and after the Britton killing.

Reiter met many of the men who advocated violence in the name of Christ and provides chilling reports of the encounters. What he saw behind some of the closed doors he was allowed behind challenged his fundamentalist faith to its core.

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Free Inquiry Magazine

World Wide Web

"I'm anticlerical, not antireligion. If somebody believes there is God, I'm not interested in trying to persuade that person there is no intelligent design to the universe. Where I become interested and wake up is about the temporal power of religion, things like prayer in schools, or Catholic-secular hospital mergers."

-- **Katha Pollitt**, *New York Times*, "Confessions of a Lonely Atheist," by Natalie Angier: <http://www.nytimes.com/library/magazine/home/20010114mag-atheism.html>

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Rationally Speaking

A monthly e-column by
Massimo Pigliucci
Department of Botany,
University of Tennessee

N. 7, February 2001: "The Greatest Democracy in the World and the Unfairness of American Elections"

This column can be posted for free on any appropriate web site. If you are interested in receiving the html code, please send an email to pigliucci@utk.edu

The United States of America is the self-professed greatest democracy in the world. Besides the obvious offensiveness of such claim to countries that are equally democratic and that can claim a longer history of civil liberties than the US can, the very idea flies in the face of the actual structure of the American electoral system. This has been painfully demonstrated by the recent squabble between George Bush and Al Gore on who *really* won the election.

Let's start with democracy 101. Ever since ancient Athens, democracy means the rule of the people (though for a long time the "people" have not included women, economically "lower" classes and slaves). By that simple criterion, the American system is undemocratic because it allows someone to win the presidential election even though she lost the popular vote—as has just happened to Gore and did happen a few other times before. This bizarre situation can occur because in the US the people don't really vote, electors chosen by each State do. And since each State is guaranteed a certain number of electoral votes which is *not* commensurate to its population, rural states are over-represented and Mr. Bush won by acreage rather than votes. As a citizen of New Hampshire put it recently during one of many interviews the media broadcasted after the 2000 elections, "If we went to a proportional system, New Hampshire would count for nothing." As it should, if this were really a democracy.

According to historians, there was originally a good reason for such a peculiar system. The United States were not really united, but rather resembled a loose confederation of largely independent entities, Swiss-style. Under those conditions, it was only natural to give precedence to the abstract entity of a "State" rather than to each of its citizens. Of course, the United States has never really become a nation—witness the harsh debates and court rulings on the limits of State vs. Federal power, but the fact remains that such a system is anything *but*

democratic.

A second major fault with the greatest democracy of the world is that typically a minority of its population bothers to go to the voting booth. Furthermore, Republicans in Congress have strenuously fought to keep it that way, for example opposing bills such as the motor registration act, which would make it easier for people to register to vote. Now, in real democracies, the percentage of people casting their ballots is much higher than the pitiful American average, and people are automatically registered based on their biographical data (they receive the registration at home when they turn 18—but of course this would mean that the Government needs to know who you are and where you live, God forbid).

The situation is so bad that several years ago the Christian coalition devised a tactic to get their favorite people elected, called "the 12% strategy." Since about 50% of eligible Americans are actually registered to vote, and of these little more than half bother to show up to cast their ballots, you need to get the vote of half of these (roughly 12% of the whole population) to be insured victory. On top of this, add the even stranger primary system, in which only a tiny fraction of really devoted people vote, thereby dramatically influencing the general election by eliminating candidates that might do well with the population at large but don't fit the opinions of a skewed minority of activists. Here is some food for thought: twenty *more* millions of people watched the 2001 Super Bowl than cast their vote in the 2000 elections.

One could go even further and suggest that *no* current voting system is actually democratic, no matter the country in which it is implemented. A recent article by Dana Mackenzie in *Discover* magazine (November 2000) clearly demonstrates why. It turns out that people have been studying voting systems for quite a while, and better options than the proportional system adopted by most countries have been clearly devised—indeed, they have been historically used by different cultures in different times.

Perhaps the simplest alternative is what is known as *approval voting*, which dates back to the 13th century, when it was used in Venice to elect magistrates. In this system, a person casts one vote for every candidate that she considers qualified. It works much like an opinion poll, with the difference that the results are added up to determine the winner. One of the advantages of approval voting is that you can vote for a candidate likely to lose—say, Ralph Nader—and don't feel like you are wasting your vote: he will get a good percentage of points while you can also cast your vote for somebody who is more likely to actually win. If approval voting had been used in the 2000 US elections, John McCain would have won, based on polls conducted in February. Furthermore,

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

approval voting would have spared Minnesota from electing Jesse Ventura, and New Hampshire from handing the State's primary to Pat Buchanan in 1996.

Another alternative to standard voting systems is the *Borda count*, named after a French physician and hero of the American Revolution. This system was actually in use in the Roman senate at least since 105 CE. It is similar to the method used to rank football and basketball college teams: each voter ranks all the candidates from top to bottom. If we take a poll by the *Sacramento Bee* during California's open primaries in 2000, McCain would have beaten Gore 48 to 43, Gore would have bettered Bush 51 to 43, and McCain would have surpassed Bush 50 to 45. Overall, the final rank would have been McCain 98, Gore 94, and Bush 88. Quite a different outcome from what actually happened!

In both the approval and the Borda systems voters are asked something that is missing from the current system: they need to choose who they will pick if their favorite is eliminated. More powers to the voters, a better democracy.

Of course, neither system is perfect, but the point is that most people in the US don't even realize that their way is one of the worst among those currently practiced by the world's democracies, and serious discussion hasn't begun in any country on how to improve the actual democratic value of our voting systems. Given that we have to live with the results for several years to come,

wouldn't it be worth taking a serious look at the alternatives?

Further reading:

Democracy and Participation in Athens, by R.K. Sinclair, to learn about the ways of the ancients.

Reflecting All of Us: the Case for Proportional Representation, by Robert Richie and Lani Guinier, a short book presenting pros and cons about changing the current American system.

Web links:

<http://discover.com/> *Discover* magazine, where the article that inspired this column originally appeared.

http://dir.yahoo.com/Government/Politics/Elections/Electoral_Systems/ *Yahoo!'s* gateway to electoral systems, a very valuable comparative resource.

<http://www.indiana.edu/~kglowack/athens/> *The Ancient City of Athens*, where democracy was born—a photographic tour.

Next Month: "Game Theory, Rational Egoism and the Evolution of Fairness"

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January Meeting

The Free Inquiry Group met at the Cincinnati Observatory on January 23rd, 2001. Resident astronomer Paul Nohr spoke on the topic of 'Cosmology: The Beginning, Evolution, and Fate of the Universe.'

Mr. Nohr pointed out the important contributions that mathematicians, physicists, and astronomers have made to the science of cosmology, mostly in the last 100 years. From the spectral lines found in starlight to the background radiation that pervades space, these discoveries have furthered our understanding of the universe.

We have learned that the universe had a beginning in the 'Big Bang' and continues to expand, seemingly at an expanding rate. All indications point to a universe that will continue to expand indefinitely because it does not contain enough matter to collapse in a gravitational 'Big Crunch'.

Mr. Nohr explained how recent discoveries have made the discussion of grand unification theories much more difficult. String theory is very promising, but much work remains to be done. The audience

then got into an extended discussion about the possibility of multiple universes.

After the break we were treated to a view a Jupiter through one of the two historic telescopes at the observatory. For more information, visit the Web page at CincinnatiObservatory.org.

In Celebration of Darwin's Birthday, February 12th:

Charles R. Darwin (1809-1882)

by Hans Magnus Enzensberger
trans. Joachim Neugroschel

The man who didn't want to.
The ground underfoot made him seasick
"Epoch-making," "revolutionary," "brilliant," "a Titan,"
he didn't want to, he fought it
all the way, in every way,
with nausea, migraines, hypochondria.

School *simply a blank*.
He acted stupid. Out of mimicry, mediocre and lazy.
College, *repugnant, incredibly dull,*
a waste of time. No inkling of math,
forgot the classics, *stayed as ignorant as a pig*
about politics, history, and moral philosophy.

They wanted him to be a doctor:
couldn't stand the sight of blood.
They tried to make a vicar out of him:
didn't know Latin.
A loser. Kept out of everything,
stayed put, avoided going all the way,
no push, no pull.

Marriage: *Grievous loss of time*.
Children: *Better than a dog anyhow*.
Shirked all the fun.
Fun is the worst.

Then the famous world-voyage: half reluctantly,
half inadvertently. On board
he lay on the cardtable for hours,
giddiness, sluggishness.
Gathered samples, data, specimens.
Kept his convictions to himself.

One afternoon he read Malthus
(*for amusement*): palpitations,
violent shivers, and in his brain
an electric storm. From now on
he was lost. The rest was evolution:

The Origin of the Species originated
and developed, "naturally," irresistibly,
a new species of ideas, in a process
that crushes the crusher, slowly,
gradually, and relentlessly.

He retreated, married
withdrew to an out-of-the-way hamlet,
avoided traveling, socializing,
shielded himself: Pensioned *at thirty-three*.

My mind seems to have become a machine
for grinding general laws
out of large collections of facts.

Seven years on *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs*.

Twenty-one years on *The Movements and Habits of Climbing Plants*.

Eight years on *A Monograph of the Cirripedia*
(two thick volumes describing all the living,
and two thin quartos the extinct species).

However, a solid structure forms from the shell,
protecting the body like an armour.
I therefore have nothing to record
during the rest of my life
except for the publication of my several books.

Daily schedule: at most four hours of work,
then the visit to the greenhouses.
A long siesta, wrapped in a cashmere
on the sofa. Change for dinner. After dinner
someone plays a piano sonata.

Early to bed. Insomnia:
His nights were usually bad,
he often lay awake or sat up in bed.
Endless details, accumulating like coral rag
in drawers, folders, registers.

Poor devil, his gardener remarked,
stands around staring
at a sunflower
for minutes on end.
If only he had something to do,
it would be a lot better for him.

A horrid languishing, a feeling
of fully withering.
Only science is left.
So much the worse.
Sometimes I hate it.

Didn't want to, never wanted to,
and yet all the way he doted on "Nature,"
with her gross waste, her base shoddiness,
and repugnant cruelty: methodically,
like a bookkeeper or an earthworm.

The Formation of Vegetable Mould
through the Action of Worms,
with Observations of their Habits.
The fruit of fifty years' work.
More significant in the history of the earth,
than one might think, they grind
the earth into humus in their gizzards,
tons of it, silently and irresistibly.

"The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us; and I for one must be content to remain an agnostic."
—Charles Darwin, *Life and Letters*

FIG Leaflets

Ministers "... are not all like Elmer Gantry. Most of them are rather uninteresting, actually. But they all suffer from an identity crisis, from the same tragicomic pressures. Most of them sincerely feel they are doing the right thing. But what kind of grip on life can you have working for an invisible boss, speaking with assurance of things which cannot be known? How much integrity can you maintain as a teacher of truth if you are *not allowed* to invite a fair discussion of an opposite point of view? Where is the prestige in representing a god who is so all-powerful that he can't do any work unless people write out (tax deductible) checks? What honor is there in selling real estate to people who must die before they can take possession? Of course, like Barnum said, there is a sucker born every minute, and as long as there are people gullible enough to donate to religion, stock in heaven will be a bull market. A market for bull. If there were no market for such property, perhaps ministers would move into more productive lines of work. Like the circus."

Dan Barker, *Free Thought Today*, April 1987,
Losing Faith in Faith

The tension between science and religion is about to get tenser, for some scientists have decided that religious experience is just too intriguing not to study. Neurologists jumped in first, finding a connection between temporal lobe epilepsy and a sudden interest in religion. As V. S. Ramachandran of the University of California, San Diego, told a 1997 meeting, these patients, during seizures, "say they see God" or feel "a sudden sense of enlightenment." Now researchers are looking at more-common varieties of religious experience. Newberg and the late Dr. Eugene d'Aquili, both of the University of Pennsylvania, have a name for this field: neuro-theology.

Sharon Begley, *Searching For the God Within*,
Newsweek,
<http://www.msnbc.com/news/519130.asp>

Sacrificial Sheep Shoves Man to His Death

ALEXANDRIA, Egypt (Reuters) -- An Egyptian sheep destined for sacrificial slaughter forestalled its owner's plans by pushing him to his death from a three-story building, police said Tuesday. They said

Waheeb Hamoudah, 56, who worked in the police tax evasion department, had been feeding the sheep he had tethered on the rooftop when it butted him. Neighbors found Hamoudah lying bleeding and concussed on the ground below, with several broken bones, Monday. He died soon after reaching hospital. Hamoudah had been fattening the sheep for the past six weeks and planned to kill it for Eid al-Adha, the Muslim feast of sacrifice, in early March. Many Egyptian city-dwellers keep livestock on rooftops, balconies or in basements, especially in the run-up to Eid al-Adha.

<http://news.excite.com/news/r/010102/10/odd-sheep-dc>

On "Opening of the Evangelical Mind."

To anyone who has grown up immersed in evangelical doctrine (as I have), one fact is clear: the mainstream of the evangelical movement is extremely unlikely ever to accept even the possible validity of Catholicism or Darwinism, or metaphorical interpretations of the Scriptures, or the spirit of skepticism that underlies modern science, postmodern philosophy, and secular academia. To do so would undermine the *raison d'etre* of the movement.

Evangelicals can be quite open-minded on matters outside their faith and on hair-splitting differences within their faith, say pre- versus post-millennialism, or varying techniques of baptism. But on significant matters touching their creed: drinking, dancing, creation, abortion, ecumenicalism, Catholicism, or human sexuality, the "opening of the evangelical mind" is basically an oxymoron. Richard W. Parker,

professor, *Atlantic Monthly* (January 2001) p. 8

On Einstein's God.

He believed in Spinoza's god, which was that the laws of nature and the beauty and harmony of the Universe are grand and wonderful to study.

Michael Shermer, on *Politically Incorrect* (22 December 2000)

The Bible is a collection of writings by people who use history not simply to report events, but to put over a particular slant. Without some knowledge of the background and of the politics of the time, a straight reading of the Bible is akin to a Martian reading a biography of George Bush by Bill Clinton without knowing any of the context and believing it to be gospel.

Peter Stanford, *The Devil: A Biography* (1996) p. 34

We...know how cruel the truth often is, and we wonder whether delusion is not more consoling.

—Henri Poincare (1854-1912)

The Light of Other Days, Arthur Clarke and Stephen Baxter

Sexual Freedom

Sex and God: Is Religion Twisted?

Behold the age-old antagonism toward all things sexual

James. A. Haught

“Christian endeavor,” H. L. Mencken wrote, “is notoriously hard on female pulchritude.” He was right, of course, and he should have included Jewish endeavor and Muslim endeavor in his observation. Western religions have spend millennia inflicting shame, guilt, repression, and punishment upon human sexuality—especially women’s sexuality.

Asian faiths aren’t so punitive. They generally accept lovemaking as a natural part of life. Some Hindu temples are covered with statues of copulating gods and goddesses. Millions of Shiva worshippers pray over models of his erect penis. Tantric sects practice ritual intercourse.

But the West presents an opposite, ugly story: a long chronicle of religious hostility to lovers—for no rational reason.

ANNALS OF ANTAGONISM

The Old Testament raged against “whoredom” and commanded that nonvirgin brides be stoned to death (Deut. 22:21).

In the first century C. E., Paul urged celibacy for Christians. The earliest known papal decree, issued by Pope Siricius in 386, attempted (without much success) to forbid church elders from making love with their wives. Scholar Reay Tannahill says that early Christian leaders made sex and “sin” synonymous. “It was Augustine who epitomized a general feeling among the church fathers that the act of intercourse was fundamentally disgusting,” she says. “Arnobius called it filthy and degrading, Methodius unseemly, Jerome unclean, Tertullian shameful, Ambrose defilement.”¹

When priests oversaw the historic witch-hunts—in which thousands of women were tortured and burned—church writings reeked of revulsion to female sexuality. A medieval cardinal, Hughes de St. Cher, wrote: “Woman pollutes the body, drains the

resources, kills the soul, uproots the strength, blinds the eye, and embitters the voice.”²

In late nineteenth-century America, Anthony Comstock and his “Committee for the Suppression of Vice” pursued sex like a hunted animal. About 2,500 people were convicted on morality charges, and Congress passed the puritanical Comstock Laws. Margaret Sanger was jailed eight times for advocating birth control.

Until recently, thanks to church pressure, nearly every U.S. state had Old Testament-style laws against “fornication” and “sodomy” and the like. It wasn’t until 1972 that the U.S. Supreme Court finally ruled that all American couples have a right to practice birth control. The clergy’s opposition to contraception had been based not so much on a desire for limitless breeding as a desire to prevent people from enjoying the sexual freedom brought by birth control.

Today, the church’s ability to imprison nonconformists has receded. However, nearly every censorship effort or attempt at sexual repression still comes from religion.

North Carolina’s 1.2 million Southern Baptists recently voted to shut off their television sets for a day to protest “moral depravity” in shows such as “NYPD Blue,” which contains partial nudity and sexual situations.

In 1993, Pope John Paul II declared unmarried sex and birth-control “intrinsically evil.” In my city (Charleston, West Virginia), two brave nuns, Patricia Hussey and Barbara Ferraro, battled Catholicism’s sexual taboos until they finally were forced out of their order. They recounted their struggle in a 1990 book, *No Turning Back*. It says: “The church really hates the idea of people having sex for fun.... There is something prurient and dishonest about the church’s loathing for the body.”

As the American public has seen, sometimes the ministers who rail loudest against “filth” and “pornography” are cloaking their secret sins. Television evangelists Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Baker both fell to private sex scandals. Georgia revivalist Mario Leyva went to prison in 1990 for sodomizing more than 100 church boys, and two assistant pastors likewise were jailed. Numerous such cases appear in the news.

As American clergy endlessly strive to censor sex from public media, an odd contradiction has arisen: Ministers raise little objection to a movie containing 50 murders—but a glimpse of a woman’s nipple brings their wrath. A popular song commented: “Bullets fly like popcorn on the screen, recommended wholesome, nice and clean. Making

James A. Haught is Editor of the Charleston Gazette in West Virginia and the author of *2000 Years of Disbelief* (Prometheus Books, 1996). He is a FREE INQUIRY Senior Editor.

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

love's the thing that can't be seen. Why?"

(Using legal language, Congress and state legislatures periodically ponder laws to imprison purveyors of "ultimate sexual acts." In my newspaper, I once asked readers to suggest what might be the ultimate sexual act. A couple in a rubber raft going over Niagara Falls? Two elephants in a china shop?)

Meanwhile, the sexual hang-ups of Christianity today are trivial compared to those in the Muslim world, where suppression of women continues at Old Testament levels. Some examples:

?In Muslim Somalia, an estimated 98% of girls are genitally mutilated to inhibit their sexual pleasure throughout their lives and keep them "pure" for husbands. But it doesn't always work. In 1993, a United Nations team found five women being stoned to death for adultery. They had been condemned by mosque leaders, and the execution was carried out after evening prayers. Cheering villagers videotaped the killing. U.N. observers who tried to save the women were driven off by threats of death. U.N. agent Cecelia Kamau said bitterly: "Fundamentalism is really catching on."

?In Muslim Algeria, zealots shot high school girls in the face for not wearing veils and cut the throats of professors who taught boys and girls in the same classrooms.

?In Muslim Iran, morality patrols flog women who allow a lock of hair to show beneath their shrouds, and clerics laboriously black out women's faces in imported magazines.

?In Muslim Afghanistan, a major *mujahideen* (holy warrior) leader got his start by throwing acid in the faces of unveiled college girls. Now that even-more-puritanical Taliban religious students have seized Afghanistan, they've decreed that all windows must be painted black, lest someone look at a woman through one, and they stone women to death for being in the company of a man who isn't a relative.

WITHOUT REASON

It would probably take an army of psychiatrists and historians to pinpoint all the reasons Western religions developed such hostility toward human sexuality. More important is the question: Is this attitude justified? Are there ethical, rational reasons to support the religious condemnation of normal sexual desires?

Perhaps the detailed and insightful answer came from none other than humanist Bertrand Russell, who said that a "morbid and unnatural"

attitude toward sex is "the worst feature of the Christian religion." And much of what he said applies with equal force to other Western religions. He asserted that religious aversion to sex is not only unfounded but harmful. Again the prevailing anti-sex views of religion, he argued that sexual pleasure is a positive good and that religious objections are based not on reason but on dogma. But perhaps his most important argument was that religious anti-sexuality attitudes inflict untold human misery, especially on women. He observed:

Monks have always regarded Woman primarily as the temptress; they have thought of her mainly as the inspirer of impure lusts. The teaching of the church has been, and still is, that virginity is best, but that for those who find this impossible marriage is permissible. "It is better to marry than to burn," as St. Paul brutally puts it. By making marriage indissoluble, and by stamping out all knowledge of the *ars amandi*, the church did what it could to secure that the only form of sex which it permitted should involve very little pleasure and great deal of pain. The opposition to birth control has, in fact, the same motive: if a woman has a child a year until she dies worn out, it is not to be supposed that she will derive much pleasure from her married life; therefore birth control must be discouraged.³

Strangely, Russell said, the church doesn't seem to care how much misery its rigid sex laws inflict on people. He cited this example:

An inexperienced girl is married to a syphilitic man; in that case the Catholic Church says, "This is an indissoluble sacrament. You must endure celibacy or stay together. And if you stay together, you must not use birth control to prevent the birth of syphilitic children." Nobody whose natural sympathies have not been warped by dogma, or whose moral nature was not absolutely dead to all sense of suffering, could maintain that it is right and proper that that state of things should continue.⁴

Russell maintained that it wasn't just regarding sexual behavior that the Christian attitude was harmful to human welfare—but also regarding basic *knowledge* of sexuality:

Every person who has taken the trouble to study the question in an unbiased spirit knows that the artificial ignorance on sex subjects which orthodox Christians attempt to enforce upon the young is extremely dangerous to mental and physical health, and causes in those who pick up their knowledge by way of "improper" talk, as most children do, an attitude that sex is in itself indecent

BOOK REVIEWS

The Scalpel and the Butterfly: the war between animal research and animal protection

by Deborah Rudacille

(New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000)

The whole idea of protecting animals is not new. It goes back to the Middle Ages when lords prohibited the villagers from poaching, snaring, or otherwise catching their favored hunting prey. The notion that animals should not be mistreated probably started with the first animals kept as pets as distinct from working or food animals. The prohibition of bear baiting, the outlawing of the bull ring, and the end of cock fighting belong to this time. The idea that animals may have rights themselves, and that none should be killed or used for human ends is more recent, and today associated with the writings of the philosopher Peter Singer and his book on Animal Liberation.

Rudacille recounts the history of the animal rights movement with emphasis on the fight against using animals in the science laboratory for experiments. She recounts the histories of vivisection, of the Humane Society, of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, of the Farm Animal Reform Movement, and other recent and older organizations. On the whole I think her description is fair and balanced, she speaks of a moral crusade on the one hand, but she is also quite aware and clear that animal research has been and remains indispensable for finding cures of human and animal diseases. Without animal experiments there would be no polio vaccine or mechanical hip replacement.

The overwhelming majority of animals used by humans are raised for food and fiber, or hunted for sport. Yet the most violent attacks have been on use of animals in science. Some animal "liberationists" are quite consistent in disdaining the use of all animals. Some have become vegetarians who will not touch meat, milk, or eggs. A pure vegetarian diet strikes me as inappropriate for this omnivore. It is difficult to get all proteins or the necessary zinc from such a diet, especially when used to raise small infants.

While I see no reason to mistreat animals or to hurt them without a purpose, the animal liberationist mind strikes me as having fallen into a religious mode, that is beyond anything defensible by reason. As in all religions there are inconsistencies in the faith of the animal rights folks. They will not permit

the use of animals in laboratories. They focus on certain "preferred" animals, ie. cute, cuddly, furry, and warm. Rattlesnakes need not apply, much less mosquitoes. They will keep animals as pets after they have been deprived of their sexual functions, and thus the "full sensual enjoyment of life." And of course they will put surplus animals to death.

Rudacille reviews the history of Nazi Germany. Soon after coming to power the Nazis passed stringent laws for the protection of animals. It has been said that the only person Hitler ever truly loved was his dog Blondi. Yet the same people were capable of systematically putting millions of human beings to death. When people argue for animal rights, raising the animal nearer the human, they at the same time lower the status of humans to that of animals. Thus, it is not astonishing that some animal rights activists have little compunction about damaging human life and property. They are, after all, engaged in a great crusade of right versus evil.

Modern activists consider any animal research a corrupt practice, but also the eating of meat, the use of fur or leather, as well as of feathers and wool. Rudacille quotes one of their "philosophers" thus: (p. 141)

The animal rights view holds that human utilization of nonhuman animals, whether in the laboratory, on the farm, or in the wild, is wrong in principle and should be abolished in practice. Whatever humans might gain from such utilization (in the form of money or convenience, gustatory delights, or the advancement of knowledge, for example) are and must be illgotten. (Tom Regan)

The question is why so many Americans have turned against Enlightenment culture to dream of an unspoiled Eden for all the animals. Why have these people turned with violence against biological medicine despite its undoubted successes in improving life and health. Rudacille's book is a serious attempt to answer these question fairly and with justice to both science and its critics.

Wolf Roder

BOOK REVIEWS

Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters

trans. and ed. by J. Lennart Berggren
and Alexander Jones
(Princeton University Press, 2000)

The astronomer, mathematician, and geographer Claudius Ptolomaeus lived from about 100 to 170 CE but exact dates are not known. He probably worked in Alexandria, at that time the second city in the Roman Empire, but even this is not known with certainty. Yet, among scientists with the greatest impact on Western Civilization, Ptolemy must be counted near the top. His major works, *the Almagest*, *the Geography*, and the *Handy Tables* have been fundamental to developing the modern view of earth and cosmos.

The astronomer had nothing to do with the Ptolemaic dynasty of rulers of Egypt which came to power in 323 BCE. This dynasty ended with Cleopatra in 30 BCE. That is, some 150 years passed before our Ptolemy was active.

Ptolemy is best known for the cosmic system he described in the *Almagest*, which is notorious for the complex calculations necessary to make the planets move in circular arcs. Which raises the question: what does geography have to do with astronomy. Precisely that on a spherical earth the best way to locate where you are is by looking at the stars. And, Ptolemy knew and described the earth as a sphere without any doubt. In fact, he provides a geometrical method for estimating the circumference of this earth by using the angle of the sun's rays, and by measuring along a meridian. He gives a second method which requires only measuring any distance on land or water. Unfortunately, he had no way of obtaining accurate distances. He used estimates from days of caravan travel, or dead reckoning sailing. These were the best at the time. He reports two estimates of the size of the earth, indicating the work was compiled at different times from a variety of sources. His first estimate of the global circumference comes to about 20,000, his second to 28,000 miles. Modern values are close to 25,000 miles.

Latitude at any place in the northern hemisphere is best determined by measuring the elevation, i.e. the angle with the horizon, of the North Star. Latitude can be gauged quite precisely by examining the outermost circumpolar star, i.e. the star which does not sink below the horizon in the course of the night. Longitude

has to be determined by measuring the time interval between two places, which requires a precise traveling clock not constructed until the eighteenth century. The bulk of the *Geography* is a catalog of some eight thousand places listed by latitude and longitude. It is this catalog which allows us to reconstruct Ptolemy's map and understanding of the known world. None of Ptolemy's own maps have come down to us. The editors of the present volume provide reconstructions of Ptolemy's maps juxtaposed to modern versions. The people of classical antiquity had a remarkably accurate understanding of their world.

Ptolemy devotes considerable space to discussing the extent and size of the *ecumene*, i.e. the known and inhabited world. This extends from the westernmost parts of Europe to southeast Asia in the vicinity of Hanoi, and from Iceland or the Shetland Islands in the north to as far south as Zanzibar, or possibly Cape Delgado, i.e. definitely south of the Equator. This area covers about a fifth of the globe. A region this large can not be accurately shown on a flat map. Ptolemy accordingly provides us with a discussion of map projections, including the description of two he invented. His maps, his researches, and his ideas are substantially modern. When his books were rediscovered in the Renaissance they became fundamental to the age of exploration.

Ptolemy studied at the height of the Roman Empire at a time before Christianity became dominant and destroyed so much of scientific knowledge. I am always impressed by the height of achievement reached in antiquity, and wonder where civilization would be today, if the Christian Middle Ages had not intervened.

Wolf Roder

How so many absurd rules of conduct, as well as so many absurd religious beliefs, have originated, we do not know; nor how it is that they have become, in all quarters of the world, so deeply impressed on the minds of men; but it is worthy of remark that a belief constantly inculcated during the early years of life, while the brain is impressionable, appears to acquire almost the nature of an instinct; and the very essence of an instinct is that it is followed independently of reason.

-- Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man* p. 122

