

FIG Leaves

November 1999

November Meeting

The FIG meeting on Tuesday, November 16, at 7:00 p.m. at the Geier Center, will feature a presentation by Steven Schafersman on "The Intelligent Design Argument: It's Origin, Death, and Resurrection." This talk will cover the history of the theist/creationist argument from design, the fine-tuning argument, and the anthropic cosmological principle, focusing on the arguments of design proponents (Paley, Ross, Swinburne, Schroeder, Davies), the philosophical refutations of them (Hume, Grunbaum, Drange, Smith), and the scientific refutations of them (Darwin, Dawkins, Weinberg, Stenger). For a number of reasons that will be discussed, the various versions of the design argument are currently very hot topics among creationists, theist philosophers and scientists, cosmologists, and popular science writers and readers. Come and find out why, and learn the latest thinking about this subject.



Steven Schafersman has been Visiting Assistant Professor of Geology at Miami University since 1994. He will be joining the faculty of the University of Texas of the Permian Basin in January, 2000 CE. Steven is a member of FIG, ART, CSH, AHA, and CSICOP, and has long been active in both local and national skeptical and humanist activities. He is a CSICOP Scientific and Technical Consultant. He founded the Houston Association for Scientific Thinking, a CSICOP local group, and was a co-founder of the Humanists of Houston, an AHA chapter. He started the Texas Council for Science Education, a NCSE group, to oppose creationism in Texas and to improve high school science textbooks. Trained in evolutionary paleontology and historical geology, he is a science teaching professor and has devoted the last several years to developing instructional materials for use on the World Wide Web. He is the web administrator for the American Humanist

FIG Discussion Group

Date: December 1, Wednesday.

Place: Ethiopian restaurant (Addis Zemen) 421-2557
where Clifton Ave dead ends into McMillan Ave

Time: 7-9 pm

Purpose: Discussion and dinner

Topic: What is truth? Part 1: Belief

Optional Homework: 2 Articles included with
this issue of FIG Leaves:

- (i) The belief engine, James Alcock
- (ii) Some systematic biases of everyday judgement,
Thomas Gilovich

Format: focus discussion around the topic (not only the articles)

Facilitators: William Jensen and Gary Weiss

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Events



Speaker

Steven Schafersman
Tuesday, November 16
at 7:00 PM
Geier Center

Potluck Dinner

Tuesday, December 14
at 6:30 PM

OCTOBER SPEAKER

Dr. Anil Menon, Assistant Professor at U.C.'s Department of Molecular Genetics, Biochemistry and Microbiology, was the featured speaker at the October meeting of the Free Inquiry Group. He shared the results of his research into one of the genetic components of essential hypertension. Dr. Menon described how the regulation of blood pressure has a number of separate genetic components because it is so vital to survival. A variation (allele) in any one of these genes may create a predisposition to hypertension, but the influence of one allele is obscured by the effects of the environment and other genes. Sorting this out requires detective work that draws upon multiple disciplines such as chemistry, history, and statistics.

Dr. Menon then described the way in which the scientific method was applied in his research. Hypertension is quite prevalent among African-Americans, leading researchers to search for a genetic component that originated in Africa. His group started by analyzing genetic material from the African-American community in Cincinnati. They found a correlation between the incidence of hypertension and an allele of a gene suspected to regulate sodium (and thus blood volume) in the kidneys. This correlation was confirmed in a genetic survey of the Gullah population in South Carolina. One hypothesis theorized that this allele was artificially selected by the slave trade, specifically the ability to survive diseases such as cholera on slave ships. A genetic survey of various African populations was then carried out to confirm or deny this hypothesis.

The African research found the suspect allele in desert populations, but it was much less common in coastal populations. Historical research supported the supposition that African-Americans are largely descended from these inland populations. The fact that the frequency of the allele is not significantly greater in the African-American population than among the African desert dwellers tends to weaken the 'slave ship' hypothesis. Instead, the evidence supports an alternate hypothesis based on natural selection of the allele to conserve water in a dry environment. This knowledge may lead to better methods for the prevention and treatment of hypertension, a leading cause of death. Once again, the free pursuit of the science stands to improve our quality of life.

The presentation was followed by a lively question and answer session.

Philip Ferguson 🍀

WHAT IS TRUTH?

Review of a talk by Prof. Arnold Wilson
25 May 1999, Free Inquiry Group

by Steven Schafersman

Jesus: "For this purpose was I born and for this I entered the world, that I might testify to the truth. Every one who loves the truth listens to My voice."

Pilate: "What is truth?" (John 18:37-38)

Jesus gave him no answer.

Nietzsche later wrote that Pilate's response, and Jesus' silence, annihilates the premise of Christianity.

Arnold Wilson is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cincinnati, Executive Editor of the journal *Teaching Philosophy*, and serves as faculty advisor of the UC Skeptics (which he helped to found). In this talk, he recounted the views of truth and knowledge that have guided and frequently misguided so much of Western thinking, particularly Plato's legacy, the problem of deductive chauvinism, and the impasse between ethical relativism and absolutism.

Wilson began with a critical but nonjudgmental history of epistemology (philosophy of knowledge and truth). The first rigorous epistemologists were the Pythagoreans who believed that the immortality of one's soul and one's personal nobility were aided by the acquisition of knowledge, especially such universal, eternal truths as the Pythagorean Theorem. The Pythagoreans influenced both Parmenides and Plato. Parmenides, recognizing that there are two kinds of knowledge, being and opinion, shunned the way of opinion and pursued the way of being as the path to truthful knowledge. He seems to be supporting a logical and empirical view.

Plato, on the other hand, believed that true knowledge was to be found in a transcendental realm of forms, dimly perceived by humans in their sensory world (as if one viewed shadows on the wall of a cave). Knowledge of these transcendental forms can be found only by the mind, not by sensory (empirical) investigation. We are born with the ability to recognize truth but must rediscover how to do it. Plato, an idealist, opposed the materialists who tried to understand and explain reality without animism (a spirit or ideal entity, being, or substance hiding in the outward material object).

FIG Leaves Volume 8, Issue 11, November 1999 - Editors welcome thoughtful articles, letters, reviews, reports, anecdotes, and cartoons. Submit in electronic format via Internet to fig@goCreate.com 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. © 1999 The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. FIG Board of Directors: President George Maurer, Vice President Edwin Kagin, Secretary Helen Kagin, Treasurer Joe Levee, Members: Nurit Bowman, Lyse Hurd, Tim Kelly, Inez Klein, Robert Riehemann, Gary



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(What is Truth?, continued from page 2)

Materialist philosophers recognized a natural necessity, but Plato said there was an intelligence behind this necessity that materialists ignored. This was the origin of the concept of Logos, the Word, that many Greek philosophers believed to underlie reality (and that later influenced Christian doctrine when Hellenistic philosophy was combined with Judaic theology).

Plato said that the world was one of appearances, with a hidden underlying truth. Aristotle wanted to make this world knowable. Aristotle was infected with "Pluto's Plague," the elusive and perhaps quixotic quest to gain demonstrative and certain knowledge of the world, something Plato claimed was difficult to impossible to achieve. According to Aristotle, such knowledge could be gained by syllogism: if one possesses true premises, one can deduce both true and new knowledge using logical deductive arguments. Further, Aristotle believed in essentialism, the doctrine that every object has an underlying essence, so we can hope to achieve real and demonstrative true knowledge by comprehending essences. For example, Euclid's geometry identified a few basic axioms (essential truths) and organized all other known geometrical truths as deductions from them. Aristotle thus endorsed an axiomatic system as the best model to discover true knowledge.

The philosophical axiomatic system that simple syllogism from true premises will guarantee truth by deductive logic is termed "foundationalism." Although started by Aristotle, many other philosophers and scientists have used foundationalism to establish and support their philosophies. For example, Thomas Aquinas created Roman Catholic theological dogma using axioms and deductive reasoning, a philosophy termed Thomism. Spinoza tried to establish an axiomatic system of ethics. Newton in his Principia mathematically deduced physical laws from a few basic axioms. Descartes deduced demonstrative truths from a few simple axiomatic truths. For centuries following Aristotle, real knowledge meant using foundationalism, logical deduction from axiomatic premises, and science (presumably to empirically discover true premises in those cases in which the truth of the premise was not obvious!) to guarantee certainty. This foundationalist program, and the idea that to have true knowledge you must have a foundation, was termed "deductive chauvinism" by Wilson.

What is the real measure of certainty that humans can have? John Stuart Mill challenged deductive chauvinism and promoted inductive reasoning as the real source of new knowledge. In his view, no new truths or new knowledge can be gained by axiomatization, i.e. putting knowledge on a foundation from which further truths are deduced, because new truths are not contained in the old truths and thus cannot be axiomatically deduced from them. The debate among

philosophers about the sources of truthful knowledge continues to this day.

Neo-platonism was adopted by early Christianity: the ideal world is the true world, while our sensory world is an imagined world. The existence of heaven, hell, good, evil, the entire transcendental realm of the supernatural was conceivable and explainable under neo-platonism. Later, Aquinas attempted to merge the logical rigor of Aristotle with neo-platonic church dogma (surely the most awkward of syntheses), to make Catholic theological irrationalities more acceptable to thinking persons. Later, Gassendi attempted to do the same for Democratus, Epicurus, etc. in the sixteenth century. The goal of both was to make new anti-Christian (i.e. materialist, skeptical, relativist) ideas palatable to Christians.

Platonic or neo-platonic ideas continue to have great popular appeal among religious folk. They think: God is guaranteeing certain truths and then allowing us to discover others by logical analysis and empirical investigation. For example, mathematical axioms are "ideas in the mind of God"; moral truths are inside of us: we can "hear God speaking to us through our conscience." By this neo-platonic program, religious individuals want (and can have) their moral knowledge to be as true and certain as scientific knowledge. Even our language is constructed in a way that implies that we can obtain truth and use logical ideals; it gives us a sense of certainty or logical necessity.

Modern philosophers, however, such as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Sartre, have destroyed this sense of certainty and necessity and replaced it with an existential uncertainty, ambiguity, and relativism, ideas that are absolutely opposed to the neo-platonic ideals of religious theism. Even Aristotle warned against trying to find greater certainty in answers and solutions than is reasonably possible. Modern students must learn to appreciate ambiguity, relative truths, and skepticism of authorities. Modern science, for example, does not assert greater confidence in our knowledge than we actually have, a concept opposed by most transcendental religions, that typically promise absolute, cosmic, and ultimate truth. Wilson agrees with Protagoras that humans are the measure of what is and what is not. He acknowledges that objective

	Wells Didlick will be speaking about "Consciousness" to the Greater Meaning Discussion Group. The group will meet at 7:30 on Sunday, November 14, at the First Unitarian Church at Linton and Reading.										





Letters to the Editor

E-mail fig@goCreate.com

Mail Editor, FIG Leaves, P.O. Box 8128, Cincinnati OH 45208

To: Free Inquiry Group Editors
From: Mr. Andrew O. Lutes
Re: Ventura interview
Date: October, 1999

Governor Jesse Ventura of Minnesota was wrong in what he said in his interview in a pornographic magazine. He said, quote: "Organized religion is a...crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers." This is not true. What about the strong minded people we all know who are religious? Many of us are acquainted with Joe Gastright, a religious person who is a member of the Association for Rational Thought, another local organization. He has investigated many paranormal

claims, showing them to have normal explanations. Joe deserves to be compared with Martin Gardner, another person of faith who has shown a strong mind and outstanding rational activity. We may not agree with Joe or Martin about religion, but we know they aren't weak minded.

Ventura also erred when he said he "understood" the Tailhook scandal, saying that those who "live on the... edge and defy death" don't consider groping a bad thing. What if rugged homosexuals who worked in dangerous professions groped Ventura? I doubt that he'd be "understanding" about it! But the kind of exploitation the women took in the Tailhook incident is exactly the equivalent kind of exploitation Ventura would feel if homosexuals groped him!

Watching TV

(From the SANE e-mail list, for the amusement of FIG Leaves readers.)

Richard L Smith <windhook@proaxis.com>: I'm sure that some people have been affected adversely by watching too much TV or even the 'wrong' shows. . . .

Wolf Roder <wolf.roder@uc.edu>: There is actually a great deal of research on the effects of TV watching, though I can't put my finger on it easily. This research is strongly questioned because cause and effect can not easily be connected. And of course powerful commercial interests dispute the findings as well.

John E Fischer <fischerj@one.net>: Is there really any need to look further than the number of dollars that companies spend for commercials? I feel quite sure that large companies are quite sure that the commercials they use will affect the people watching (read sell more of their product or service) or they would not spend the bucks!

Wolf Roder <wolf.roder@uc.edu>: This is quite true, and advertising does work and research shows it does. But, advertising has three functions: . . . (3) persuasion, buy this not something else, buy it now not later, this will enhance your image, etc. There is a great deal of problem in disentangling these functions to know what works, especially how persuasion works.

Steven Schafersman <schafesd@freeinquiry.com>: I'm delighted to see that Wolf is capable of being persuaded to change his views, by trenchant argument if not by television advertisement. First he appeared to doubt the efficacy of advertising by pointing out that the research supporting it "is strongly questioned because cause and effect can not easily be connected" and the

relationship between violent television entertainment and violent behavior is disputed. Really? Then, after being reminded that giant corporations spend billions of dollars on television advertising, he acknowledges that "advertising does work and research shows it does."

Well, good for him: of course advertising works and of course research shows it does. Can American capitalism be wrong? Another example of our implicit belief in advertising's efficacy is the fact that presidential and congressional candidates for next year's elections will raise and spend over \$550 million on media advertising, double what was spent in 1996. The cost-effectiveness of advertising is one fact on which both Democrats and Republicans agree, and if they both agree, how can we not also.

But what about Wolf's statement that "powerful commercial interests dispute the findings" of the effects of violent television persuading one to violent behavior. He is referring to the television corporations themselves, who deny their complicity in the increase in violent activity among the young in our society, allegedly the result of years of violent television programming (and even more violent video and computer games, most sold by these same multimedia corporations). Now, how can these giant corporations on the one hand say that their violent television programming DOES NOT persuade young people to act more violently, but on the other say that television advertising (from which they profit) DOES persuade young television viewers to buy their sponsors' commercial products. Well, that's easy to explain: these giant corporations are hypocrites. They want to have things (and fully expect to get things) both ways. That is, they want to keep getting the lucrative profits from television advertising and game sales, but they don't want responsibility for corrupting an entire generation of



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(Watching T.V., continued from page 4)

nation's youth. I am curious to see how long they can keep getting things both ways. With the money, power, size, human resources, and political influence the colossal multinational entertainment corporations now have, I imagine they will hypocritically but profitably survive for a long, long time.

I trust everyone understands that young people are much more easily influenced, persuaded, misled, manipulated, etc., than adults. Once they have gained the skills of critical thinking and learned to question authority, they are then adults and no longer so easily persuaded. Right? (Ah, if it were only so!) The effectiveness of authoritarian influence and persuasive techniques--by parents, peers, television entertainment, video games, books, ministers, politicians, TV evangelists, etc.--is easily demonstrated by the fact that 90% of the American people believe in the most abject, implausible, fatuous, mythical, even cruel superstitious nonsense--you know what I mean: every superstition from the lowest to the highest. Humans undoubtedly are influenced by their environment, especially by authorities (for reasons that are well known), and most individuals never lose this credulity by developing a capacity for critical thinking and skepticism of authority as adults.

Although the U.S. has always been a violent society, and our modern mass media quickly popularizes and magnifies the extent and frequency of violence, I believe that violent activity among the young has increased in the last two decades due to their exposure to extreme violence on television, video games, computer games, movies, rock music recordings, and comic books. For the most part, adults can experience this stuff more easily without going postal, since they have a better grip on the difference between fiction and reality (but not that much better--witness the popularity

of X-Files and Rush Limbaugh). Nevertheless, while I understand and support the First Amendment, I think it would be reasonable to restrict the availability of such violent material for young people. At the very least, parents should be able to control its access by their children, since they and their children (NOT the giant corporations) are ultimately responsible for their actions, however much their behavior is persuaded by television programming. But they have that control now, you say? Perhaps, but could society make it easier for them to exert it?

Many of you must have seen the full-page ads in the New York Times, such as the October 20 edition, with Steve Allen and a headline that exclaims, "TV Is Leading Children Down A Moral Sewer." Steve has formed the Parents Television Council, an organization that objects to "fine companies that use their ad dollars to send TV filth, vulgarity, coarse humor, premarital sex situations, violence, killings, and all the rest into American living rooms and children's bedrooms." The ad tells us these facts: the National Institute of Mental Health and seven more national organizations say there is overwhelming evidence that violent entertainment causes violent behavior; homicide rates doubled in 10-15 years after TV was first introduced into specific areas of the U.S. and Canada; 22-34% of young felons imprisoned for violent crimes said they consciously imitated crime techniques learned from watching television programs. I think Steve Allen is on the right track, and I support his effort to ask readers to write to television sponsors asking them to refrain buying ads for such programs.

In the end, of course, television producers have the right to produce such violent shows, and parents should be taking responsibility for what their children watch. If parents don't, then perhaps society should. As a good liberal, I believe in government regulation for legitimate and worthy societal goals. For example, we should be able to protect our cultural environment by

DID SHE REALLY SAY "YES"?

by Michael Shermer

Okay, let's all take a deep breath. A bunch of you hammered me for bringing up the very tragic death of Cassie Bernal in the Columbine murders, and her very emotionally touching story about the courage of her conviction to say "yes" in the face of death from a killer who asked her if she believes in God. I know this is an EXTREMELY sensitive issue, and I absolutely mean to cause no pain to anyone, especially her family, but I'm just pointing out what has already come out and is rapidly becoming a controversy since the mythic nature of the story was broken by Salon magazine. I was just in Denver yesterday and this is already an explosive issue.

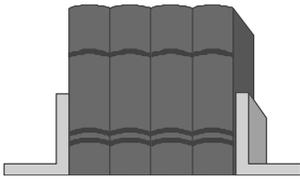
Peter Boyle, the number one talk show in Denver, boasted to me of being the first to break the story on the air and he's been hammering on it ever since. Below I have posted the story for you all to read, with other sources. The controversy brewing this week is why the Denver media did not report the story when they apparently had good information and reliable sources that the entire story is a bad misunderstanding that has become a myth of epic proportions.

There are several reasons that this story should concern us:

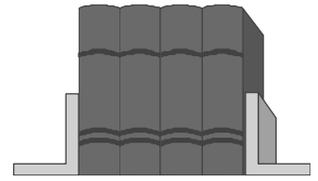
1. Many Christian groups are trying to portray this mass murder as an atheist-believer divide, and the sort of madman/amoral actions of nonbelievers (because without God what would stop any of us from murdering our fellow humans, goes the reasoning--and yes, people really do make this argument: I have heard this in every talk I have ever given on God and religion.) Frankly I'm

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Book Reviews



The Double Helix: A Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA

by **James D. Watson**

Signet 1968, 143 pages

Evolution! The word is in the news every day. Kansas has removed the concept from their state science requirements and Kentucky has removed the word from some of its official documents produced by the Department of Education. Yet it has been the unifying principle behind biology for 140 years, since Darwin's 1859 book, *The Origin of Species*.

It was Gregor Mendel's discovery in 1865 that statistical thinking applied to the observable traits of successive generations might give us information about organisms. As quoted in *The Eighth Day of Creation*, by Horace Freeland Judson, Mendel wrote: "Among all experiments made, not one has been carried out to such an extent and in such a way as to make it possible to determine the number of different forms under which the offspring of hybrids appear, or to arrange these forms with certainty according to their separate generations, or definitely to ascertain their statistical relations." And so Mendel did his experiments with peas and genetics was born. But it was another 35 years before anyone noticed.

There are other tremendous problems in biology: development---how the egg turns into the organism. Why, when the initial egg cell divides, do the cells differentiate? Some become heart cells, some brain cells, others muscle cells---where is the plan for all of this fantastic complexity? Regeneration and embryology were problems that a smart kid from Lexington, Kentucky, Thomas Hunt Morgan, was working on when, in 1902, he switched to genetics. The problems of embryology were too difficult to attack directly and Morgan thought that genetics might shed some light on them. It was

Morgan who figured out that two X chromosomes give a female and XY gives a male. (Some say that this discovery belongs to Wilson and Stevens.) He came up with the idea of mapping distances between genes on chromosomes and received a Nobel prize in 1933.

So it was Morgan who gave us the idea that the needed information might be in the long stringy chromosome---that chromosomes are chains of genes. The discovery of the structure of this string and how it might duplicate and carry the information was due to James Watson, Francis Crick, and Maurice Wilkins in 1953. Their discovery was awarded the Nobel prize in

1962. Watson's personal version of this story is told in *The Double Helix*.

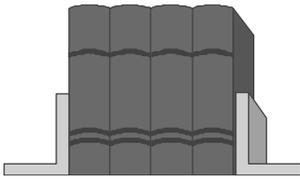
Watson took his Ph.D. locally, at Indiana, Bloomington. His undergraduate degree was in the Great Books program at Chicago. He was identified as very bright and somewhat lazy. He describes himself as avoiding all the difficult physics and chemistry courses. His book is filled with intense competitiveness which Crick and Wilkins found strange, having never noticed it themselves. The book was written in 1968, 6 years after the award and circulated among the university community for a time. When Francis Crick saw it there was talk of a law suit. Some biologists describe it as filled with petty details about the life of creative people--- a movie magazine for the intelligensia.

This is only half the truth, as even Crick realized in his own autobiographical book, *What Mad Pursuit*. There is a great deal of chemistry and science in the book and the reader comes away understanding that the physical structure of the double helix was the first example of a physical explanation for how heredity works at the level of atoms. This put Darwin's theory on a firm footing as biology. Darwin had commented that he did not know the mechanism by which selection worked in his book.

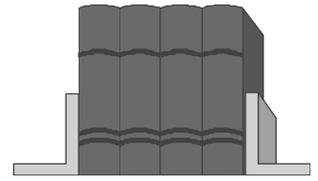
Watson discusses the chemical regularities found by Chargaff which were not finally understood until the model was almost completed. He describes the problems of interpreting the x-ray data and comments that the best resident expert on it, Rosalind Franklin, repeatedly made errors and refused to accept advice or help from others. The great chemist, Linus Pauling, is the object of intense competition and his son, who shared an office with Watson, was regularly grilled for any details about dad's work. When Pauling published an incorrect structure, Watson and Crick celebrated. Watson goes through the detail of trying to build the model and fit the various DNA base pairs together and describes the problems posed by different physical forms available for the same chemical formula. So the science is certainly not neglected. This reduction of biology to physics was the end result of Morgan's deviation from embryology and the cornerstone foundation for molecular biology. This unification and reduction is the reason that the DNA structure is called the greatest biological discovery of the 20th century. But do not expect a unified description of the chemistry and biology. Science is not the main point of the book, the discovery process from Watson's personal view is the focus.

As Watson remarked, he was inspired by the





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book, *What is Life*, written by the physicist Erwin Schrödinger in 1943 which stated, "We believe a gene---or perhaps the whole chromosome fibre---to be an aperiodic solid." DNA qualifies as the aperiodic solid. This is discussed as Delbruck's theory and Morgan had hired the physicist Delbruck to work in the California Institute of Technology's biology department which he created as its first chairman. So the complicated connections between ideas and persons which are part of the scientific process are also illustrated in the book.

The problem was that Jim Watson was not very kind in his descriptions and this upset a lot of people. The book has become so important that there is a Norton Critical Edition: *The Double Helix: A Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA* by James D. Watson and edited by Gunther S. Stent. This contains commentary on the text, copies of reviews of the original book and the original papers. It is extremely interesting for those who follow the history of science.

It is also interesting to note that the original paper which appeared in the scientific journal, *Nature*, was just a little over one page long.

Bob Riehemann

Inside Sudan: Political Islam, Conflict, and Catastrophe
by Donald Petterson
(Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999)

Why would an unbeliever, atheist, or secular humanist be interested in political conflict in the Republic of Sudan? Let me quote from the end of Petterson's introduction, (p. xi):

... at the very least, the Sudanese experience gives credence to the thesis that any government based on religious fundamentalism and intent on propagating its religious beliefs will by its nature be tyrannical, intolerant of dissent, and prepared to use any means, including violence against its own people, to maintain itself in power.

Petterson knows whereof he writes. A career foreign service officer, he was American ambassador to Sudan from 1992 to 1995. As such he was able to learn to know the country, and to convey to its highest leaders the United States position on questions at issue.

The Sudan is the largest country in Africa, about the size of the United States east of the Mississippi. It straddles the Sahara desert, with the north Arabic

speaking and Islamic, while the south is part of Black Africa. Under a British colonial regime until 1956, the country was governed largely as separate territories. The north was part of the Middle East, while the non-Islamic south was open to Christian missionary endeavors. Petterson comments at one point it might have been better to let the separate regions become independent as two countries.

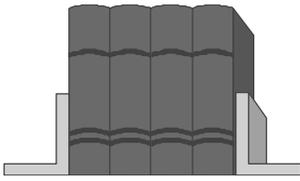
Conflict between Muslim north and Christian-animist south predates independence, and has smoldered for the past forty years, breaking into open warfare over most of this time. In a country of such contrasts, peace requires exceedingly careful handling of religion, and a powerful insistence on human rights. There have been periods in Sudan's history when reasonable approximations to these requirements were achieved, and an uneasy peace reigned. The present government, however, the National Islamic Front, is a fundamentalist regime, bent on making Islam the national religion and the Quran the guiding law book.

This government tried to induce or force Islamization on the southerners. It did not hesitate to use food, clothing, and medicine to this end. The fact that occasional western relief agencies had been caught trying to promote Christian teaching did not exactly allow them to hide behind a mantle of altruistic humanitarianism. The military on both sides of the civil war did not hesitate to appropriate aid supplies to their war making capacity. Nor did it help that the southerners themselves were at odds with one another, and several forces, often fighting among themselves, were in the field. Worse, in the process of war the ancient practice of slavery has returned, so that young boys and women are being sold in open slave markets.

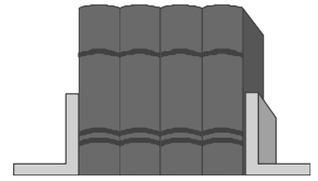
Throughout his service, over and over again, Petterson tries to lay out the American view to the Sudanese leaders. The US is mainly interested the country adopt reasonable human rights policies, and we are prepared to help the Sudan achieve a compromise peace with its south. Anyone who has ever discussed religion or evolution with a fundamentalist will appreciate what Petterson was up against. He is told over, and over, American views must be hypocritical. Look what we did to the American Indians, to Japanese-Americans, and to Blacks (p. 27). During war time the rights of individuals had to be abridged, parliamentary democracy was unsuitable for the Sudan, furtherance of Islam was morally correct (p. 44). It was necessary to expose displaced southern children to the Islam oriented national school curriculum (p. 87).

Petterson is informed, the US is anti-Sudan, is anti-Islam, and hostile to Muslims. The United States is a racist and godless society with no moral compass, and is controlled by a Jewish-Zionist lobby (p. 111), which follows





Book Reviews



the dictates of Israel (p. 160). Our country is seen as symbolizing decadent, irreligious materialism (p. 138). At

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(Inside Sudan, continued from page 7)

one point most of Sudan's neighbors tried to help negotiate a peace with the southerners, but the government proved itself as unbending with these as with the US. The Sudan absolutely rejected any discussion of self-determination, or a return to secularism. Any talk about changing Sudan's "civilizational, that is Islamic Project" would be an insult (p. 131).

At the end I feel  downright sorry for our Ambassador. The poor man must have talked himself beyond hoarse only to meet a wall of misunderstanding, rejection, and a firm conviction the Sudanese leaders had all the right and only answers.

Wolf Roder

The Altar Boy Chronicles

by Tony Pasquarello

(Parsippany, NJ: Gustav Broukal Press, 1999)

Drifting away from Roman Catholicism and why is the theme of these memoirs of an emeritus professor of philosophy. Anthony Joseph Pasquarello grew up in an Italian community of South Philadelphia during the thirties and forties. This meant, -- nothing else would have been thinkable, the whole shebang, altar boy, Catholic primary school, Catholic high school, confirmation, confession, sin and sex. Yes, sex, for the Church seems to be deeply concerned with nothing so much as sex, whether as virginity, as forbidden words and pictures, as celibacy or as masturbation. Given that emphasis, the little Tony notices most the tits or jugs on a female sinner in purgatory as depicted in one of the Church of the Epiphany of our Lord's stained glass murals. The big question, is it a sin to look at or think about these? Oh, how much pain and angst the good Catholic child must pass through.

The author describes himself as having been a frightening naive, terribly nerdy youngster, absorbed in school, music, and sex. Theoretical sex that is, pursuing pictures of nudes in art and photography, all the while remaining a perfectly good little Catholic, clean in body if not in mind, and worried about all the time in purgatory he was piling up. And prayer, the poor kid must have spent half his waking hours on his

knees praying or serving mass.

Then there is his understanding of the doctrine and teaching. He explains, "the Trinity boiled down to this: there was just one God, God the Father (forget the three persons); God had a son, Jesus, and a pet bird the Holy Spirit (often employed as a carrier pigeon)." (p. 58) And that god was far too awesome, too holy, too super; which is why you had to pray to lesser Paradise People, heavenly VIP's, and local saints. As he gets older we find him eagerly scanning the weekly Catholic newspaper, to find the forbidden films and books. Then scouring the Public Library in the hope of finding *the hot stuff*, which ran to John Steinbeck and Erskine Caldwell.

Chance and the example of his High School buddies lead him to attend the University of Pennsylvania instead of St. Joseph's College. Pasquarello describes this as a case of real culture shock, and immersion into thought, society, and learning infinitely distant from South Philly, while really only ten blocks away in space. There is a strong streak of the down to earth, materialist in him, and thus he drifts away from the Church.

"Neither sex, nor Christian hypocrisy, nor tragic losses were operative factors in my decision to leave Catholicism and, indeed, all religion. Though, to be accurate, it was not a decision at all it was just something that happened. The tapestry of unbelief was woven over a span of years and, when complete, I had to acknowledge that it was there, and the altar boy wasn't." (P. 210)

This book is amusing  rather than funny. There is a serious, and sometimes sarcastic undertone in much

Science Book Club

The November meeting of the Science Book Club will be in the Main Library, Downtown, from 2:30 until 3:30 in Meeting Room 3A on the 4th Sunday of the month, 28 November. If you need assistance finding us, ask at the information desk when you walk in. The reading for this month will be essays from the two books: *The Medusa and the Snail*, by Lewis Thomas and *The Immense Journey* by Loren Eiseley. To facilitate a newly forming group we will be choosing an essay or two from these books to read aloud and discuss during the meeting. So there is no need to prepare beforehand! Thomas is an MD and writes about biology and medicine; Eiseley is an anthropologist who writes about anthropology and biology.



(Did She Really Say "Yes" ?, continued from page 5)

sick and tired of having to defend the nonbelievers' belief in the value of human life in and of itself that does not require a higher power for justification. (I read some of the book in an airport today. What the story is really about is how Cassie's life was miserable, ruinous, debauched, etc., until she found and accepted Christ and became born again. Misty thanks Cassie on the last page for saving her life as well by finding Christ.) In reality, the story as it is reported is that the only targets of the shooters were athletes. The rest were just random shootings. Atheists are not to blame.

2. We can all sympathize with Cassie's parents, of course, and since I have a young daughter I can even empathize. But we should broaden our sympathetic horizon just a bit to encompass the other victims families. In fact, while Cassie Bernall's mother, Misty, makes the rounds of national media (20/20, The Today Show, Larry King Live), and sales of her book exceed a quarter of a million copies, and Christian groups have embraced the story and elevated it to mythic proportions, the rest of the families suffer in silence watching the circus sideshow. I'm sorry to point this out, but this is blatant commercialism capitalizing on a tragedy. The publisher and the author are making millions of dollars (nothing has been said, that I know of, of what the parents intend to do with the royalties). In fact, the girl to whom the murderer actually spoke the words "do you believe in God?" Valeen Schnurr, said "yes" and she was spared. Why haven't we heard from her, or heard about her courage? Because she has been encouraged to (and, understandably) felt the need to keep silent; as did the girl who witnessed the whole thing and said from the very beginning that it never happened. This hardly seems fair to Valeen, her family, and especially to the parents of those who died.

3. The truth matters. One spectrum of debate in Denver this week is whether the truth matters or not. The argument goes like this: It doesn't matter if it happened or not, it's a wonderful and heartwarming story that makes people feel good so just let it go. That is, in fact, what probably happened to the Denver media until the Salon story broke. But now that the truth is coming out (which it inevitably does despite best intentions), I fail to see how such blatant mythmaking and commercialism (the book is just the beginning--audio and video tapes are already being released) can help anyone involved in this tragedy come to grips with their loss and grief.

Go to:

<http://www.salon.com/news/feature/1999/09/23/columbine/index.html>

Plus commentary:

<http://slashdot.org/articles/99/09/23/0036227.shtml>

And denials of part of the Salon story:

http://www.apbnews.com/media/mediawatch/1999/09/23/columbine0923_01.html?s=email

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"... by 600 the Church was seriously debating whether or not women could be considered human. Were not labour pains an obvious punishment from God for having indulged in sex? Should not baptism be considered an exorcism of the Devil from the newly born child? Didn't unbaptised babies go straight to hell and suffer for all eternity? Weren't pagans just devil-worshippers in disguise?"

Douglas Lockhart, *The Dark Side of God: A Quest for the Lost Heart of Christianity* (Shaftesbury, UK: Element Books, 1999) p. 52