

January Meeting

A Universe of Surprises (Our Knowledge of Interstellar Space)

It has been about 150 years since Maxwell surprised the world by showing that the speed of light is a fixed value. From that time, the Universe has yielded up one surprise after another as astronomers, physicists and mathematicians worked to understand the nature and structure of the Universe; and, its beginning, evolution and ultimate fate. The twentieth century brought us from a virtually unmeasured and unknown Universe to what might be a unified understanding of all forces and matter. It brought us from the sketches of the biased eye of the astronomer and his crude instrumentation, to a space age technology capable of delicately scrutinizing the entire electromagnetic spectrum. Without the advances in the microscopic world of particle physics it would not be possible to begin to understand the unimaginably large Universe of galaxies and stars. I will discuss some of the historic astronomical background and surprising discoveries that, coupled with quantum mechanics and relativity, have brought science, for the first time, to the threshold of understanding the Universe. In a question and answer period we might look at some of the questions astrophysicists and cosmologists hope to answer in the next decade or so. That is, if they are not handed many more surprises.

Paul Nohr

Astronomical Background during the Past Twenty-eight Years:
I joined the nonacademic staff in the Physics Dept. at U.C. where, among other things, I set up the observatory in Braunstein Hall and was instrumental in developing the undergraduate astronomy lab. When the Physics Dept. took over operations at the Cincinnati Observatory, I was asked to restore the instruments and set up public tours and

(Continued on page 2)

Camp Quest Receives Grant

Camp Quest, the nation's first residential summer camp for children of secular humanists, has received a grant for expanding its unique program. The Institute for Humanist Studies (IHS) in Albany, New York has awarded Camp Quest \$5,000 to attempt to create three new such camping programs in the United States during 2001.

Camp Quest, verified by the American Camping Association as the first of its kind for the children of those who accept reason and rational inquiry over systems grounded on faith and belief in the supernatural, is sponsored and operated by the Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. The secular humanist organization was the stated reason for HB 70, the law passed last year

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January Meeting

A Universe of Surprises (Our Knowledge of Interstellar Space)

Tuesday, January 23, 7:00 p.m.
At the Vernon Manor Hotel,
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati

February Potluck Dinner

Tuesday, February 13, at 6:30

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educational programs. After twenty years at the observatory I returned to campus for one year. Under a special contract, I returned to the Observatory to assist the new operators of the Cincinnati Observatory Center. My primary background is instrumentation and education. I love teaching and working with students and science classes. I developed a teacher workshop, Insights into Astronomy, to help teachers better understand the physical concepts and astronomical terminology behind many of the topics covered in the Earth and Space Science portions of the Ohio student proficiency tests. I expect to retire in two or three years and hope to spend much of my time helping in H.S. physics and astronomy classes, write a book, study ancient astronomy, and set up a radio telescope and optical observatory to work on a couple of my own projects.

World Wide Web

- ◆ New York Times article on Paul Kurtz:
◆ <http://partners.nytimes.com/2000/12/23/arts/23ATHE.html>
- ◆ Check out the most recommended Skeptic books: www.skeptic.com
- ◆ Christians want U.S. Army to ban Wiccans:
◆ http://www.religioustolerance.org/boy_army.htm
- ◆ Darwin Day: <http://www.darwin.ws/day>
- ◆ U.S. Catholics ask for forgiveness:
◆ <http://www.msnbc.com/news/508859.asp>
- ◆ Confessions of a Lonely Atheist:
◆ <http://www.nytimes.com/library/magazine/home/20010114mag-atheism.html>

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by the Kentucky Legislature giving churches the unique right to discriminate against those who do not share their beliefs. Camp Quest rented, for the first two of its five years of operation, the campgrounds of the Bullittsburg Baptist Church, which successfully sought the exemption from the Kentucky Civil Rights Law.

Edwin Kagin, a Union, Kentucky attorney and Director of Camp Quest, said the grant was awarded after Camp Quest staff member Dr. Steven Schafersman, of the Department of Science and Mathematics of the University of Texas of the Permian Basin, Odessa, Texas discovered the funding possibility available from the newly formed IHS and drafted the grant proposal. In a letter to Kagin, IHS Executive Director Matt Cherry said, "The Institute for Humanist Studies works to increase public understanding and support for humanism. We created the IHS Fund on the principle that we can greatly amplify our own efforts by actively supporting the best work of other humanist organizations and individuals."

Kagin said that he and his wife Helen, a retired physician and Camp Quest Registrar, are excited about this opportunity for expansion. He said that last year the camp was booked beyond capacity, with some campers staying in tents, and that additional camps are needed to accommodate the growing interest. He said that information on the camp is available on the Internet at www.Camp-Quest.com where photos and forms can be found. The Kagins said a presentation to a humanist group in Tennessee is already scheduled, and that several humanist groups have expressed interest in adopting the program Camp Quest has developed. Helen Kagin said that Camp Quest has attracted international attention. Last year there were two campers from England, who are re-enrolling for this year. "We have campers from all over the United States. We have had a girl from the Netherland Antilles and a boy from the Czech Republic. This year two new campers are coming from Japan," she said.

FIG Leaves Volume 10, Issue 1, January 2001 - Editors welcome thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons. Submit in electronic format via Internet to figeditors@fuse.net or on disk or typewritten via mail to Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 8128, Cincinnati OH 45208. Contributions received before the first Tuesday of the month will be considered for publication that month. All material printed in FIG Leaves may be reproduced in similar publications of non-profit groups which grant FIG Leaves reciprocal reprinting rights as long as proper credit is clearly attributed to FIG Leaves and the author. Opinions expressed in FIG Leaves are those of their authors and do not necessarily reflect opinions of the editor or the Free Inquiry Group, Inc., its board, or officers. © 2000 The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. FIG Board of Directors: President Bob Riehemann, Vice President Edwin Kagin, Secretary Philip Ferguson, Treasurer Joe Levee, Members: Nurit Bowman, Michele Grinoch, Helen Kagin, Tim Kelly, Inez Klein,





Rationally Speaking

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

N. 6, January 2001: "Split-brains, paradigm shifts, and why it is so difficult to be a skeptic"

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 (pigliucci@utk.edu).

The Mind's Past, by Michael Gazzaniga, a book about the evolution of consciousness and split-brain experiments by one of the people who is doing the actual research.

The human brain is a funny machine. Imperfectly designed by natural selection, it finds itself in an environment that has little resemblance with the one it evolved in. Gone is the savannah in which our ancestors had to guard themselves from fierce creatures. Instead, we live in a complex and ever expanding social milieu, our neighborhood now encompassing the whole planet. Is it any wonder that our poor brains are not doing so well in this brave new wired world?

Our brains seem to fail to grasp reality, as demonstrated by the fact that a majority of Americans don't "believe" in evolution (whatever "believing" in a scientific theory means), while a sizable percentage is ready to accept the existence of an imaginary all-powerful god, as well as of the devil, hell, and a sleuth of angels. Why is it so difficult to be a reasonably skeptical person? What is it that makes so many apparently intelligent people so gullible about things that their brains clearly have the power to master? And-perhaps most importantly for the skeptic-how do we get people to change their minds in an informed way on so wide an array of irrationalities?

Obviously, I am not going to present the reader with the magic bullet that can answer these questions, but a starting point is being provided by recent research in neurobiology. It turns out that lately we have learned a lot about how the brain works and why it makes mistakes

while interpreting reality. Since our most powerful tool doesn't come with an owner's manual, it may pay off to spend a little time thinking about how we think.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic ways we are learning about the brain is by studying patients who literally have a split one. The brain is made of two hemispheres, joined by a structure called the corpus callosum which contains nerve fibers that continuously exchange signals between the right and left hemisphere. Some individuals have suffered more or less complete damage to the corpus callosum, either because of a stroke or because of a surgical operation. These subjects are invaluable to neurobiologists because it is possible to interrogate the right and left hemispheres separately, see how differently they think, and then piece this information together to reconstruct the thought patterns of normal individuals. The problem with attempting to "talk" to both hemispheres is that language is controlled by the left one, the only hemisphere that can articulate things. Fortunately, the right side can still "respond" to interrogations by virtue of its control over the motor functions of the left half of the body, including the arm and hand.

Perhaps the most astonishing thing neurobiologists have discovered from split-brain patients is that the left hemisphere, which normally "dominates" the right one, is literally in charge of our view of the world. And it fights hard to preserve it. In a wonderfully elegant experiment, a group of researchers led by Michael Gazzaniga at Dartmouth College showed pictures to the right and left hemispheres of a split-brain patient and then asked each hemisphere to pick another picture to accompany the one originally presented. The right side was shown (through the left half of the visual field) a house with snow and, logically enough, it picked a shovel. The left hemisphere was shown a chicken leg (through the right half of the visual field), and it picked a chicken head-also quite logically. The experimenters then verbally asked the patient to explain his choices. The left hemisphere was the only one that could articulate an answer, but remember-it did not know why his right counterpart had chosen a shovel, since the information about the house with the snow did not cross the severed corpus callosum. The patient's answer was as astounding as illuminating: "Oh, that's simple. The chicken claw goes with the chicken [which was true], and you need a shovel to clean out the chicken shed [which was coherent, but completely false]." In other words, the left hemisphere acted as an interpreter of the worldview of the individual and fabricated a just-so story to fit all the available data!

These sort of experiments have shown that the left hemisphere is in charge of our worldview, of the

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paradigms we currently hold about a variety of aspects of reality. In normal patients, these paradigms are constantly evaluated against external evidence, gathered by both hemispheres through a suite of sensorial inputs. The left interpreter has the all-important function of making sense of the world, and it does a reasonably good job at it. However, when the incoming data is insufficient, or when some piece of evidence contradicts the currently held view, the left hemisphere either rejects the unfit information or it distorts it so to make sense of it. This process of "rationalizing" the world goes on up to a certain point. If the degree of conflicting information is too high (i.e., there is too much dissonance between what one believes and what one perceives) then that most stupendous phenomenon suddenly occurs: we change our minds (literally)!

The problem that rational people face, then, is twofold. On the one hand, the brain has evolved a powerful mechanism to avoid to change its mind too often, which means that people will stubbornly continue to believe all sorts of nonsense because it is less painful than to radically alter their worldview. On the other hand, we know that the problem is all the more insurmountable when the data fed to the subject is poor, and unfortunately most of what modern human beings are exposed to by the media is pure garbage.

However, there is no need to despair just yet. Understanding the problem is a necessary (though by all means not sufficient) step to solve it. Realizing where people's stubbornness (and sometimes our own) comes

from will help not getting unduly irritated or downright nasty when facing patent irrationality in our fellow human beings. And empathy is one important step toward connecting with anybody. The second message of modern neurobiological research is perhaps an old one, but which now comes with the weight of evidence: education is our (slow) way out. What we need to do is to keep educating people, to feed good information to the brain's interpreter. If neurobiologists are correct, most brains will come to understand reality if properly nurtured. It is ignorance which provides the necessity for just-so stories, with all the tragic consequences that follow when people defend a flawed worldview at all costs.

Further reading:

The Mind's Past, by Michael Gazzaniga, a book about the evolution of consciousness and split-brain experiments by one of the people who is doing the actual research.

Phantoms in the Brain, by V.S. Ramachandran, a fascinating voyage into the weirdness of the brain seen by a practicing clinician. Learn about phantom limbs and why people believe in god.

**Next Month: "The greatest democracy in the world
and
the unfairness of American elections"**

© by Massimo Pigliucci, 2001

FREE INQUIRY GROUP OPPOSES ASHCROFT FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky opposes president-elect Bush's nomination of John Ashcroft as our nation's next Attorney General. FIG, composed primarily of secular humanists, is concerned not with his sincere religious convictions, but that his beliefs will cause him to fail to support current constitutional laws supporting separation of church and state and permitting freedom of choice. His career indicates that he would substitute his version of religious truth over the Constitution and laws of the United States.

As governor and legislator, he has tried to restrict abortions and has strongly urged a constitutional amendment to outlaw them even in cases of incest and rape. During his career he has favored prayer in public schools and supported vouchers for religious schools.

Senator Ashcroft's record of promoting special privileges for religion is shown by his 100% rating from the Christian Coalition for each of the six years he served in the Senate. During this time he was a major architect of the "Charitable Choice" provision of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act that removed all church-state separation restrictions from any religious organization that received government funds for social services.

The office of U. S. Attorney General, as head of the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI, is charged with protecting our civil rights. This is a position which requires the protection of minority groups, including those who hold no religious beliefs and those of minority religions, without providing favoritism to any other group. John Ashcroft's record indicates that he would not fulfill this responsibility.

Bob Riehemann
President, Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG)



These are some of the responses to Edwin Kagin's "On the Fractionalization of the Recent Experiment in Government Known as "One Nation, Under God, Indivisible" published in FIG Leaves and in Charlotte's Web:

Excellent column on "The Fractionalization". Very thoughtful, even apocalyptic! What I suspect we are witnessing is a demystification of government authority. This is a cultural transition which could be a very valuable change in our perception of leadership. The human race has evolved from the concept of having gods on earth (Pharaohs) to agents of gods on earth (Kings) to representatives of gods on earth (Presidents). What we seem to be learning is that there are no gods. Not even those who claim to be agents of the "Will of the People", a mundane mystical concept, are worthy of unmitigated esteem or unearned respect. The Founding Fathers were ahead of their time, even ahead of history, in placing individual rights above any governing authority. Their intent was that the President be a mere administrator, the servant of the Congress, rather than a leader or figurehead or even a scion of wisdom and enlightenment. The perception that the two significant candidates for the office are a liar and a dummy only contribute to this demystification. There's another element that Edwin overlooked. That is the exploding access to information and knowledge. I can sit down at my computer and acquire just as much -- perhaps more -- truth than the president will ever consider in forming government policy. I can make up my own mind about what is wise and distribute my own best judgment around the world in a matter of minutes. What this technologic marvel has given me is the key to the "Holy Grail" that had been the sole province of priests, pharaohs, kings and presidents throughout previous history. The gods are slowly passing away. For those who depend totally on the high authorities in their life, it's happening all too quickly. For those who seek truth, it's not happening fast enough. But there's a clear cultural transition in progress. Knowledge is the power that has made pharaohs omniscient, armies omnipotent and modern rulers the icons of earthly gods. The power has fallen to the people, not as a collective, but as autonomous agents in the pursuit of truth, wisdom and justice.

Bill Westmiller (westmiller@aol.com)

Interesting and very well written. But I think Kagin tries to make a conflict of values between the religious and the freethinkers where there is mainly a conflict of methods. There is a conflict of values, or at least emphasis, but it splits along different lines.

Brent Meeker (meekerd@rain.org)

U.C. Skeptics Winter Schedule

THURSDAY, JANUARY 18, 6:00 PM, RVSCHL 821B — Mer-i-toc-ra-cy: a system in which the talented are chosen and moved ahead on the basis of their achievement
A Skeptics Open Student Discussion: Is Affirmative Action a Step Towards or a Step Away from Actualizing Meritocracy in America? Facilitated by Matt McCarran

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 6:00 PM, RVSCHL 823 — Cate Sherron, UC Doctoral Candidate speaks on the Feminist Philosophy of Science

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 6:00 PM, RVSCHL 821B — UC's Dr. Scott Keely speaks on the Human Genome Project

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 6:00 PM, RVSCHL 821B — A Skeptics Video Presentation: Debate on Religion's Role in Society — Alan Keyes, Former Republican Presidential Candidate vs. Alan Dershowitz, Harvard Law School Professor

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 6:00 PM, RVSCHL 821B — A Skeptics Open Student Discussion: Relationships—Sex and Sexuality

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22 — Open Week, No Meeting

THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 6:00 PM, RVSCHL 821B — Inside the Religious Right—A Talk by Humanist Author Jerry Reiter

The skeptic does not mean him who doubts, but him who investigates or researches, as opposed to him who asserts and thinks that he has found.

[Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936)]

If I wanted a loving father, a faithful husband, an honorable neighbor, and a just citizen, I would seek him among the band of Atheists.

[John Tyndall, presidential address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science (1874)]

Life is not a miracle. It is a natural phenomenon, and can be expected to appear wherever there is a planet whose conditions duplicate those of the earth.

[Harold Urey, Time magazine, 24 November 1952]

I can very well do without God both in my life and in my painting, but I cannot, suffering as I am, do without something which is greater than I, which is my life -- the power to create.

[Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo. Art News Annual, 1950]

<http://www.triskelion-ltd.com/internet-humor/god-tv.html>



FIG Leaflets

The Parson's Faith

He had prayed by so many deathbeds, delivered so many funeral addresses: The words had become automatic. It was like putting a record on a gramophone. What did he really believe, in his heart of hearts? When he assured the bereaved that they would meet their loved ones in heaven, did he actually believe in such a place? Once he had, he must have, or he could not have presented himself for ordination; he had surely believed then in a savior who took the sins of the world upon him; who made there by this one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice. He had believed that then: one believed in so much in youth; but how far had that faith survived the wear and tear of a long ministry, with all its parochial problems, its weighing of the politics of this and that, the conflict of personalities, the stage-management of a career.

Alec Waugh, *Island in the Sun* (1955) p. 289

In no society can religion and politics ignore each other. Faith and power must always, however uneasily, take a stance toward one another. The polity, more than most realms of human action, deals obviously with ultimate things. With respect to both internal deviants and external enemies, political authority has claimed the right to make life-and-death decisions. Religion, on the other hand, claims to derive from an authority that transcends all earthly powers. The possibility of conflict between these potentially conflicting claims is always present, yet collisions are not necessarily constant.

-- Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond,
Varieties of Civil Religion (1980) p. vii.

No Order in the Universe

Seeking to understand the kind of world that would let the innocent suffer, Camus came to the startling conclusion that life is "absurd;" and by "absurd" he meant that life itself is no more than a series of random events. We are not part of any grand plan. Quite the contrary. The universe is completely indifferent to us to your desires, hopes and expectations.

At roughly the same time that Camus and the French existentialists were introducing this notion into philosophic thought, Margaret Mitchell was introducing it to the American

reading public in fiction. In *Gone with the Wind*, Mitchell wrote: "Life's under no obligation to give us what we expect. We take what we get and are thankful it's no worse than it is."

Fifty years ago this notion that there is no underlying plan to our existence was revolutionary. Now, however, this concept is such an integral part of our consciousness it provides most of the fodder for American comedy.

Ethel Diamond, Aristotle would have liked Oprah (1999) p. 146

What distinguished Greece was that its writers and thinkers attempted, with the birth of schools of philosophy in the fourth century BC, to rationalize human existence and death. Rather than throw themselves at the mercy of ill-defined gods and demons, these philosophers subjected ancient beliefs to logic and reason. The Greeks invented the philosophical question and were no longer content to believe that the gods moved in mysterious ways, one minute sending floods and earth quakes, the next rains and fertile soil. They began the search for coherent explanation to the world that did not rest upon arbitrary whims and ritualistic sacrifices but which placed the emphasis on human acts and a divinely ordained plan of right and wrong.

Peter Stanford, *The Devil: A Biography* (1996) p.17

A different kind of spelling:

When a teacher at a High School in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, became "mysteriously" sick, fifteen year old student Brandi Blackbear was brought in for strong and detailed interrogation by assistant principal Charles Bushyhead. Blackbear confessed she had read books about the Wicca religion from the school library and admitted she "might" be Wiccan. Now a federal lawsuit filed against the school charges that Bushyhead suspended Blackbear for two weeks as "a direct threat to the school," sequestered her notebooks, and stopped her from drawing or wearing any Wiccan signs in school, because he concluded she had "put a curse" on the stricken teacher.

Blackbear denies casting any spells. Her family insists she is Roman Catholic. "It's hard for me to believe that in the year 2000 I am walking into court to defend my daughter against charges of witchcraft brought by her own school," her father commented. The attorney for the school district was eager to speak about the case, but was barred from giving explanations by laws protecting students and minors.

(Reuters; Tulsa World)



Sexual Freedom

The humanist stance on choice and pleasure Introduction

One of my most memorable experiences as an editor of *Free Inquiry* was strolling along the canals of Amsterdam with senior editors Vern and Bonnie Bullough during the 1992 World Humanist Congress. The two of them walked hand-in-hand throughout the famed Red Light District, reminiscing about the various houses they had visited while researching their 1987 book *Women and Prostitution: A Social History* (Prometheus Books). I was touched by their obvious concern for the individuals they had interviewed and their open-minded attitude about sexuality. What a perfect marriage! I thought.

The Bulloughs were not unique in being both humanists and sexologists. The freethinker Alfred Kinsey, for instance, became a pioneer in the field in 1938 when he was asked to teach a noncredit course on marriage by the Indiana University Association of Women Students.

A zoologist by profession, specializing in the study of wasps, Kinsey was shocked by the paucity of information available on the topic. He began to do empirical research that exploded many of the most widely held beliefs about human sexual behavior in American society. His associate Wardell Pomeroy was later inducted into the prestigious International Academy of Humanism. As Jared Diamond's new book, *Why Is Sex Fun?* (Basic Books), shows, there is no end of fascination to describing the various ways in which members of the *homo sapiens* species engage in sexual congress.

In addition to this descriptive aspect, there is also a *prescriptive* aspect to humanism's examination of sexuality, best exemplified by John Stuart Mill's dictum that whatever consenting adults choose to do in the privacy of their own home is nobody's business but their own. This libertarian attitude has often come into conflict with the more proscriptive attitudes of traditional religions, and it is not surprising that the humanist movement has been in the forefront of liberalizing laws that restrict sexual expression, as can be witnessed by several of the following articles. (Editors note: these articles will be published in subsequent FIG Leaves.)

While sexual pleasure is a good in and of itself, one must be careful not to see it as an all-purpose panacea. As the psychologist Mihaly

Csikszentmihalyi points out in his new book *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement With Everyday Life* (Basic Books):

One of the cultural achievements of this century has been the rediscovery of the importance of "good sex" for a good life. However, as usual, the pendulum has swung too far: sexuality has been decontextualized from the rest of experience, and people have accepted the erroneous notion that liberal doses of sex will make them happy. Variety and frequency of sexual encounters have taken precedence over the depth and intensity of the relationship in which they are embedded.

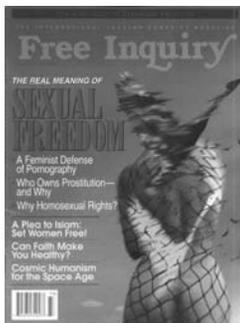
A concern for other human needs, such as intimacy, commitment, and caring, as well as an emphasis on personal responsibility, are key elements to the humanist worldview.

Still, humanism begins with the supposition that pleasure is something to be pursued, not avoided. As the saying goes, life is not a dress rehearsal. Or to quote that famous humanist philosopher Mae West, "Too much of a good thing is great!" From Epicurus to Voltaire to Bertrand Russell, humanist philosophers have not just striven to understand human sexuality, but also to change the laws of society so that people could pursue that which gives them pleasure. The burden of proof should rest on those who claim that sex is bad, not—as has so often been the case—on those who find it a good.

As Vern and Bonnie wrote in their Prometheus book *Sexual Attitudes: Myths and Realities* (finished shortly before Bonnie's untimely death): "The Church Fathers regarded sex as, at best, something to be tolerated, a necessary evil out of which procreation resulted. The dominant Western attitudes have been conditioned by these beliefs ever since. Americans, whether or not they are Christians, are heirs to this tradition, and understanding this background might help us to come to terms with our own ambiguous feelings about sex." The illustration on our cover by Elka Kazmierczak is a beautiful expression of the *humanist* approach to sexuality—breaking free from the netting of dogmas and restrictions. To quote Alfred Kinsey: "The living world is a continuum...the sooner we learn this concerning human behavior the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex."

Timothy Madigan

Republished by permission from the Free Inquiry Magazine, Fall, 1997



Sexual Freedom

How Women Have Changed Sex It's not what it used to be—it's better

Vern L. Bullough

Women have been the driving force behind the radical changes in American sexual behavior in the last half of the twentieth century. Women's attitudes toward sexuality and sexual behavior have changed and forced a response from males. The key element in the change has been a woman's ability to exercise greater control over her body.

Society itself has held varying attitudes toward female sexuality. In the nineteenth century, middle-class women in a growing industrial society, denied entrance into the workplace, accepted a redefinition of the female role. They became not only mothers, but moral guardians of society. It was their mission to bring culture to a crass male-dominated society and to provide a moral point of view in the discussion of issues.

This was the engine that fueled the movement for women's suffrage. Women were needed as voters, not because they were equal to men, but because they represented society's highest values. It was no accident that women heavily influenced the politics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the demand for prohibition of alcohol, the abolition of prostitution, the greater protection of women and children, the rise of censorship of pornography (the list could go on), all of which became part of the campaign of the right to vote. Often they had to grit their teeth to do so, since one result of censorship was to ban abortion and the dissemination of contraceptive information.

Much of the struggle of feminism in the twentieth century has been spent in trying to get rid of this cultural and social baggage that had proved so useful. Perhaps the real change began in the Second World War when the shortage of males enabled women to do things previously denied to them. Although the end of the war, and the desire of both men and women to start long-delayed families set back the employment gains of the war, they were not entirely forgotten, and growing dissatisfaction among women became common in the late 1950s, particularly as children reached school age. Large numbers joined the workforce. They were however, second-class workers, and humanist Betty Friedan

voiced the frustrations of many women and sounded a clarion call for change.

There was growing research on women's sexuality by Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues. The turning point occurred in 1960 with the pill, which, coupled with the newly improved intra-uterine device, gave women greater freedom in planning families. The culmination was the legalization of abortion. It was in the 1960's also that William Masters and Virginia Johnson emphasized the essential sexual nature of women.

Recognizing women as sexual creatures means that they had to accept responsibility for sexual decisions, and both sexes are still coming to terms with the new rules. As one who teaches college men and women on issues such as these, I have noted a sea change in attitude. But there still exists a kind of double standard that might label a young woman who says "Yes" as *too* willing.

The growing movement for female sexual freedom also has some negative consequences. Not only college women have signed onto the acceptance of female sexuality, but high school and middle school girls as well. Our society accepts the bombardment of advertisements emphasizing sexual allurements, and even young girls are responding to biological urges. Unfortunately, only abstinence training, which has the greatest failure rate of any kind of birth control, is allowed in the public schools. The result is a growth in unmarried teenage pregnancy.

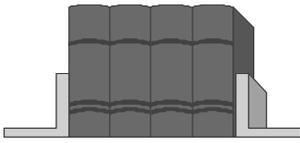
Women, in short, have been recognized and now accept themselves as very sexual creatures. The problem is for both males and females to adjust to this new open sexuality, and to depict the possibilities and pitfalls in more realistic terms to our young.

Vern L. Bullough, along with his late wife, Bonnie Bullough, has written extensively on sex research, including Sexual Attitudes: Myths and Realities and Contraception: A Guide to Birth Control Methods (Prometheus Books).

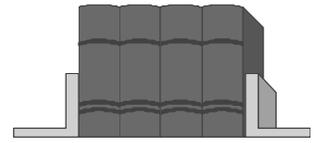
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Coming Next Month: Sex and God: Is Religion Twisted? Behold the age-old antagonism toward all things sexual, by James A. Haught





Book Reviews



This House has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria
by Karl Maier
(New York: Public Affairs, 2000)

"The combatants invoke the name of God to justify their cause but by doing so they question their enemy's place in the world. The addition of ethnicity and power politics to the religious frenzy invariably produces an inflammable cocktail." (p. 143) The history of Israel? Northern Ireland? Or Bosnia and Kosovo? No, this is about Nigeria, and a sad story it is.

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, became independent in 1960 after some seventy years of British rule. The country harbors some 400 ethnic-linguistic groups, most of them quite small and local, but several with populations in the tens of millions. The northern two-thirds of this new country has been Islamic since the middle ages. During the colonial period, this region rejected the ministrations of Christian missionaries, who were most active in the south. Missionaries, however, founded schools, and brought literacy and education. At the end of the colonial period the southern regions were way ahead of the north in educated manpower. Further imbalances existed in the economy, the military, in commerce, and other institutions. The north had reason to fear domination by southerners, while the south feared rule by an illiterate northern majority in a democratically elected legislature.

Nigerian democracy did not last six years. Except for a brief period of four years the military has ruled Nigeria since 1966. Coups followed counter-coups, and assassinations of leaders helped along the change of governments. Military governments have been spectacularly corrupt, as have most governments in Africa. Soldiers and civilians with an "in" lived in considerable comfort, while corruption fueled inflation impoverished the salaried classes. For the rural poor not much changed, except that their level of living fell back to what it had been before and during colonial occupation. It is endemic under these circumstances that people in each region suspect that all the best jobs, benefits, and other goodies end up in another region, ethnic group, or religious community.

Maier is a journalist with a real penchant for getting out into the country and a need to understand what is going on and motivating the people. He sees a growing religious fundamentalism among a people for whom the future does not hold many promises. Especially radicalized are the educated young, who see no place for themselves in a society where all the good positions are reserved for the friends and relatives of the ruling leaders.

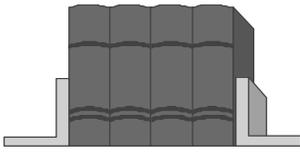
In the north this takes the form of a demand for the introduction of Sharia the law written out in the Koran. This would introduce yet a third legal system in the country, i.e. traditional ethnic common law, and English colonial, essentially Christian, legal concepts. In theory, Sharia would only apply to Muslim persons, but many Islamic experts doubt that Koranic Law could operate effectively or properly in a secular state. While the north is traditionally and predominantly Muslim, both Christian and traditional communities persist in the region. Maier describes cases of pogroms, riots, civil disorder, and street warfare. He writes of death tolls in the thousands, and entire neighborhoods which have been "religiously cleaned." Maier also describes Christian fundamentalist evangelists heightening the antagonism with their preaching.

People of the wrong faith in the wrong place flee back to their home region. There they, and their compatriots will retaliate against Muslim northerners in their midst. Accusations are hurled against each other. The media, and Nigeria has a lively press, support one or the other side thereby widening and deepening suspicion and violence.

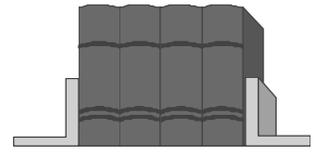
I have the impression Maier is carefully searching for something hopeful to say about Nigeria's future. Not much occurs.

Wolf Roder





Book Reviews



***A World Full of Gods:
The Strange Triumph of Christianity***
by Keith Hopkins
(New York: The Free Press, 1999)

At issue is the question why and how the rather incredible religion of Jesus of Nazareth became the national creed of the declining Roman Empire. Classical antiquity, the world of Caesar and Cicero, of Epikur, Ovid, and Lucretius was a world full of gods. The Roman Empire which surrounded the Mediterranean Sea was about the size of the United States. It was a country of many tribes, tongues, and religions. Ethnic group, religion and language usually went together and were thus legitimated in the eyes of the government. The Empire generally tolerated all creeds as long as they made obeisance to the head of the nation by making a symbolic sacrifice for the god or godlike Emperor.

Hopkins goes to considerable effort to make us aware of the ordinary life in classical times. He fashions a science fiction like narrative of a couple traveling back in time to Pompeii, Ephesus and Rome. It is important to understand the life of the ordinary and poor people of the time, for it is among these that the curious offspring of the Israelite National Religion spread. We visit the slave market, the Colosseum, private homes, a wedding, and other places with the time travelers. Most of all we observe the Religion of the time. Religion was public in the Empire, ceremonies, temples, processions were open to all. Religion was polytheistic, and few believers had difficulty acknowledging the other gods of the various ethnicities and cults of the land.

Christians in considerable contrast held their ceremonies not in public, but in private homes. Christians had no ethnic base, no national standing. Its own Jewish parentage denied this illegitimate offspring. What is more, the Christians refused to sacrifice for the Emperor, and denied all gods but their own. Christians did accept all persons as equals, practiced mutual aid in brotherhood, and gave respect and honor to the poor and women. Aspects which helped the spread of the creed.

Hopkins examines the internecine strife among the Christians. It was by no means a simple or certain history that the orthodoxy of what became

Catholicism won out, if only in western Rome. One of the earliest schismatics, one who broke with Judaism was Marcion of Sinope (100-160). He rejected the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures, but also most of the New Testament including the myths of divine incarnation and resurrection. Marcion accepted only a version of the Gospel of Luke and ten of the letters of Paul. His followers practiced baptism and celebrated the Eucharist. Marcion's form of Christianity was suppressed after the orthodox became the state religion in 312 CE.

The author has considerable difficulty providing a balanced account of the growth of Christianity. History is written by the victors, and the books, the thought, and the beliefs of the losers were destroyed. In this case the most important among the losers called themselves gnostics, i.e. the knowing ones. It was their belief that divine reality was not found in "the straitjacket of Jewish ethnic myth or the ethically doubtful thoughts and exploits of the God of the Old Testament." (p. 85) The truth had to be found in every human soul. Each person could through self-knowledge advance to an understanding of god. Their writings were completely and utterly destroyed.

In was in the struggle with the gnostics and with other "subversive" and "heretical" sects that orthodoxy defined itself as a teaching reserved to the hierarchy. The truth was what was pronounced by the bishops, especially by those who were later accepted as church fathers, and by what was concluded at the great church councils. Ultimate authority came to be vested in the Bishop of Rome, who was mythologized as the direct successor to the Apostle Peter.

The Bible, or better those writings which were eventually incorporated into the "official" New Testament in the fourth century are the result of disputations with those labeled heretics. They are writings of advocacy, not of history. After the recognition of orthodox Christianity as the national religion, the gnostic and other deviationists were suppressed.

Wolf Roder



January Meeting Review

Dr. Barbara Lynn Eisenstadt addressed the Free Inquiry Group on December 19th, 200, at the Vernon Manor Hotel. The title of her presentation was 'Sex and Humanism - Delight or Depravity?' Dr. Eisenstadt has a Phd. in education and extensive experience as a therapist for substance abuse and sexual dysfunction.

The highly interactive presentation involved a mixture of exercises and discussion. In the first exercise, volunteers from the audience were asked to rank each other by the number of times that each person had 'been in love.' Since the various participants did not know each other well, it was interesting to note how they made their evaluations based on appearances. The persons who went later also had the advantage of knowing how the other ranked themselves, yet they seemed to not take full advantage of this information.

The volunteers for the second exercise were asked to rank each other according to the number of people that they had 'taught about sex.' This exercise required a bit more thought since several of the participants were known to be teachers and/or parents. As in the first exercise, it showed that there were various interpretations of the question.

Dr. Eisenstadt then challenged segments of the audience to identify the sources of sexual ethics. Religion, culture, and law were most commonly named. We then discussed the appropriate, or at least accepted, forms of sexual expression in our society. It was noted that each society has its own standards in that regard.

The subsequent discussion covered a wide range of topics. People described the first time that they became aware of their own sexuality. The prominent role of power in sexual relationships was discussed. We also talked about whether monogamy was a natural state for humans. That discussion was not conclusive, but there were enough negative examples to seriously question the prevalence of monogamous relationships.

The evening closed on a more philosophical note as different members of the audience attempted to define love. There was not a single definition of love that everyone could agree to, but perhaps we know it when we see it.

Philip Ferguson

It ain't the parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.

- Mark Twain

Wilma Mankiller to Speak

FIG is pleased to announce that they will co-sponsor Wilma Mankiller's appearance at the Woman's City Club. Ms. Mankiller will speak at the Plum Street Temple, at Eighth and Plum Streets, on Monday, March 19, 2000, at 7:30 p.m.

"Wilma Mankiller, this woman with the powerful name, was once described as a cross between a humanitarian, a saint, and Dirty Harry. In her role as the first female chief of the Cherokee Nation, she needed every one of those qualities to succeed.

Mankiller governed a tribe of 137,000 citizens, supervised a staff of 800 workers, and managed a budget of \$52 million during her tenure as Nation Chief. She is given credit for helping the Cherokees achieve greater social, economic and educational goals than had ever happened before in the 20th century.

Her leadership focused on restoring a sense of pride, heritage, and confidence to her people. The success of her crusade elevated her in many eyes to the status of the most heroic Cherokee leader known since Chief Sequoia.

In March, Mankiller will headline the Women's City Club's National Speaker Fundraiser at Plum Street Temple. She will share with us her gift for championing the needs and abilities of women. As a captivating storyteller, Mankiller knows how to engage her audience with inspiring insights and gentle humor."

"The radicalization of identity which makes cultures resistant to any beneficial influence from outside is worrying enough; but no less perilous is the slavish conformity of cultures, or at least key aspects of them, to cultural models derived from the Western world view. Detached from their Christian origins, these models are often inspired by an approach to life marked by secularism and practical atheism and by patterns of radical individualism. This is a phenomenon of vast proportions, sustained by powerful media campaigns and designed to propagate lifestyles, social and economic programs, and in the last analysis, a comprehensive Worldview which erodes from within other estimable cultures and civilizations."

Pope John Paul II

Let a wave of intolerance wash over you. I want you to let a wave of hatred wash over you. Yes, hate is good.... If a Christian voted for Clinton, he sinned against God. It's that simple.... Our goal is a Christian Nation...we have a biblical duty, we are called by God to conquer this country. We don't want equal time. We don't want Pluralism. We want theocracy. Theocracy means God rules. I've got a hot flash. God rules. [Randall Terry, Head of Operation Rescue, Fort Wane, Indiana, August 15, 1993]

