

FIG Leaves

November 2000

November Meeting

Gary Edward Dean will be our November Speaker on Tuesday, November 28th at 7:00 p.m. He is an Associate Professor at the University of Cincinnati's Dept. of Molecular Genetics, Biochemistry, and Microbiology. The title of Prof. Dean's Speech will be ***Outreach through Research.***

Abstract: Funded by the National Science Foundation, we are developing new paradigms in science education K-12 with emphasis on biology, genetics, and the scientific method.

The thesis for the talk (and my mission over the last few years) is that kids need to be exposed to science in a real way to learn it, not just canned science and certainly not the rote memorization they mostly get. I present our approach to answering this, along with some others we've learned about along the way, and invite others to consider becoming involved. I think such an approach will go far towards:

- 1) interesting kids in subjects that they've historically shunned but everyone agrees are necessary;
- 2) establish an informed citizenry to deal with the enormous legal and ethical problems that are hurtling towards us; and, by the way, whether good or bad,
- 3) maintain the pipeline of technical folk we seem to be on track for needing over the coming years.

For more information about Prof. Dean, see his Web Site:
<http://www.molgen.uc.edu/cv/dean/dean.html>

December Meeting

SEX AND HUMANISM: Delight or Depravity?

Our presenter will be Barbara Lynn Eisenstadt, Ed. D., an empathetic and lively speaker. She will talk about such topics as what does it mean to be a sexual being and who decides what is "right" and "wrong" in sexual relations. Barbara is a clinician, trainer, and lecturer in the fields of addiction, sexuality, group therapy, and women's issues.

Please note that Tuesday, December 19th is not our regular fourth-Tuesday date and that we will be meeting in the Vernon Manor Hotel. See our December FIG Leaves for more details.

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Events

November Meeting

Gary Edward Dean
"Outreach through Research"
Tuesday, Nov. 28, 7:00 p.m.
at the Geier Center, corner of
Gilbert and Elsinore Avenues

December Potluck Dinner

Tuesday, Dec. 12, 6:30 p.m.

December Meeting

Barbara Lynn Eisenstadt
"Sex and Humanism"
Tuesday, Dec. 19, 7:00
At the Vernon Manor Hotel,
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati

October FIG Meeting

Scott Keely spoke on the subject of genomics at the Geier Center on October 24th, 2000. He is a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, Department of Molecular Genetics, Biochemistry, and Microbiology.

Scott described genomics as the study of all genes within the nucleus of a given cell. It is an investigation into the structure, nature, and evolution of the genes of an individual. Genomics finds all of genes first, then tries to find out what they do. It can thus be described as a data-driven process.

Scott explained that DNA is the storage molecule for genetics, RNA is the messenger, and proteins cause the actual biological activity. The human genome contains approximately three billion chemical base pairs, where each pair is either adenine/thymine or guanine/cytosine. A gene consists of a large sequence of base pairs that encode for a specific protein or other controlling molecule.

By way of comparison, a bacterium such as E. Coli has about four million base pairs, or a bit more than one one-thousandth of the genetic material of a human. Yet much of the human genome does not seem to do anything, and may be considered evolutionary debris.

Scott then discussed the technological innovations that have contributed to the rapid progress in genetic research. Companies such as Celera, led by Craig Venter, have sequenced the genetic code of many species, ranging from bacteria to fruit flies to humans. Other companies produce gene 'chips' that allow the expressed genes of two individuals to be directly compared.

Some of the most exciting research is in the area of gene therapy. Viruses and liposomes have both been used to introduce missing genes into the body, but success has been mixed. This research is likely to provide major benefits for sufferers of genetic disorders in the near future.

In conclusion, Scott emphasized the importance of studying genetic circuits rather than individual genes. These circuits,

FIG Post-Election Discussion Group

Members of FIG met at the Geier Center on November 14th to discuss the outcome of the presidential election. Yet even a week after the election, the outcome was still very much in flux. Nevertheless, George Bishop led a discussion on the election process and possible consequences for the next four years.

On the positive side, George felt that neither candidate would be able to pursue a partisan agenda. The extremely close vote totals and near parity in Congress will dictate a centrist approach to policy making. Supreme Court nominations will not succeed if they stray very far from the ideological middle.

Any hint of bias in the Florida vote counts will cast a pall of illegitimacy on the candidate who comes out ahead. It was noted how tellingly that the recounts have brought out the deep-seated animosity between the two major parties.

The discussion then turned to the process that individual voters go through in choosing a candidate. George cited studies which showed that party affiliation is the largest single predictor of voting behavior. Beyond that there may be any number of different issues, such as taxes, abortion, or gun control, that contribute to the voter's choice. Some members of the audience felt that single issues were extremely important to individual voters, but George noted how the positions on various issues tend to correlate with each other and with the party platforms.

We also discussed the ways in which both Bush and Gore fine-tuned their personalities to appeal to the undecided voters without alienating the party faithful. The election may have been so close because both candidates were successful in courting the small pool of political independents.

The benefits and drawbacks of the electoral college were then debated. It was noted that this election could have required a national recount if not for the electoral college. On the other hand, the present system gives states with small populations a disproportionate amount of power. But given the difficulty of amending the Constitution, the electoral college is unlikely to go away.

Everyone agreed that it was an exciting election, but they don't care if they never see another political ad.

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Rationally Speaking

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

N. 4, November 2000 - "Intelligent Design - the Classical Argument"

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

"In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer that for anything I knew to the contrary it had lain there forever. ... But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that for anything I knew the watch might have always been there."

These famous words were written in 1831 by the Reverend William Paley (in *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*) and constitute the best-known rendition of the classical argument from design for the existence of god. Essentially, Paley said that nobody would necessarily invoke a supernatural designer in order to account for the existence of simple rocks, but complex and marvelously functional objects such as eyes beg for an explanation that transcends natural laws. If there is a watch, there was a watchmaker; ergo, if there is an eye, there must have been an intelligent designer of that eye.

Unfortunately for Paley, the famous skeptic philosopher David Hume had already refuted his argument, more than 50 years before Paley's formulation. In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume left it to his legendary character, Philo, to concisely explain what is wrong with the argument from design:

"The world plainly resembles more an animal or a vegetable than it does a watch or knitting-loom. Its cause, therefore, it is more probable, resembles the cause of the former. The cause of the former is generation or vegetation."

It is interesting that the argument from design is still the most popularly cited reason for why people believe in god according to a survey by Michael Shermer published in *How We Believe* (2000). It is therefore important for us to examine more closely the structure of Hume's critique and understand where exactly the intelligent design argument falls flat. In the exposition below I will add my commentary and examples to clarify each point, given that Hume's language is at times obscure and obviously not up to date on our current knowledge of the physical universe.

One can discern six objections to the argument from intelligent design in a complete reading of Hume's Dialogue:

1. *The analogy between the universe and human artifacts is not convincing.* In the quotation above, Hume does not think that the universe resembles a complex machine at all. While the regularity of the laws of nature may superficially inspire the analogy, human artifacts are always clearly designed for a function. It often takes quite a bit of imagination to see what the purpose of some aspects of the universe really is. Biologist J.B.S. Haldane once answered a reporter who asked what his study of genetics told him about God: "He must have an inordinate fondness for beetles," referring to the hundreds of thousands of species of these insects existing for no apparent purpose other than their own reproduction.
2. *Intelligence is only one of the active causes in the world.* Many natural phenomena obviously do not require intelligence to occur. Tides, for example, would hardly make a good choice for Paley, since their explanation in terms of simple gravitational interactions does not require any intelligent design.
3. *Even if intelligence is everywhere operative now, it does not follow that we can ascribe to it the origins of the universe.* This is logically true, and can be illustrated in modern terms if we imagine that somebody one day demonstrates that life on Earth was seeded by a race of extremely intelligent extraterrestrials. This, of course, would not make them gods, and would not provide an explanation for the origin of the extraterrestrials, nor for the universe as a whole. In fact, humans may someday do something of the sort, without because of this being elevated to divine status (other than perhaps by the simple-minded results of our own experiments).

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4. 4 - *The origin of the universe is a single unique case and so analogies are pointless.* This is a subtle but very good point: while we have plenty of natural objects, organisms and human artifacts, we only have one universe. Science can derive meaningful analogies by comparing *populations* of objects or entities. While we may compare and contrast the attributes of rocks, eyes, tides and watches, to what shall we compare the universe? Anything we might think of would be comparing a part of the whole to the whole itself, and we are unable to find another self-contained whole for comparison. We may conceive of an omnipresent god as an analogy for the universe, but unfortunately the analogy offers no insights of scientific value. It is also unlikely that the analogy would help theology. Is god spherical or doughnut-shaped? Will god expand forever from an explosive beginning, or does god alternate through phases of expansion and contraction?

5. 5 - *The analogy between human and divine mind is clearly anthropomorphic. Nature resembles a mindless organism rather than a purposeful and intelligent one.* This is another way to put objection #1, this time by highlighting the parochialism of a theology that would pretend to understand the mind of god simply as a version of the human mind writ large.

6. 6 - *The fruit of anthropomorphic thinking is a finite God.* Here Hume goes on the counter-attack by showing that if the argument from design is taken seriously, one has to conclude that the god acting in the universe is very different from the Christian variety. Since there is no independent argument for the perfection of the designer, we have to judge its ability and character from what we see of the universe. And to paraphrase Bertrand Russell, if I had millions of years of time and infinite power and had come up with the universe as we know it, I should be ashamed of myself.

Hume was a skeptic, but not a fool. He published his *Dialogues on religion* posthumously, in 1779. They are still one of the most lucid critiques of the most commonly used argument in favor of theism. And that, my friends, is true immortality.

Further reading:

Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, by David Hume
Why I am Not a Christian, by Bertrand Russell

Web Links:

The Hume Society (<http://www.hi.is/pub/hume/>)
Natural theology of William Paley, from The Victorian Web (<http://landow.stg.brown.edu/victorian/religion/paley1.html>)
An Inordinate Fondness for Beetles, learn more on the animals that made Haldane wonder about god's taste

Would you like to host a potluck?

If anyone is interested in hosting the FIG Potluck Dinner in any month, please contact Bob Riehemann at 859.491.7219. These dinners, which are grand occasions and considered major steps for social climbers, require the ability to host about 25 people (normally) and the provision of a corresponding number of drinks and place settings. The provision of other food by the host is optional; additional food items are provided by the guests. These dinners are scheduled for the 2nd Tuesday of

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"Whenever philosophy has taken into its plan religion, it has ended in skepticism; and whenever religion excludes philosophy, or the spirit of free inquiry, it leads to willful blindness and superstition."

—Coleridge, *Alsop's Letters, Conversations and Recollections of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1836 2000 Years of Disbelief: Famous People with the Courage to Doubt*, James A. Haught

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KAGIN'S COLUMN

Edwin F. Kagin is a lawyer-poet. He believes column and, if events are predestined, that whatsoever. He can be reached in care of this edwinkagin@fuse.net



that, through grace and faith, this will be a regular whatever he believes makes no difference publication, or through e-mail at:

ON THE FRACTIONALIZATION OF THE RECENT EXPERIMENT IN GOVERNMENT KNOWN AS "ONE NATION, UNDER GOD, INDIVISIBLE..."

"A Republic, Madam—If you can keep it."

Attributed to Benjamin Franklin, in response to a question a woman is said to have asked him, in the late 18th Century C.E., regarding what kind of government the Constitutional Convention had established for their newly created nation, The United States of America.

There are lots of different methods available to operate nations. Democracy is one of them. And democracy is a rather recent and highly unreliable form of government. Democracy is an upstart newcomer in the pantheon of national gods. The oldest, and most reliable, form of government is that of an absolute dictatorship run by one person, usually male, with the necessary backing of a loyal priesthood. This priesthood, if not forcing the common folk to worship the ruler as a god, represents the ruler to the people of the nation as either the living embodiment of a god, or as one whose authority to rule over all others of the nation comes directly from a god. King by the Grace of God.

This is the method of government set up, recognized, endorsed, and encouraged by that grouping of legal and literary writings and myths collectively known as "The Holy Bible." Keep this in mind when chatting with those—sadly growing in number—who would have it that our land of freedom, our America, be "restored," to "biblical values."

But we just might not be all that happy with these biblical values. Democracy is not mentioned in the bible. The concept was unknown. The very idea of it would have been rejected. It would have been thought to be a notion as absurd as permitting women to make laws or to rule over men. The practice of voting had not evolved in those times, when there was no air conditioning or computers, when people thought dreams foretold the future, and believed the only way humans could know right from wrong was if some god gave them the rules and the priesthood of the god explained the rules to them. The closest thing to "voting" was choosing a thing, or someone to do something, "by lot." This was a form of gambling, where each candidate might, for example, put the name of a thing, or their name on an object, like a stone or piece of wood, and one object, with the thing or the name on it, would be selected in some manner by chance alone. God was credited with providing the outcome, a result every bit as reliable as predicting the future by looking at the guts ripped with a knife out of the belly of a sheep. The idea of a jury is not found in the bible either. Nor is that of "due process of law." Neither "compromise" nor "humanity" appear in the King James Version of the bible—the only bible used by fundangelicals until recently, when they discovered that their beloved good King James was, in life, a homosexual.

But I digress, and my editors are stern.

A totalitarian form of government works because of the Golden Rule. The one with the gold makes the rules. And that person has absolute power over everyone else. If one disagrees, one can be killed. Simple, effective, and stable. Our American democracy has thus far survived a little more than two hundred years. And in that short time has seen a Civil War that all but destroyed its delicate fabric. And we now face another crisis of division that could destroy us. More of this in a moment. By contrast, consider that the ancient Pharaonic government of Egypt was measured, not in hundreds, but in thousands of years. There was as much time between the first king of Egypt and Pharaoh Ramses II as there has been time between Ramses II, who died in 1314 B.C.E., and the November, 2000 Presidential Election. This fact should cause us to pause. For the latter event threatens to put our infant democracy as inexorably into the category of history past as other little understood events consigned to memory the kingdoms of those who prayed to Ra rather than to Jehovah for those fortuitous events of history they were pleased, when random chance operated in their favor, to call "miracles."

Government by decree requires only that the one doing the decreeing have the ability—make that the power—to

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enforce the decree on those who might disagree with the decree, and if need be, to see to the elimination of those who disagree with, or disregard, the decree. Safety comes from obedience. Just as one can know what is right and what is wrong by relying on the safety of the certainty of obeying the law of the god. Obey or die. Simple, effective, easily enforced, and easily understood. To be free, you see, you need to obey the decree. As the church song puts it, "Trust and obey / For there's no other way / To be happy in Jesus / Than to trust and obey."

Democracy puts a bit of a kink in this straight and true path to the way citizens conduct their lives. This is something the fundangelicals of our free land have never understood. Their biblically endorsed forms of government simply cannot be reconciled with the idea of democracy that is foreign to their scripture. One cannot both obey authority and chart their own way. This is why, no matter what they think or teach, religious authoritarians really don't believe in the concept of separation of state and church that was, and is, so central to the American experiment.

Democracy requires that those who participate in it be, to a degree at least, of one mind. The citizens of a democracy must all accept certain ill defined basics if this new experiment in human affairs of governing one's selves has any chance at all of working. Happily, much of the time this is so. Thus, we have been free of the revolutions and civil conflicts that too often attend the transfer of power in lesser countries. By the processes of democracy and the democratic vote, and by accepting the will of the majority, we have become, in our short history, both great and unique among the parliament of nations.

But there are dangers; there have been, and are, fearful portents and omens. The Liberty Bell did crack into ruin when first it was rung. We did have a great Civil War. This bloodiest and most disastrous conflict in our nation's brief history occurred when we were but "four score and seven" years. Now that we are not yet seven score years distant from that national disaster and shame, we are again threatened. And the threat is now, as the threat was then, a dagger aimed at the very beating heart of our democracy.

We have accepted a working illusion, an operational definition that has kept our republic afloat longer than expected by its detractors. This is because we as a nation attempted to live by our motto, *E pluribus unum*, "One out of many." Sadly, in the 1950s, the unworkable "In God We Trust" replaced this motto and things haven't been right since. Our Ship of State may, like other crafts that lacked the wit to survive, be destroyed while attempting to pass safely between the Scylla and Charybdis of our divided land's oppositional perceptions of the world. These worldviews may be understood as a conflict between those who believe in humanism and those who do not. Our democracy thus far, and not unproblematically, has been able to accommodate those who truly believe in democratic principals and those who really, whether they know it or not, want us to be ruled by authority, by gods and kings of their choosing.

This was what our Civil War was really all about. We were then, and we are now, two countries. Two nations, divided by a common language, forced by our democracy to live in unhappy harmony under the loosely stitched together tents of two very different ideologies. This is true despite the seeming need of each side to mouth much the same god talk. During our Civil War, both sides claimed god was on their side. Lincoln then observed that both sides may be, and one side must be, wrong. Deep down, these two sides truly hate each other. Somehow, with the exception of our Civil War, that is still not over, that is still far from resolved, we have managed to keep safe from one another with the mutual acceptance of an uneasy peace. Until now.

The American Religious Civil War (ARCW), that was foretold, and has been reported upon, in these pages now threatens to destroy us, in consequence of an election so close that the voters of our democracy cannot agree on who won. This time the winners were not so clear that the losers could with honor fain the patriotism of acceptance and the humility of acquiescence to the public will. As we fractionate, each faction increasingly fears and distrusts the honor and motives of the other. Each side believes the opposition has cheated them of their rightful votes in an attempt to steal the election of our President and to pervert their democracy. At this writing, each side is in the courts, invoking the rule of law, our secular god, on behalf of their position. The only certainty is that without this rule of law, that we all have agreed, and must continue to agree, to accept, there will be nothing left to save. Should the judgment, the final decision, of the rule of law not be accepted by all sides... .

Apart from the clear and present danger of such a situation, it is truly high humor. Aristophanes would have loved it.

The ancient tensions and hatreds are straining at the tethers of civilization. And, as of this report, we do not know what end will come. There is little sign of compromise or restraint. There is mass confusion concerning just how the casting and counting of votes really operates. People are seeing defects that have been forever present, but, until now, not generally known. And moronic legal interpretations and opinions are creating a great pooling of shouting ignorance. Fanned by the public press, much shrill talk is shoving aside reason and legal knowledge. The ordinary citizens (peasantry in an earlier age) are already in the streets with signs. Soon they may come with pitchforks and torches.

That which could happen is too fearful to contemplate.

If it does not happen, which is likely, that which did not destroy us may strengthen us.

If it does happen, we will become a footnote to history. We will be one with Ramses.

It may be that we really do need two countries. Then, we of like mind can live in peace and harmony, and those others will have to get passports to come in. Relocating everyone should be easier that straightening out this voting mess. Surely we will be happier. After all, those on our side get along with each other, for we understand things in much the same ways. I think our country should be in the mountains, with woods, ponds, streams, and cool mornings. My Helen, for some reason, thinks it should be by the ocean, where it is hot, salty, barren, sandy, and full of sand fleas. Can you believe such irrationality?

Just hope the rule of law holds.



FIG Leaflets

Next time he'll demonstrate crucifixion?

The preacher at the Independent Baptist Church in Hillsboro, Illinois, demonstrated recently with exuberance how god will pitch the Devil into Hell on Judgment Day. He picked up a 12-year-old boy from where he was sitting with his parents and threw him six feet into the pews. The preacher has been convicted of child endangerment. (AP)

For the most part our small towns have had two outlets for social interaction: the church and the tavern. A church was a place where open discussion was impossible, or severely censored. The tavern welcomed free spirits and honest argument. Thinking people agree that truth is respected nearly everywhere more than in religious houses; therefore taverns provide more humanistic value to the community.

Charles Schisler in *Freethought Perspective*
(Oct-Nov. 2000) p. 18

I can never think of the place even now without a shudder. It smelled of prayers the way a fish-market smells of fish. Oh! That dreary school, with its eternal religious ceremonies, its freezing Mass every morning, its periods of meditation, its gospel-recitations, and the reading from pious books during meals! Oh! Those dreary days passed within those cloistering walls, where nothing was spoken of but God. . . . We lived there in a narrow, contemplative, unnatural piety and also in a truly meritorious state of filth, for I well remember that the boys were made to wash their feet but three times a year, the night before each vacation. As for baths, they were as unknown as the name of Victor Hugo. Our masters apparently held them in the greatest contempt.

Guy de Maupassant in *Une Surprise*
about his school in the 1860's

Election--A regular public event in which Americans are given the glorious privilege of choosing which dishonest and incompetent politicians will be allowed to rob their wallets and infringe on their personal freedoms.

--Atlanta Freethought Calendar
Statue of Liberty dedicated, October 28, 1886
John Adams, October 30, 1735

The Humanist Family

Being a parent is the most difficult job I've ever had. Most of the parents I know tend to turn to prayer in times of trouble. That's just not the way I cope. As a humanist, I try to use logic and reason to find solutions to difficult situations. Studying how other parents and teachers successfully deal with children has provided me with a lot of good parenting ideas. But sometimes I have stumbled upon methods that work for me even though they are a bit unorthodox.

When school is out for the summer and the children are driving me up the wall, the solution is always there for me...I just become a Taco Bell Mom. Years ago when the boys were ages 2, 4, and 6, I stumbled upon the Taco Bell solution. During a particularly stressful day, when we were all desperate to get out of the house, we went out to lunch at Taco Bell. There, amid so many other people, I was not about to give in to the impulse to strangle them all.

It was as if the slate had been wiped clean. We all sat down and began to eat our meals without the usual prerequisite whining about how this or that was not edible. Without the stress of food preparation, I was left to engage the children in conversation. We all rose to the occasion and talked at length about books we had read and movies that we had seen.

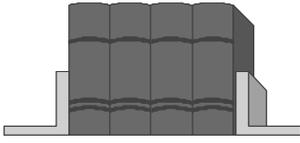
There happened to be a woman sitting at the next table who was kind enough to comment upon our conversation in a very positive fashion. I was reluctant to tell her that it was all for show...that an hour earlier we had been at each other's throats. I just thanked her for her kindness and filed away our warm feelings and successful hour at Taco Bell.

We went home and our good behavior actually carried over into much of the afternoon. We really only had to find a way to survive until Philip got home. Daddy's arrival is the magic cure-all for any rough day. But not surprisingly those rough days come with a certain regularity with 10 whole hours to fill before the arrival of the certain Daddy cure.

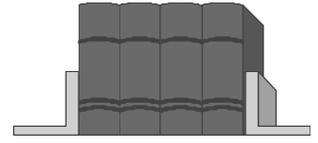
So when those difficult days do occur, one of my favorite mantras is "I want to be a Taco Bell Mom." It's a solution that has proven itself time and time again. For some reason, when we all leave the house and strap ourselves into the van, we leave our problems behind. We march into Taco Bell, order our food, and sit down to really talk as a family. I've spent a fortune on cheese burritos and Gorditas, but it has been worth every penny.

Martha Ferguson





Book Reviews



Duck Egg Blue
a novel by Derrick Neill
(Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999)

Sometimes the River looks brown and muddy, and at others it reflects the heavens to assume a hue of duck egg blue. So it is with god, to some he looks startlingly real, to others he appears as all of nature and a few can't find him at all. The novel is about a teenager who is pressured to define his own lack of belief. At stake is his Eagle Scout badge as the board insists he assert a belief in god.

The public library refers to the book as a "Bildungsroman," that is a novel of growing up, of the emotional development of the hero. It is also a didactic novel, which teaches us about the contemporary problems of religion, education, teaching evolution, and related issues. The author has them all there, and as far as I can see he has his facts correct. It is thus small wonder that the characters are a little more than life size. The hero is more perfect than any literary teenager should be allowed to be. The hero's mother is better and wiser than any teenager could recognize. His girl friend is sweeter and more understanding than any believable ninth grader, and she is more beautiful than expected in any real woman. And the fundamentalist male character is, of course, truly evil.

Let me hasten to add this is not some dreary morality tract. On the contrary I found it a very interesting and lively novel which held my attention without difficulty or hesitation. In fact, I only put it down to sleep. More, the novel provides scenes and situations which raise insistent questions which demand clear answers, and should be food for discussions.

A New Age character claims that music which makes her cry are the real equivalent of prayers. Perhaps the deaf and non-musical then, don't pray? Honest work is equally praised as devotion. Does the agnostic character have a truly honest position, or is it merely a practical out so he doesn't offend the everyday world? Does the atheist have a supportable position, or is he merely bitter? Are the myths in the Bible and in other religious scriptures really "metaphorical representations of the grand mystery of our world and of the spiritual potential of every human being" (p. 139) as the Unitarian pastor asserts, or are these mere fairy tales? Can our hero walk with his friend to accept both god and science? Will they agree that evolution is simply god's way of creation?

At one point in the novel some students are excused from viewing an educational movie about sex and reproduction, because their parents will not give them permission to do so. Surely these students will be mercilessly teased and hounded by their class mates. Now, if it is OK to be excused from sex instruction and assigned other work, why is it not OK to be excused when the Christian majority insists on having public prayers?

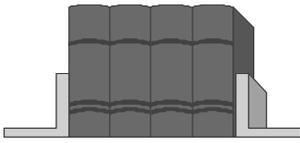
Eventually, the hero is faced with answering the scout board what it wishes to hear, that he believes in some kind of god, or else to tell them the truth. In an epiphany of music the hero goes with the lead in *Les Miserables* who will be condemned if he tells the truth, but damned if he stays silent. The question for the unbeliever is, condemned by whom, damned to which non-existent hell. To thine own self be true is no doubt a good adage, but confessing the truth to uncomprehending idiots is throwing pearls before swine. Sometimes there are good reasons to lie and to conceal what one thinks, believes, or is.

I wish anyone teetering on the edge of falling into faith or of drifting into unbelief could read this book. I'm sure it will be eye opening to many teens. By all means read it.

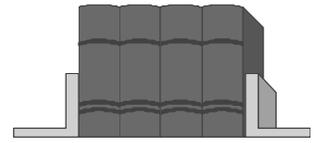
Wolf Roder

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Book Reviews



(Continued from page 8)

Compassionate Conservatism: What it Is, What it Does, and How it Can Transform America
by Marvin Olasky, foreword by George W. Bush
(New York: The Free Press, 2000)

Ed Kagin drew my attention to a Penthouse article about Governor Bush's hidden commitments to religious conservatives, which in turn pointed to this book and its author, a Ph.D. in American Studies and professor of journalism at the University of Texas. The same Penthouse article describes him as having been born Jewish, migrated to atheism and Marxism, before becoming a fundamentalist Christian in his mid-twenties.

Perhaps the book should be less obscure and more widely read, for it has been heralded as the presidential candidates' source of his often proclaimed ideals of "compassionate conservatism." So what is this concept? Simply, it is about getting the government out of administering welfare, and turning the tasks, though not necessarily the financing, over to private charities. To quote Olasky himself: "The government of a pluralistic society is inherently incapable of tending to spiritual needs, so the more effective provision of social services will ultimately depend on their return to private and especially to religious institutions." (p. 4).

The book is heavily anecdotal, built around a trip Olasky took with his teenage son, in which they examined a number of local religious charitable institutions. He is clearly enamored by existing, small, successful organizations engaged in helping the poor, the addicted, the out of work, the homeless, the alcoholic, etc. Compassionate conservatism consists of building on these local efforts by using taxpayer money to expand working programs to reach many more unfortunates. These programs are driven by religious faith which motivates volunteers and changes lives. Olasky clearly expects the government to fund religious institutions without limiting their routines of evangelizing their clients.

Olasky tells us horror stories of independent Christian charities which accepted government money. Under the present regime this requires following bureaucratic rules and minimizing the spiritual ministry. Decline and failure is likely under such conditions of government pressure he insists. Compassionate conservatism, in contrast, will be hospitable instead of antagonistic to religion.

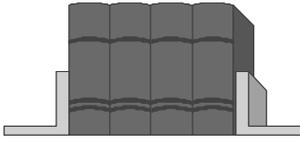
Governor Bush has already instituted a number of such changes in Texas. He has supported a Christian anti-drug organization because it was effective, despite its refusal to follow state requirements. By executive order he established options and licensing procedures for using private and religious charities to deliver welfare services. At issue are programs such as abstinence education or poverty fighting or establishing group homes for unwed teen welfare mothers. He even permitted a state prison unit to be operated by a Christian ministry. Governor Bush is quoted as laying out a philosophy opposed to Washington's government mandates: "In every instance where my administration sees a responsibility to help people we will look first to faith-based organizations, charities and community groups that have shown their ability to save and change lives." (p. 14)

Olasky suggests organization based on any faith would be able to participate in such government contracts. He even specifically refers to atheists in three places, (pp. 18, 55, 193) but his examples are all Christian. Schools are included among government supported organizations which must and will be allowed to implement their Christian vision and continue to proselytize. A Bush Supreme Court will either change its understanding of the relationship between church and state, or ways may be found around the existing prohibitions. Olasky sees vouchers in particular as a means of satisfying the strictures of the court.

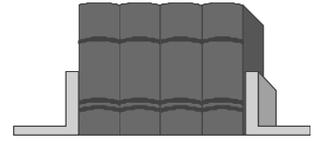
Wolf Roder

(Continued on page 10)





Book Reviews



***Live from the Gates of Hell: An Insider's
Look at the Antiabortion Underground***

by Jerry Reiter

Prometheus Press, 2000, 270 pages

Jerry Reiter and I met at Camp Quest where we were both counselors and my 10 and 14 year old daughters were campers. Of all the counselors, he was the most fun loving and I remember well that in response to the "college atmosphere" of science lectures and field trips, Jerry purchased two armloads of water guns and distributed them among the campers. It produced a gigantic free-for-all that relieved tension and generated a lot of fun. He told stories, played the guitar, helped everyone, and actively listened to campers and staff with a story, grievance, or sorrow. He also said that he had a story to tell: about the FBI, the Klu Klux Klan, the antiabortion movement, and the religious right. And what a story! What drama and danger! I found it difficult to put this book down.

The Gates of Hell is a phrase used by the antiabortion movement to refer to a family planning clinic, especially one which provides abortion services. Believing that human life begins at conception and that the germ cells are not human life, this movement adheres to the idea that the abortion of even a fertilized egg cell is the murder of a person. It is possible to interpret Biblical texts to support such a position according to adherents. The scientific portion of this web of reasoning contradicts every biology textbook which discusses the alternation of generations of sexually reproducing organisms.

Each human sperm and egg are members of the haploid generation of the species; they have half the chromosomes. A fertilized egg and adult are members of the diploid generation. These have all the chromosomes. But sperm, egg, zygote, and adult are all equally members of the species. Consequently every member of the species cannot be a person unless we are willing to believe that every sperm and every egg is a person. Thus the definition of personhood, along with attendant political rights, is a matter of political definition. This was the point of the article Starting Point of Life in OB.GYN. NEWS Vol 5 No 9 May 1, 1970, written by Wayne Davis of the Biology Department of the University of Kentucky, and explicitly cited by Justice Blackmun in Roe vs. Wade. I am relatively sure of Wayne's position because I knew him when we both lived in Lexington and I discussed it with him a couple of times. Such political consequences of scientific facts are ignored by the religious right and the extent to which extreme factions of anti-abortionists will go to impose their religious reasoning on others is one important point of Jerry's book. The dramatic, emotional, and political importance of the book derives from the implication of the leaders in planned violence.

Jerry converted from Catholicism to fundamentalism when he was in high school. He became a member of the antiabortion movement through his famous pastors, the twins Paul and Rob Schenck. Jerry is a journalist by training, and a radio and TV personality. During the 1992 antiabortion rally, The Spring of Life, in Jerry's hometown of Buffalo, he was removed from his reporting duties because of his antiabortion connections. His plight became a cause célèbre' among the religious right.

While a member of the anti-abortion movement, Jerry accidentally learned that "something big" was planned for a convention of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers in Pensacola, Florida. This was taking place near the end of the trial of Michael Griffin, who was convicted at the trial of murdering Dr. David Gunn, an abortion provider. On a freelance assignment to cover this, Jerry, through his notoriety and his connections with the Schenk brothers, began to receive disturbing information implicating the abortion movement in well planned, and executed, violence. As Paul Hill, a defrocked minister also convicted of killing an abortion provider and his escort, told Jerry, "...you're about to see a coming IRA-type reign of terror..." This is called "Killing for Christ." Eventually Jerry's moral sense on this issue overwhelmed him, he defected from the movement and became an FBI informant. He is now a member of the Council for Secular Humanism, of which FIG is a member organization.

The book is written like a detective novel and so, to enhance the reader's pleasure, I will forgo detailed



The Church of Apathy

Join our Church of Apathy when you get good and ready, or around-to-it. This is the official church for those that don't wish to identify with a specific religion. For those that feel that atheism and agnosticism are just too much damn work. Others who believe that their religion solves all their problems, need not apply.

We are a relatively New Religion with new attitudes. We are Apathists. We seek no converts. We distribute no pamphlets. We ring no door bells.

The Church of Apathy was thought about by its Founders for several years, before they decided to organize on December 26th, 1970, they decided not to become tax exempt, nor claim any guidance from any divine source.

In 1979 they decided to look around for a suitable church site, but that effort proved to be too much trouble, and besides they really didn't care where they met anyway. The founders thought they should have a clergy person, but so far all that applied were rejected. They asked stupid questions about our not having a prayer book with writing in it. Some complained that we didn't have a Symbol or a Logo identifying our religion. Some wanted us to light candles, bless wine, chant, sway, kneel, pray or in general "carry on" like mainstream religions ... all of these candidates for the clergy person were rejected.

We soon will be celebrating the 30th year of our founding. We Apathists encourage those that share our deeply rooted apathy to think about joining our church as non-active members. We seek no donations nor offerings ...you keep your money, and we'll keep ours. As we have no mother church, postal address, telephone number, or website, we are sometimes difficult to locate. However if you have faith, and are not in any big rush to join our Church of Apathy, you are the type of person that could benefit by being an Apathist.

We are happy to say that in almost 30 years, not one of our members has been called "a dirty Apathist" to their face, they have demanded, and received "apple fritters" as their religious rights, in prisons and university cafeterias, and our Religion is not part of any college course on "Comparative Religions" and as far as we know, none of our faithful have been healed, saved, or converted. Some have rented from Avis but we consider that as free will. Someday we would like to sponsor our own TV ministry, but we haven't figured out as yet what to preach about. We strongly believe that one should not take YES for an answer, but if they do, they do.

We do have a motto: Don't Bother Us...and We Won't Bother You.

--writ by rubin....reluctantly

World Wide Web

Christian Urban Legends:

http://www.religioustolerance.org/chr_cul.htm

QUOTES FROM BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

"My parents had early given me religious impressions, and brought me through my childhood piously in the Dissenting way. But I was scarcely fifteen when, after doubting by turns of several points, as I found them disputed in the different books I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself. Some books against Deism fell into my hands.... They wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, I became a thorough Deist."
—from Franklin's autobiography,

published posthumously

"The way to see by faith is to shut the eye of reason."

—*Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1758

"When a religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not take care to support it so that its professors are obliged to call for help of the civil power, 'tis a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one."

—letter to Richard Price, October 9, 1780

Many a long dispute among divines may be thus abridged: It is so; It is not so. It is so; it is not so."
—*Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1743

